CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE STATE AND THE PEOPLE OF MANIPUR

1. INTRODUCTION

India is considered to be an anthropological laboratory because of its regional, religious, ethnic, racial and linguistic diversities. It has always attracted the attention of the world as being one of the oldest civilizations with kaleidoscopic variety of rich cultural heritage.\(^1\) It has also been described as a ‘melting pot’ of races and tribes.\(^2\) Next to Africa, India has the largest concentration of tribal in the world.\(^3\) If the above is true for India as a whole, it is even truer for North-East India, where there is a greater variety of cultures and traditions.

North-East India is comprised of seven states, namely, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. The region is also called ‘the Land of Seven Sisters’ (now it become eight states including Sikkim). Except for Tripura and Manipur, the other states were carved out gradually from the erstwhile Assam province of British India.\(^4\) The entire area of North-East India is populated by variegated groups of people. Migration of people from Burma (now Myanmar) to these areas was common and, as such, we find that people with Mongoloid physical traits were subsequently identified and differentiated, one from the other, as a result of various historical developments, of stresses and strains. The North-East provides shelter to numerous people groups with various ethnic affiliations having different social structures and cultural heritages. The land is considered to be a cultural corridor between India and South-East Asia and has a tremendous strategically importance, not only because of its geography but also because of its history,
demography and culture. There are about 130 major tribal groups in the North-East India, one-third of the total number of tribes for the whole of India are to be found in this region.

Manipur is one of the North-Eastern states of India which came into being on the 1st December 1963. It is a composite of different people of the Tibeto-Burman group of the Mongoloid stock who migrated here at a different period in the history than others and developed a culture, which, with all its homogeneous and heterogeneous elements, is an integrated expression of the cultures of these people. The historical records suggest that the migration of assorted, colourful tribal communities to this region started from the very early times. Moreover, the chronicles of the state of Manipur clearly supports the existence of many tribal communities, from the first century of the Christian era. There are twenty-nine recognized tribes in this state. The hilly area, which is situated at an elevation of about 750 metres from sea level, is the domain of tribal people. They are considered to be autochthones. The evidence of stone-age cultures in Manipur and adjoining regions is a proof enough that there was human habitation in this area during prehistoric times. The polished stone implements that have been discovered from these areas signified the beginning of agriculture. Manipur is the ancient homeland of the Meiteis, the Muslims and twenty-nine indigenous tribes who have dwelt there for many years. All these tribes, in fact, already have accessed socially and emotionally to indissoluble rights of life, properties and privileges, which are guaranteed in the constitution of India. The habits, tastes and behaviours of various tribal people living together for centuries have synchronized with the geographical and topographical features of Manipur. The cultural integrity of the tribes or
communities corresponds to the territorial integrity of the land where they are living.\(^7\)

### 1.1. The name Manipur

The term “Manipur,” is a Hinduized term imported through the window of the Baishnav cult of Hinduism.\(^8\) It literally means the city or the land of gems.\(^9\) A romantic name, whose reverberation is found in the rolling hills and spectacular dales is aesthetically described by many as “Land of Gems”, “Jewels of India”, “A Little Paradise”, “A Flower on Lofty Heights” and “the Switzerland of India”.\(^10\)

In the olden days, Manipur was known by the neighbouring states by different names which were given to it. In Rennell’s Memoir and Maps of India it was called ‘Mecklay’. In the narrative of Symes and in Maps of that period, Manipur was called ‘Cassey’. To the Shans it was known as ‘Kase’ and to the Burmese as ‘Kathe’, a corruption of the same word; the Ahomes called it ‘Makeli’ and the Cacharis ‘Mavli’, while the old Assamese name for it was ‘Moglan’.\(^11\)

There are also a number of explanations showing how the state got the name ‘Manipur’. According to some, it came to be known because there was much diamond ore in the area in ancient times; ‘mani’ meaning diamond and ‘pur’ place. The legend goes like this: when the country was at one time water logged, Lord Shiva and Uma, who in Manipur were known as Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi respectively descended upon it and performed the Lai Haraoba dance. The entire country was lit up day and night by the snake God Ananta who came to see the dance with the magic gem ‘mani’ on his hood. From this, the land was named Manipur, ‘The City of Gem’.\(^12\)
1.2. Geographical features of Manipur

Geographically, Manipur is bounded on the north by Nagaland, on the east by the Surma Tract and upper Chindwin of Myanmar, on the south by Chin Hills (Myanmar) and Mizoram and on the west by the Cachar District of Assam. It covers an area of 22,327 sq. km., which constitutes only 0.68 per cent of the total area of the Indian Union and is one of the smallest states in India. The state is situated between 92º58’ E and 94º45’ E longitudes and 23º50’ N and 25º42’ N latitudes. It occupies a proud place in the galaxy of States with exquisite natural beauty and splendour as well as cultural distinctiveness. In the words of Mrs. St. Clair Grimwood, “it is a pretty place more beautiful than many of the show places of the world.” According to Roy, it is one of the beautiful spots of the earth and rightly called "The Jewel of India." Still another scholar Ghosh described the state as the gem of India, her velvety green fields; transparent lakes, zigzag streams and bracing climate induce a visitor to feel as if he or she is in Kashmir.

According to its physical features, the state may broadly be divided into two parts, viz., the hills and the valley. The hills comprise five districts, namely Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel and Ukhrul, while the valley is comprised of the districts of Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal East and Imphal West. The average elevation of the valley is 790 meters above sea level. The hills are spread from north to south with an average height ranging between 1500-1800 metres. There is also a proposal of a new district called ‘Sadar Hills’ that is to be carved out from Senapati District.
In the field of communication, two National Highways run through the State. NH-39 links Imphal with the railway head of Dimapur in Nagaland at a distance of 215 km. to the North and NH-53 with Silchar in Assam towards the South West. The State also is connected by air with Guwahati, Dimapur, Calcutta and Delhi.\(^\text{18}\)

1.3. Population of the state

The state of Manipur is the homeland of a bewildering variety of peoples and kindred, tribes and tongues. In diversity of population, no other part of the world of its size can rival it. The present composition of its population may be broadly classified under five main groups: (1) The Meiteis, (2) The Scheduled caste Meiteis (3) The Kuki-Chin-Mizos (4) The Nagas and (5) The Muslims.

**Table.1. District Population 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>196,646</td>
<td>182,568</td>
<td>379,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>57,994</td>
<td>53,499</td>
<td>111,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churachandpur</td>
<td>114,740</td>
<td>113,967</td>
<td>228,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>102,772</td>
<td>103,135</td>
<td>205,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>183,338</td>
<td>183,003</td>
<td>366,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal West</td>
<td>218,947</td>
<td>220,585</td>
<td>439,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>197,710</td>
<td>196,070</td>
<td>393,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>73,413</td>
<td>67,533</td>
<td>140,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>61,778</td>
<td>60,936</td>
<td>122,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,207,338</td>
<td>1,181,296</td>
<td>2,388,634</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: http://www.neportel.ogr/northeastfiles/Manipur/Population/Districts_2001)\(^\text{19}\)
Table 2. Total Population, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe population by sex and place of Residence, Manipur state, District. 2001. (Excluding the population of Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-division of Senapati)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>2,166,788</td>
<td>60,037</td>
<td>741,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,095,634</td>
<td>29,934</td>
<td>374319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,071,154</td>
<td>30,103</td>
<td>366,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>156,513</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>122,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86,230</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>61,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76,283</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>61,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>111,499</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>106,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58,014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23,485</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churachandpur</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>227,905</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>212,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>117,232</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>107,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>110,673</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>105,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>208,368</td>
<td>2,727</td>
<td>6,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>104,550</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>3,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66,618</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>3,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>364,140</td>
<td>33,969</td>
<td>4,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>182,250</td>
<td>16,640</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>181,890</td>
<td>17,329</td>
<td>2,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal West</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>444,382</td>
<td>13,276</td>
<td>21,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>221,781</td>
<td>6,646</td>
<td>10,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>222,601</td>
<td>6,630</td>
<td>10,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>394,876</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>24,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>198,371</td>
<td>5,374</td>
<td>12,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>196,505</td>
<td>5,035</td>
<td>12,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>140,778</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>134,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74,465</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67,313</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>118,327</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>108,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50,741</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
<td>54,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58,586</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td>54,087</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: census 2001)\(^{20}\)

According to the 2001 census, the population of Manipur is 2,388,634, representing only 0.22 per cent of the total population of India, while the tribals constitute 632,173 persons-1,207,338 males and 1,181,296 females. The tribals represent 34.41 per cent of the total population while their women represent 30.05 per cent of the total female population of the state. Out of the total population, 57.67 per cent of Manipur is Hindus, 34.11 per cent are Christians, 7.27 per cent Muslims, 0.07 per cent Jains, 0.17 per cent Sikhs, 0.04 per cent Buddhists and 0.77 per cent belongs to other religion.

**1.4. Rural-Urban Composition of Population**

Out of the total population of 2,3888,634 persons found in Manipur as per the provisional totals of 2001 Census, a total of 570,410 persons representing 23.88 percent of the total population are found residing in urban areas. The corresponding figures in 1991 Census are 505,645 persons (27.52 percent). It means that while the absolute number of urban dwellers has increased by 64,765 persons during 1991-2001, the proportion of urban population to the total population has declined by 3.64 percent in 2001 Census. The share of the rural sector, therefore, shows an increase by the same proportion during the period.
Table 3. The pattern of the rural-urban composition of the population at the state level for 1991 and 2001 is presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,331,504</td>
<td>682,395</td>
<td>649,109</td>
<td>72.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,818,224</td>
<td>923,428</td>
<td>894,796</td>
<td>76.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute increase</td>
<td>486,720</td>
<td>241,033</td>
<td>245,687</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>505,645</td>
<td>255,964</td>
<td>249,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>570,410</td>
<td>283,910</td>
<td>286,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute increase</td>
<td>64,765</td>
<td>27,946</td>
<td>36,819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: census 2001)

1.5. Growth of Population

The growth rate of population for any decade for census purposes may be defined as the percentage of the difference in population between the two censuses divided by the population of the previous census. Based on the provisional population figures of 2001 Census, the percentage of the decadal growth rate of the state and the districts for the period 1991-2001 shows the decadal growth rate of the rural areas higher than that of the urban areas. The growth of population for the rural areas during the period is 36.55 percent against the growth rate of 12.81 percent for the urban areas. As stated above, until 1961, Manipur continued to have only one town. With the influx of the rural population to the urban areas, the number of towns increased to 8 in 1971 and 32 in 1981. Consequently, the urban population has also grown suddenly to 108.95 percent during 1961-1971 and to an all-time high growth rate of 165.36 percent during 1971-81. The growth in the urban population from the census
context is, however, affected not only by the increase or decrease in population due to the demographic factors of births, deaths or migration but also because of addition of fresh areas as new urban places or deletion of existing urban areas.

Table 4. The progress of population by rural and urban sectors for the periods from 1901 to 2001 is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1951</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>212,231</td>
<td>271,572</td>
<td>304,013</td>
<td>359,802</td>
<td>412,353</td>
<td>574,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>72,234</td>
<td>74,650</td>
<td>80,003</td>
<td>85,804</td>
<td>99,716</td>
<td>2,862</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>712,320</td>
<td>931,261</td>
<td>1,045,493</td>
<td>1,331,504</td>
<td>1,818,224</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>67,177</td>
<td>141,492</td>
<td>375,460</td>
<td>505,645</td>
<td>570,410</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Census 2001)

The population structure of Manipur is unique with 34.41 percent hill people and the Meiteis, constitute nearly two thirds of the total population. In addition, there are about one lakh Manipuri Muslims. Technically, it is a multilingual state, but dominated by the Meiteis, Manipuri speaking group who are overwhelmingly found in the valley of about 700 sq. miles. The valley is encircled by mountain ranges and contains about 76 per cent of the population of the state. In conclusion, we can say that Manipur thus with her pluralistic society presents a picture of homogeneity and heterogeneity within a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-lingual base of civilization and culture.

1.6. **Population-land ratio**

The population number of India is closely related to the carrying capacity of the land. It is more so in the case of Manipur, as agriculture is the sole support of more than 70 percent of the people here, and the cultivated land is highly
limited. Therefore, crude population density alone cannot reflect the actual situation of the density in the state. The physiological density and agricultural density of the areas rather convey a real picture of the pressure of population on land here.

The physiological density of the state as a whole is 632 persons per sq. km. This shows very clearly that the population in the state is not as low as reflected by the numerical density. In the valley region the highest physiological density is found in the Imphal West Block I (1070 persons per sq. Km) followed by the Imphal West block II (1000 per sq. Km). The blocks of Bishnupur, Thoubal and Jiribam have physiological density of 700, 790 and 640 persons per sq.km., respectively. Still these figures are much higher than the numerical density. The high concentration of people is thus evident in the entire valley region. This situation in the hill region also is no less acute. The physiological density is of the order of 501 to 1000 per square km in the blocks of Mao-Maram, Sadar hills East, Sadar hills west, Nungba, Chandel, Tengnoupal, Chakpikarong, Ukhrul central, Churachandpur and Singat. In the remaining blocks, it varies from 200-500 per sq. km. In the case of agriculture, the density varies from 144 persons per sq. km in Phungyar block to 402 persons in the Tipaimukh block. In the Jiribam it is 152 persons per sq km. In the valley region it varies from 140-180 persons per sq km. The present agricultural density in the state which is greatly lacking land-resources strongly suggests that the pressure of population on its land-resources is intense. Unless a balance between human resources and natural and other resources are maintained the present conditions may deteriorate further in the near future.
1.7. Distribution of major ethnic groups

Manipur is comprised of numerous distinctive ethnic groups, who arrived at various times and contributed to the growth of the civilization in this hilly state in India's northeastern frontier. So far as the distribution of ethnic groups in Manipur is concerned, except for the Meiteis, all groups are distributed in different areas in the state. The majority of the Meiteis are concentrated in the Manipur Valley part of the Jiribam Basin. They constitute about 55 percent of the total population of the State. The Muslim population is 7.0 per cent of the total population of the state. Like the Meiteis, they are plain dwellers. They are found mainly in some pockets of the valley region such as Lilong, Mayang Imphal, Yairipok, Khetrigao, Sora and Kwakta. The Nepalese are mostly concentrated in the Sadar Hills of the Senapati district, where more than 50 percent of their people lived. They constitute about 2.65 percent of the state population. The Bengali population of Manipur is mostly distributed in the southern part of the valley and the Jiribam basin with 1.5 percent of the state population.

Of the tribal groups, the Thadous who are scattered in different parts of the hill districts make up about 5 percent of the State’s population. However, majority of them are found in the Churachandpur district. The Hmars are concentrated in the blocks of Tipaimukh and Churachanpur, and they represent about 2 percent of the population of the state. The Vaipheis constitute about 1.03 percent and majority of them are found in the Churachandpur district. The Marings and Anals are found in the blocks of Tengnoupal subdivision and Chandel town and they constitute 1 percent of the State population. The Tangkhuls are largely concentrated in the Ukhrul district and constitute 5.01 percent of the state’s total
population. The Maos and Marams are confined in the Senapati district. They represent about 4 percent of the total population. The Kabuis (Zaliangrongs) constitute 3.18 percent of the State’s total population. They are mainly concentrated in the Tamenglong district and in some pockets of Manipur valley. The Paite people make up about 2 percent of the population and are mostly confined to the Churachandpur district. The Meiteis are the dominant ethnic group, consisting of about 55 percent of the state’s total population. The various groups belonging to the Scheduled Tribes are scattered in the hill areas, and now a large proportion of tribal population may be found in the valley region, particularly in and around Imphal Town.

1.8. THE PEOPLE
As mentioned earlier, the present population composition of Manipur may be broadly classified as the Meiteis, the Scheduled caste Meiteis, the Kuki-Chin-Mizos, the Nagas and the Muslims. The Kuki-Chin-Mizos and the Nagas inhabited the hill areas of the state, whereas the Meiteis, the Scheduled caste Meiteis, and the Muslims are the main inhabitants of the valley besides some tribals, the Mayangs and other Indians.

1.8.1. THE MEITEIS
The Meiteis are the dominating group of the people of Manipur. They are concentrated in the three valley districts such as: Imphal, Bishnupur and Thoubal Districts.\textsuperscript{24} The civilization here is rural and the economic life of the people is not defined by capitalism. The Meiteis were Hinduized during the eighteenth century and yet simultaneously followed their traditional religion. They are probably the sole exception in the history of the world who follow two
religions at the same time. The land of the Meiteis was known by several names, such as Meitei Leipak, Kangleipak, etc. Mongoloid in physical features, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman Linguistic group, and professing the Radha-Krishna cult, Meiteis may be considered one of the most talented group of people in the history. Their talents were not limited to any particular sphere; however, they proved their excellence especially in areas such as weaving, handicrafts, dance, music and even games.  

T.C. Hodson is of the opinion that the group name “Meithei” has been derived from Mi=man and thei=separate. But Brian H. Hodgson, in a footnote to A Contribution to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1853, expressed the view that in the Moitay of Manipur, we have the combined appellations of the Siamese Tai and the Cochin Chinese ‘May’. However, in view of the great Shan influence over the culture and politics of Manipur, it is difficult, especially on linguistic grounds, to group the Meitheis with the Tai races when the structure and vocabulary of the Meithei language alike agree with those of the Tibeto-Burman races.

It is also said that a small section of the Meiteis strongly believes that they are of western descendant. However, on linguistic and anthropometric grounds this idea is quite untenable. The modern Meitei race is a composite formed out of several tribes. The fertile valley of Manipur witnessed invasions of different tribes from time immemorial. At different periods the Nagas, the Kukis, the Shans, and the Chins settled in this land and over time merged into the Meitei community.
The Meiteis mainly inhabited the main valley of the state. Their Mongoloidness in physical features is evident from the fact that their men are muscular and stout with well-developed chests and hard limbs, possessing enormous stamina and muscular power. Their improvised Mongol features distinguished them from the other Mongolian races. Their features are strikingly different than that of their neighbours, the Nagas and the Kukis, as well as the nearest to them, the Burmese. Their hair is generally coarse and black, very few grow beards, and moustaches are not in fashion. The women are beautiful with improved Mongol features such as slightly sharp facial features. Instant identification of a Meitei woman is the improvisation in the eye sockets, the flatness of the nose, the thickness of the lips and the progression of the cheeks. The complexion varies from dark to fair, but in general the women are either fair whitish or dark. Their hair is luxuriant and one rarely finds a woman with grey hair.

The dress of a man is white kurta, dhoti and pagari and they are distinct and specific for particular ceremonial occasions. The woolen 'endi' or silk shawl is wrapped around the body over the white kurta and dhoti. Pants, shirt, and coat are also common, especially with the young and office-goers. The women dress themselves with choli to cover the upper part of the body and a skirt type garment called 'phanek' which is wrapped around the waist up to the ankles, and they are fond of gold ornaments. The possession of gold is considered a sign of wealth. They wear earrings of various designs as well as necklaces and bracelets.

Col. McCulloch described their houses as well being adapted to the climatic conditions. The rich construct their houses on the posts and beams with wood, and the poor with bamboo. The walls of both types are made of reeds plastered with a
mixture of earth and cow-dung, and the roofs of all are thatched with grass. All dwelling houses face eastward, with a large open verandah facing in this direction. In villages, some affluent people have replaced these old types with cement, brick and concrete material. The villages are established with a cluster of a few houses in pockets distributed throughout the valley. The habitation can be marked by the growth of groves in and around the village; the rest is left for cultivation and is covered with paddy fields where no trees are generally grown.

Agriculture and cottage industry are the main occupations for the majority. While men and women jointly work in the fields, women weave at home and sell their products in the market. The embroidery works of the Meitei women are diverse and excellent. They keep their houses, clothing and utensils very clean.

The Meitei society is very democratic and is hardly affected by the caste system. They are easy-going people. Singing, dancing, and fishing are indispensable parts of their social life. Both men and women have active social lives. Their women are highly respected; nobody disobeys them. The Meiter women do not suffer from seclusion; they are hard workers and share the burden of the family with the male members even outside the home. This may be not so for the traditional Hindu women of other parts of the country, where she is expected to stay at home and do household chores. She is confined to the home in the name of discharge of the duty of the motherhood. The concept of beauty on the part of a woman has subjected her to exploitation. The mother has to nourish the child; she has to rear it and she has to look after its needs and welfare.
The wife should consider her husband as God, serve and worship him in spite of the fact that he is devoid of character that he is lustful and that he does not possess any semblance worth. In towns, the Meitei women keep themselves busy selling small merchandise articles. Some of them run big textile shops while some are retailers, grocers, etc. In rural areas their main occupation is working in fields and fishing. In general, weaving and basket-making are the main interests of a Meitei woman. It is said that there used to be looms even in the palace. In every house a loom is installed and women are on the job. They are expert in the art of weaving. Their men have a special aptitude and are known for their craftsmanship. The common profession among men is agriculture, although now the educated ones also seek official jobs and some are engaged in different kinds of businesses.

The principal agricultural crop for the Meiteis is paddy. All kinds of vegetables, such as cabbage, carrots, radishes, beetroots, turnips, lady fingers, pumpkins and pulses are grown and the yield is very good. In some areas different kinds of fruits are also grown. In agriculture, specifically food-grains, Meiteis have always been advanced and self-sufficient. Rice is the staple food. Wheat is not eaten in the form of chapatti or otherwise. In the town some people eat bread at breakfast but in the villages there is no concept of a breakfast. Both the morning and evening meals will include rice along with dal, vegetables and fish. Dried fish is very popular.

Fishing is a hobby as well as a profession. The peripheral banks of Loktak Lake are inhabited by fishermen. It is a common sight to see women engaged in fishing with the help of weirs, traps, fishing nets, spears and fishing baskets in lakes, ponds, rivers and marshes. It is quite interesting to watch a woman fishing with the
square net. The suspended net is raised by applying a sufficient force, her feet are firmly fixed to the ground making an oblique bend to her body at the knees and the hips, and then she makes a pull with hands to the central pole of the net. Fish is a common dietary food for the Meiteis. Most of them do not eat meat and are purely vegetarians, and fish is considered to be vegetarian.

The religious faith of the Meiteis is Vaishnavite Hinduism. The traditional Meitei religion was based on animism, so we find that some indigenous rituals have amalgamated with Meitei Hinduism.29

1.8.1.1. Genesis of gotra system

The Meiteis are divided into seven saleis (clans): Ningthouja, Khoomon, Looan, Angom, Moirang, Ngangba and Chengloi. All such saleis consist of a number of sub-groups called Yumnaks, the number varying from 115 in the Ningthouja (Royal clan) to seventeen in the Ngangba. The Meiteis are exogamous regarding the clans or saleis into which they are divided, but are endogamous regarding members of other tribes. There are subsidiary rules as well, for example, the Looangs are forbidden to take their wives from among the Khoomons, and the Moirangs are not permitted to marry the Khabananbas. According to the Vaishnava cult of Hinduism which is prevalent in Manipur, the seven saleis originated from different limbs of Guru.

1. Ningthouja from the left eye.

2. Angom from the right eye.

3. Chengloi from the right ear.

4. Ngangba from the left ear.

5. Looang from the right nostril.
6. Khoomon from the left nostril.
7. Moirang from the teeth.

The advent of Hinduism assigned different gotras to these clans, and in the process the preachers of the Vaishnava cult were responsible for seizing for the Meiteis the best lot of the prevalent gotras among the Hindus. Thus, though Ningthouja was assigned the Brahminic Shandilya gotra, others such as the Angom, Chengloi Ngangba, Looang, Khoomon and the Moirang groups have been assigned Kausika, Bharadwaj, Noimisha, Kashyap, Modkoilya and Ateya gotras respectively. The Brahmadev (the creating of the Universe) had sprung out from the Navel lotus of Narayan (the protecting God of the Universe), Marichi Muni (a Hindu sage) was born from the limbs of Brahmadev' Marichi's son Kashyap Muni's son Shaborna Muni; Indra Muni's son Chitrabirja; Chitrabirja's son Chitra Sarba' Chitra Sarba's son Chitra Rath; Chitra Rath's son Chitra Bhanu; Chitra Bhanu had no son, only a daughter named Chitrangada; Chitrangada's son Babrubahan; Babrubahan's son Suprabahu; Suprababu's son Pakhangba (jobista) Pakhangba was the first ruling king of Manipur.”

1.8.1.2. The spread of Hinduism and its Impact

The spread of the Ramayana-Mahabharata tradition in the predominantly tribal Manipur Valley has an interesting history. Though the early history of Manipur is shrouded in mystery, there is some evidence to show that the Valley, like the Brahmaputra Valley, had links with the rest of India in the seventh century; the Meitei king Naothing Khong who ascended the throne in A.D. 633 married a Hindu princess from north India. The regular Brahmins settlements were made in the fifteenth century and the process of migration of Brahmins to Manipur
continued thereafter. The young Brahmins came to Manipur single and married to the Meitei women. It is reasonable to assume that the impact of Ramayana-Mahabharata tradition became more vigorous thereafter, influencing the religious and spiritual world of the indigenous Meiteis.

The reigns of two Meitei kings, Charai Rongba and Garib Niwas, are important when considering the spread of Hinduism in Manipur. During the reign of Charai Rongba (1697-1706) Vaishnav Hinduism became a dominant force. In 1704, the first emissaries of Vaishnavism (the Nimbarka school) came to Manipur and the king and his family were initiated into this sect. Although the king himself formally took the sacred thread he did not attempt to establish Hinduism as the state religion or neglect the worship of the traditional lai and the observance of the Meitei beliefs. However, Garib Niwas (1708-1748) made Vaishnavism the official religion of the state. The principal influence in him was Santidas, a Brahmin who came to Manipur from Sylhet and introduced the worship of Ram and Hanuman. He became the Guru of Garib Niwas, and the Ramanandi School replaced the Nimbarka. The Krishna theme came to Manipur as a result of Chaitanya’s influence, again via Sylhet, and it became particularly popular in the second half of the eighteenth century. With these developments, the earlier religion of the Meiteis popularly known as lais, which included forest gods, snake-worship, stone-worship and human sacrifice began to change.31

Everyone knows that Hinduism in Manipur is of recent origin and even Gambhir Singh, technically a Hindu, once ordered a Brahmin to eat a pet goose which had died from his neglect at a time when he was entrusted to its care. Colonel McCulloch stated in 1858 that as many as 300 deities of animistic origin "are still
propitiated by appropriate sacrifices of things abhorrent to real Hindoos." Among these were Lam Lai, the nature God in charge of the rain, Imung Lai, the household deity, Sena Mehi, (Sanamahi) the deity of success, Noongshaba, the deity of creation of the rocks and stones and Laiching, the hill deity.

Even during the reign of Pamheiba, the Brahmins were associated with the worship of the popular deities like: Panthoibi, Taibong, Khombi and Yumthoi Lai. The spread and consolidation of Hinduism could not eliminate the influence of the deities which led Hodson to remark as late as in 1908:

"It is difficult to estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilization of the people, for to the outward observer they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the caste marks and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all unmindful of its spirit and inward essentials." 32

This explains why the Meiteis, in spite of their decisive transformation from tribe to the fold of caste, preferred to preserve their identity, in their system of naming, their Hindu name being prefixed and suffixed by indigenous expressions. Today the reviveraist thinking is threatening to shake off the bond of Hindu religion and the idea of Meitei identity is so dominant that there has been a demand to recognize the Meiteis in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Apparently religion has failed to act as a cohesive force in the society, and what is more significant is the desire to move from caste to tribe. About 34.41 percent of the population of Manipur is Scheduled Tribes belonging to 29 different tribes.33

Hinduism entered the Meitei society in the year 1737 when a preacher from Baisnav cult, Shanti Das Gosain, entered the Meitei society. He converted King Pamheiba and gradually manipulated the King to declare the new faith as Royal religion. The Hinduised Pamheiba assumed the name Garib Niwaz and has been
known as King Garib Niwaz since then. Shanti Das Gosain was more a politician than a saint, and he wanted to grab the administrative power with the help of the King, his latest follower. At his instigation, the King burned all religious books existing in the society so that he would have supremacy through the religion. The famous event, known as “Puran Meitheiba,” is still celebrated by Meiteis. However, the burning of important books on culture and religion has created a vacuum so that important information about ancient Meitei society, rich in cultural heritage, is missing.

The Meitei culture today is a mixture of their traditional culture brought down from generations and the Hinduised Meitei culture, with the influence of Radha-Krishna culture. It may be noted that Meiteis, while being Baisnav, followed the Baisnav rituals and festivals like holi, Rath yatra with Radha-Krishna, Narayan etc. as other deities following their traditional festivals like Lai Haraoba etc. On the other hand, they invite the Meiba and Meibi for the rituals. While analyzing their folk culture, the influence of both cultures can be noticed.

The Meitei society is a society of festivals. Their festivals depict their rich cultural heritage demonstrated by their beautiful rhythms of music, dance and songs. The most colourful and principal festival of Meiteis is Laiharaoba which means rejoicing of the Gods (Lai = Deity and Haraoba = to make merry). The festival starts from the temple of Lord Thangjing at Moirang sometime in February.34

1.8.2. THE SCHEDULED CASTE OF MANIPUR

The Caste system was not practiced in early Meitei society in Manipur, but with
the advent of Hinduism, they began to imitate the caste system of the Hindus. The idea of untouchability became part of the thinking of the Hindu Meiteis. There was even a time in Meitei society when the Meiteis degraded other Meiteis who did not adopt Hinduism; they did not mix with them nor eat and sit with them.\textsuperscript{35}

**Manipur has passed through three phases of religious change; Hinduism in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century which led to Sanskritization of the Hindu Meitei society based on caste system, conversion of the hill tribes into Christianity since the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century leading to the transformation of the traditional tribal society towards westernization or modernization and Sanamahi religious movement in the mid-twentieth century facilitating a process of desanskritization among the Meiteis.\textsuperscript{36}**

There are seven listed scheduled Caste communities in Manipur according to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe amendment act, 1976 (No.108 of 1976). They are (1) Loi (2) Yaithibi (3) Namsudra (4) Patni, (5) Ravidas (6) Sultradhar and (7) Dhobi. Most of them are mainly concentrated in the valley districts of Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur.\textsuperscript{37} According to Das, the Loi constitutes the largest single group among these communities, accounting for about 68 percent of the total scheduled caste population of the state.\textsuperscript{38} However, they were treated as different tribe by the other Meiteis. This is evident from Bino Devi’s observation, “Loi communities did not adopt Hinduism. And for a long time, they were treated as a separate tribe even though they belong to the same clans of the Meiteis. This attitude of treating the ‘lois’ as the lower caste by the Meiteis is an important factor for them to be included in the scheduled caste
even though their habits are quite different from other scheduled castes of the country.”

The term ‘Loi’ generally stands for the people who preserve the pre-Hinduist tradition and customs of the Meiteis. It also refers to the people who were banished to the penal colonies, namely, Sugnu, Ithing and Thanga as a punitive measure for some offences. There are eight Loi villages in Manipur, of which seven are on the western fringe of the valley and one on the eastern fringe. They speak a dialect known as Chakpa, worship the natural gods and goddesses like Koubru, Wangren, Sanamahi and still pursue their traditional occupations, such as pottery works, sericulture, distillation of liquor, rearing of pigs. They were included in the list of scheduled castes only in 1956 on the basis of an application submitted by Kh Chaoba, President of the ‘Chakpa-speaking Loi Association’ to the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Tribal Welfare.

Hodson writes:

“Khaganba seems to have been the first monarch to make use of the Loi villages as places of detention for prisoners, for he is said to have sent captives, taken on a raid against Nagas probably in the neighbourhood of Maram in the north to Sugnu in the year 1645 A.D.”

The Lois claim that they are the autochthones of Manipur and their traditional customs, still being preserved, are the same as those of the Meitei customs prior to their embracing of Hinduism. In any case, the Loi very closely resemble the Meitei and, except for a few characteristic features, are almost indistinguishable from them. Hodson has gone a step further by proposing a common origin of the Loi and the Meitei.

He writes:

“In discussing the origin of the Loi communities I found it necessary to set in
There is, however, the popular notion that the Lois are a different set of people because of the offensive occupation pursued by them. Brown also considered the Lois to be a degraded group. Even among the Lois, some hold the opinion that the term ‘Loi’ is derogatory and the actual term should be Chakpa, which signifies the language spoken by them. The Lois are agriculturists, distillers, potters, and they also practice sericulture. At Andro and Thongjow the Lois are handmade potters, at Phayeng they rear silkworms, while the people of Sekmai, Khurkhul and Koutruk are principally agriculturists. Moreover, the Sekmai people have a good reputation for distilling liquor, which is also a traditional calling for the women. In the past, liquor-making was the main occupation of the people. Liquor is distilled from rice. The residue after distillation becomes food for the pigs. The liquor they manufactured had a wide market. Almost invariably, all Sekmai houses were thriving centres for selling distilled liquor. There was a time when, even in the open market, it was sold by the women. Among the customers were people belonging to the Naga and Kuki tribes from the adjoining hill areas. They used to come down to Sekmai and buy liquor regularly. Undoubtedly, liquor-making and selling enhanced the economic condition of the people of Sekmai. The village has still the reputation of being generally more prosperous than other villages dependent mainly on agriculture. The people of Phayeng also distil liquor, and the tribals living to the west of Phayeng often come to the village in search of distilled liquor. Distillation of liquor was officially banned in the year 1959 under the Bengal and Assam Excise Act of 1010. Since then, the people of Sekmai, including men of status, have consistently demanded from the Government some relaxation in the
enforcement of prohibition. One of the memoranda submitted by the Loi Association to the Prime Minister of India on 16.7.1979 states:

“Scheduled caste women (Lois) maintain their livelihood by distilling and selling liquor. Since 1959 distillation of liquor has been prohibited. We have been consistently demanding substitute work to our women, but still the Government of Manipur is neglecting us without paying any attention to it.”

The villagers drew a comparison between pre- and post- prohibition days and almost all of them invariably said that economically they were much better off during those days when the manufacture of liquor at the household level was their main occupation. Cultivation was nothing more than a side attraction to them. Apparently, the difference in the potential earning from the two occupations has relegated agriculture to a secondary position. Even today, liquor is manufactured surreptitiously in many houses. During the ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death, people are entertained with liquor. Incidentally, distillation of liquor and rearing of pigs are generally considered by the Meiteis to be a symbol of inferior status.

Silk threads spun by the Lois are distributed through open markets. It may be pointed out here that except for the Meiteis of Chairen village, who are treated with scant regard by others, particularly the status-conscious among them, the Lois are the only people in the valley to turn handmade pots. The pots turned and the silk thread spun by the Lois caters to the needs of the valley population.

In conclusion, it could be stated that the scheduled castes in Manipur in general present a rather unique and interesting picture in the sense that they constitute a very small segment of the total population (1.7%) and yet live as a part of a
wider society in a situation where the caste system is almost non-existent.

1.8.3. THE SCHEDULED TRIBES

Besides the Meiteis and the Scheduled Caste groups, the other ethnic groups that lived in Manipur are the Scheduled tribes. The Scheduled Tribes of Manipur are broadly divided into two: the Kuki Tribes and the Naga Tribes. As already mentioned, these tribes are 29 in all.44

1.8.3.1. THE KUKIS

The Kukis are one of the indigenous tribes of the Indian Union, having close affinity with the Mizos in Mizoram and Chins in Myanmar.45 Gangmumei, in his article, *Glimpses of Land and Peopple of Ancient Manipur*, describes the Kuki tribes of Manipur as a group of the great Kuki-Chin family of People. They are linguistically related to the Meiteis. He further states that, Kuki is a genuine term covering a large number of tribes and clans in north eastern India and some part of Upper Burma in Chin Hills, Kuki is a foreign (Bengali) word meaning hill man. They migrated to Manipur hills in the pre-historic times along with or after the Meitei advent (early 18th century) in Manipur Valley.46 There are many more such theories related to the term “kuki”. However, the origin of the term "Kuki" is obscure. There are no written documents or monumental inscriptions to trace their history. Moreover, they had limited contact with their neighboring people, which make the task even more difficult.

There are diverse views and opinions presented by different writers and scholars, none of which, to this day have been universally accepted. The most commonly accepted view is that they originated from *Khul* (Lit. A cave, or a fortified place), which is analogous to *Sinlung* and *Chhinlung* versions.47
According to Ch. Budhi Singh, the then Head of the the Department of Anthropology, Manipur University, “the Kukis are known in the state as early as AD 33.” The Kuki-Chin is both a linguistic and an ethno-cultural entity. Linguistically, the Kuki-Chin is a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman comprised of the Kuki, Chin, Mizo (Zo, Zomi) and the Meitei (Manipuri) languages, on the basis of the linguistic classification adopted by G.A. Grierson, in his "The Linguistic Survey of India." As an ethno-cultural entity the term excludes the Meitei but covers the Kuki, Chin, Mizo (Zo, Zomi) and other cognate tribes and clans. The evolution of this composite name is an outcome of the colonial imposition of a common identity and a search for common ethnic identity on the part of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people themselves.

Historically speaking, the first reference was made to the Kuki in 1777, when these tribesmen attacked British subjects in Chittagong when Warren Hastings was the Governor General of Bengal. According to J.H. Hutton, the name Kuki first appeared in the writing of Rawlins on "the Cucis or Mountaineers of Tripura" in Asiatic Researches (II. xii). E.T. Dalton mentions that the Kukis were first known from an article written by Surgeon Mecrea in Asiatic Researches Vol. VII, on 24th January, 1799, describing the Kukis as a "nation of hunters and warriors." T.H. Lewin, another frontier officer and ethnographer, refers to the account of the Cucis or inhabitants of the Hill Tiperah written by J. Rennel, the Chief Engineer of Bengal in 1800. The Meitei name for the Kukis is Khongsai or Khongjai, and as such R.B. Premerton (1835) refers to them as Khongjuees. Khongsai is one of the ancestral lineages of the Kukis. The Kukis are a powerful and independent people who are known to the Bangalees by the name of Kookie and the Burmese as the Lankhe.”
The Kuki-Chin-Mizo group in Manipur includes the Anal, Aimol, Biete Chin, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Khotlang, Kom, Koirao, Koireng, Khelma, Lamkang, Lushai, Paite, Poi, Purum, Simte, Sukte, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, etc. Although blood-related brothers, the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups had a serious setback in relation to integration and have widely divided today. Of course, this process of transassociation has mostly a political overtone. Tribes, such as the Anal, Aimol, who now prefer to call themselves Naga, originally belonged to the Kuki group.

The Aimol are somewhat uncertain in their stand. In the case of Anal, common political aspirations are said to be at the root of their association with the Naga. The call for unity with the Nagas initially came from those who were well acquainted with the activities of underground Nagas operating in their area. There was also another agency through which Naga identity got a boost. They were the church leaders, mostly from the Tangkhul Naga tribe who popularized Naga as an ethnic label.

The Marings are one of the good examples who were motivated to call themselves Naga more by the church leaders than by any other agency. The modernization process is also instrumental in producing a group, which could no longer find effective socio-economic ties with their own people. From the above findings, it could be concluded that the term Kuki means hill man or mountaineer; the Kukis originated from Khul and are known in Manipur as early as A. D. 33.
1.8.3.1.1. Settlement

The land occupied by the Kuki-Chin speaking people extends roughly from a latitude of about 25 degrees 30 minutes North to about 20 degrees and 30 minutes North and falls between 92 degrees 20 minutes East. Presently, this region covers parts of different political areas as follows:

(a) Assam: parts of Chachar, North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills
(b) Meghalaya: parts of the East (c) Mizoram: state
(d) Nagaland: parts of extreme south (e) Tripura: part of the East
(f) Manipur: state (except parts of the extreme North)

(g) Myanmar: The Chin State, large groups including Tiddim-Falam and Haka are to be found, and parts of Magwe Division (Arakan Hill Tracts, Akyab, Kyakpyu and Sandoyway), where various southern Chin tribes are located and the Kabaw valley in upper Burma; (h) Bangladesh: Syllhet District and Chittagong Hill tracts.52

The main bulk of Kuki-Chin ancestors lived in the Chindwin valley with the Shan for some centuries. Thus from around the 13th or 14th century CE, they started migrating in a westerly direction, for reasons which no satisfactory answer is available within the present state of scholarship.

These late migrants can be divided into two groups: the southern group consisting of Asho nad Sho or Khxou or Zo; and the other group, made up of Laimi (Poi, Mara, Haka etc.), Mizo (Lushai and allied tribes) and Kuki (Paite, Hmar, Gangte, Vaiphei, Thadou, Kom, Chiru etc.). This picture is a rough sketch and should not be taken as absolute because one will find, say a Hmar, for example, among Mizo, Thadou, Zomi. But this division, apart from having
some geographical convenience, has some synchronicity with the socio-cultural, 
religio-political, cultural-linguistic variations. Some basic differences between 
southern and northern groups have been detected.

The southern group, first moving westward and slowly turning northerly to 
form the immediate neighbor of the southern group mentioned above. The 
northern group, from the southern boundary of Chin State to the northernmost 
North Cachar and Naga Hills formed more or less a homogeneous group in spite 
of many dialects that developed during the few centuries of expansion. The 
writer affirmed that some words are comprehensible between groups if they are 
patient enough to listen to each other.

1.8.3.1.2. Migration

The Kukis who migrated to Cachar and the North Cachar Hills of Assam in the 
18th century became settled subjects without much trouble. Tarun Goswami has 
clearly indicated the cordial relationship between the Kukis and Tularam 
Senapati, the ruler of North Cachar Hills and consequently between the Kukis 
and the Dimasas. Actually it was Stewart, and later Soppitt, who were serving 
officers in these areas and who wrote first on the affinity between the Kukis, 
Lushai and Chin. The common identity of the Kuki was maintained in Assam 
(later in Nagaland). The twenty-eight clans were recognized as Scheduled 
Tribes under the category of Any Kuki Tribe in Assam.

Maharaja Nara Singh of Manipur settled the Kukis in Manipur hills with the 
assistance of Political Agent W.Mc Culloch. They were recruited to Manipur's 
armed forces. The Kukis formed a part of the army of the state before 1891. 
Maharaja Chandrakriti of Manipur (1850-1886) had a very close relationship
with them. Even the rebellion of 1917-1919 was officially called the Kuki Rebellion or the Kuki Punitive Measures. The official writers like R. Brown and E.W. Dun had already indicated the existence of various tribes who were settled in Manipur for more than a thousand years but speaking dialects peculiar to the Kuki-Chin speech. They have great affinity with the new migrants of the 18th and 19th centuries. These tribes were described by the British writers as Naga and Kuki.

As Manipur was an independent state, the British did not have the opportunity of direct administration before 1891; therefore, there was confusion over the identification of these tribes. They also invented the term old Kuki to be differentiated from the recent Kuki migrants, and this term was applied to the Manipur tribes with linguistic affinity with the Kukis. This classification was based on their linguistic and cultural affinities and difference in the period of their migration to their present habitat.55

1.8.3.2. THE THADOUS

The Thadou-Kukis are a particular group within a larger Chin-Kuki-Mizo family. The appellation Thadou has been derived, according to their own version, from the word ‘that’ meaning to kill and ‘dou’ connoting war. The ‘Thadou’ literally conveys the sense of waging war against the enemies and killing them in order to protect themselves. Indeed, the British administrators who had to encounter the Thadou gal on many occasions, until they were suppressed in 1917-1919, knew them as brave and tough men in highland warfare.56 P.C. Misao explains the meaning of the term ‘Thadou’ in this way: “‘Tha’ kill, ‘dou’ resist. It means ‘Killer of all who resisted or fought’.”57
The word Thadou in general signifies a group of people speaking the Thadou dialect and having common customs and usages. The Thadou-Kuki includes; Kipgen, Haokip, Siltlhou, Lhouvum, Hangsing, Chongloi, Singson, Phoh-hil, Doungel, Changsan, Lhang-um, Sah-um, Lenthang, Thangeo, Insun, Jongbe, Mate, Lupho, Lupheng, Misao, Ngoilu, Lamhao, Thalhun, Lunkim, Baite, Guite, Kihuong, Touthang, Tuboi, Lotjem, Guite, Lhundim, etc.

The Thadou-Kukis were known for their brave warriors. Though they were small in size they even resisted the mighty British occupier in Manipur. The years between 1917-1919 are known the Kuki war of Independence or the Kuki Rebellion or the Thadou Gal. The British policy to exert control over the hill people necessitated the imposition of land revenue, house tax and forced labor which fundamentally contradicted the existing laws of the natives. However, though the sending of the expeditionary forces against the hill areas of Manipur earned the appreciation of some minor tribes and smaller villages, the big and powerful villages considered them as an absolute interference in their own internal affairs. In the minds of the Thadou-Kukis the white men’s laws proved that the British were exploiters and so they reacted violently against the British rule in 1917, bringing about tremendous political, economic and social change to the history of the Thadou-Kukis.

With the advent of the British, the influence of the chiefs declined and the importance of the Lambus, who acted as hill peons, interpreters and sometimes advisers to the British Officials, kept on multiplying. The Lambus took advantage of their contact with the rulers, who in the turn depended more and more on them, rather than the chiefs, for administrative purposes. Those chiefs,
who maintained a high status and good relationship with the Meitei Kings, resented the concept of Lambus superiority because they frequently over-ruled their judgments and enjoyed special treatment in every village through which they toured. These men were also responsible, in no small measure, for the rebellion. It is obvious that many Lambus took money from the hillmen, promising them that they would be free from recruitment. When the chiefs offered money instead of sending recruits, one of the chief commanders of the British soldiers and ordered them to either supply men or submit to punishment. The discontentment of the Thadous, coupled the whole population of the Manipur hills, especially the Thadou inhabited areas.

The Chief of Aishan, Chengjapao, head of all the Thadou-Kukis, sent orders to all the leading Thadou Chiefs to resist recruitment with force, if necessary. The British authorities, under the direct command of Brig. Gen. Macquioiel, deployed in different sectors of the war 2400 riflemen in addition to 3000 riflemen of Burma Military Police. The eight sectors are Eastern, South Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, Assam, Burma and Upper Burma. The two-year long encounter between the Kuki warriors and the British army came to a close when the British government announced a general amnesty with the call for general surrender.

The Kuki fighters on the whole had suffered a setback due to the lack of supplies, ammunition, and lack of support from their Naga neighbors, who in some cases even turned against the warriors, siding with the British armies. The long drawn-out war of the first Kuki war of Independence virtually came to a close on 20th May 1919. In the course of the war, according to L.W.
Shakespeare, eighty-six rebel villages were destroyed, 970 muskets confiscated in Manipur, 600 muskets confiscated in present day Burma. In order to cripple the Kuki nation, the British divided the land inhabited by Kukis into two, giving half to India and other half to Burma. Therefore the Kukis are scattered not only in the north-east part of India but also Burma and Bangladesh as well.

From the brief discussion above, one gets a fair idea of the different sections of the Kuki-Chin race and their distribution on the vast border areas of three sovereign states. In tracing the origin of the Kuki or Chin or Mizo people, the above sketch is a minimum requirement, for the simple reason that they share a common tradition, religion, social and cultural life, language, etc. (the different dialects are not a barrier in conversation if the people are patient). But it is unfortunate that, unlike the Nagas, the Kuki-Chin are not eager to form a nation or unite in one body, preferring to be branded individually. This is most evident in Manipur so that one writer fittingly comments:

“For them (Kuki-Chin tribes) to understand each other's language is not a problem. But to unite themselves in one body is a very big problem. Interestingly the Nagas do not understand each other's language. They communicate with each other in Meitei. Yet to them to unite in one body as Naga is not a problem.”

1.8.3.2.1. Social structure

The traditional Thadou-Kuki social organization is based on patrician system of different families and clans. Each Family and clan professes to trace its descent through the male line to a common ancestor, whereas the female line is absorbed in the clan descent to her husband at marriage. They have numerous kinship terms designated to their relatives, such as, “Gang” (the man who marries the sister of an ego’s father), “Ni” (the sister of an ego’s father), “Nu”
(Mother), “Pa” (Father), “Uh” (Elder brother or sister), “Nao” (Younger brother or sister), “Pi” (Grandmother), etc. Every family has the household council called “Insung Kivai pohon” (family administration). It comprises of the family helper or stewards (Tucha and Becha), the maternal relatives (Pute or Sung-gao), and soul mates and partners (Jol and Gol).

Tucha and Becha have great responsibilities and duties towards a family of their attachment. When a Thadou performs any function in his family, his Tucha and Becha take over all the charges and responsibilities for duly performing the function. Suppose, there is a marriage feast or any function in a family, the Tucha and Becha have to manage and supervise it. If any animal is killed for the function, it is the duty for the men Tuchas to clean its stomach portion, which is known to them as sagilsah, and the women tuchas (tuchanupis) fetch water for cooking and cleaning the vessels. Then the men Bechas cut the meat into pieces and cook it and the Bechanupis cook the rice. When everything is ready, the Bechas and the Tuchas serve the meals. The Bechanupis engage themselves in distributing rice and the men Tuchas in distributing the meat. When the feast is over the Tuchas and Tuchanupis clean all the utensils.

The Tuchas and Bechas enjoy a good status and an enviable position in the Thadou-Kuki family system although they are not born into it. Even in the event of a man killing a wild animal, the Tucha receives the waist portion known as Sakong of the killed animal and Becha gets the chest portion along with ribs of the same known as Sa-om. Besides that Becha and Tucha are invited to take the intestinal portion, which is especially prepared in the family. A part from the above mentioned duties and responsibilities, Becha has some other duties to
perform. In any important matter of a family, it is the Becha who takes the place of the head of the family. If anything happen in the absence of the head of the family, it is then the duty of the Becha to look after the matter and act on behalf of the head of that family. Such are the important functions of the Becha and Tucha whose participation as integral members of the Thadou family unit reinforces the strength and activities of the social unit.62

Food always means rice to them. Next to rice, maize may be considered the most important staple, and boiling is the most popular culinary art among them.63 “Ju” occupied the core of their socio-religio-cultural life without which no ceremonial and religious functions could be performed. However, this is now replaced by tea and the likes. The life of the people is guided by strong moral-ethical principles. The noteworthy ones are “Tomngaithna”64 (a philanthropic voluntary service rendered to the needy people), and “Jindot” (Hospitality). The host is always expected to be hospitable to his/her guest, and he/she is responsible for the welfare and security of the guest. These moral precepts constitute the social order that regulates the social behavior within the society and are the spiritual fabric that had sustained the Thadou-Kuki society.

1.8.3.2.2. Economic

The traditional Economic system of the Thadou-Kukis is the subsistence economy. They manufactured almost all the things they need for their socio-economic requirements. Moreover, for the purpose of hunting and self-defense, they also manufactured swords, spears, bows and brass muzzle-loaded guns. Like the Chins of Myanmar, they also knew the technique of making gunpowder and bullets.65 Shifting cultivation is the basis of the economy,
supplemented by hunting and food collection from the jungle. They also had a well organized corporate labour system in the economic pursuit. Such corporate works were organized in the village level by forming a member of labour group called Lom.

Lom is also an organization in which training for leadership is given to the young people of the village. Further, it is an organization in which the young ones learn a sense of duty and dignity of labour. This organization is in a way connected with the Thih-kheng office, because the success or failure of the organization depends upon the ability of the This-kheng to produce and to provide implement.66

The Lom can be divided into different forms: “Lompi” (Big labor corps), “Lomneo” (Small labor corps), “Lomlhang” (General corps), and “Lomgol” (Colleague corps). These Loms may perform feast or functions as and when the job works are completed viz. finishing of mowing, clearing grasses in the jhums, reaping of the crops, transporting and depositing of the products of the jhum and construction of thatch-houses.67

The function of Lom is concerned mainly with the economic development of the village. All the able-bodied men and women of the village join this organization, irrespective of age, sex and the capacity of the individual. Any household of the village can requisition the services of the Lom. The number will be credited to his (a Lom member) name and the same number of work he thus earns will be repaid to him by other members with labour. In this way, the Lom members reciprocate in helping each other and keeping the village, as far as possible, self-sufficient in the matter of physical labour. Sometimes the Lom
can be hired by any villagers or chief. In return, the members are given food and
drink but this entertainment needs not be instantaneous. It may be on a later day
when the person who engages the Lom is in a position to repay.

1.8.3.2.3. Political
The traditional Thadou-Kuki village is an important, social, economic and
political unit. The village site is selected with reference to a good defense
position and convenience of cultivation with water at hand.\textsuperscript{68} Each village
maintained a separate independent administrative unit, having the village chief
called ‘Kho-Haosa’ as the administrative head, and his house serves as the
village court. He governs in accordance to the customary laws with the
assistance of his officials called “Semang Pachong”, who are nominated and
retained by him at his pleasure, and their verdict is final and binding. Customary
Laws have been institutionalized by the Village Council or Village Organization
under the leadership of the Chieftain with his Council of Minister popularly
called the Haosa System. The Village Council is composed of persons of
wisdom, integrity and knowledge of Customary Laws. They are nominated
by the office of the Village Chief. They remain in office as long as the Haosa
is pleased.

The Village Chief functions within the territorial jurisdiction where the village
is the highest independent political unit. The Haosa system wields political
authority and prerogative over the villagers in absolute terms. The Village Chief
holds the supreme political power, economic control and supervision of social
behaviour and norm. The position of the Village Chief is not elective but
hereditary and it passes on from father to the eldest son. The primitive state is
not tyrannical to its subjects because the first and foremost, we know, that a primitive tribe is always a body of people related by bonds of kinship and relationship; practically, everybody is related to everybody else in the village. Unlike the Nagas, the Thadou-Kukis have no right over the land whatsoever. Only with permission from the Village Chief, who is the legal owner of landed properties, the villagers can cultivate the land and utilize other economic resources, including hunting wild life on payments either in cash or kind. Together with such rights of holding immovable properties, the Haosa system has certain obligations to the villager. In return to the services rendered by the villagers free of charges and tributes paid by them as tokens of loyalty, recognition, obedience and solidarity, the Haosa system has to protect the interests of the villagers by providing security socially, politically and economically. It is also the bounden duty of the system to see that every villager is protected from external aggression, harm and danger.\footnote{69}

The Village is the highest political unit among the Thadou-Kukis, and Chief of the village and his Council of Ministers which function within a territorial jurisdiction wielding its political authority and prerogative over the villagers in absolute terms are the supreme political powers. The administration of justice, enforcement of executive functions, maintenance of social practices and customary law, including religious performances are the areas of the village administration under the Chieftainship and his Council of Ministers. Thus, a Thadou-Kuki village is an important administrative unit. The office of the Chief is hereditary, and is passed on from father to his eldest son, who otherwise is known as “Upa”. 
The office of the Chieftainship or *Haosa* is vested with so much of power and authority over his subjects that a person in that capacity is often prone to abuse his power and thus turn himself into a despot. *Haosa* is the office of the Village Chief. It is hereditary, passing from father to the son. The office is occupied only by the *Upas* except among the Lushais, and unlike the Nagas, *Haosa* has the absolute right of ownership of the entire land of the village. The villagers have no right over the land whatsoever. Even if a villager, who is generally a *Naopa* wishes to establish a new village, he can do so only with the permission of the *Haosa*. However, absolute right over the land might be, normally allowed in consultation with his Council of Ministers, the villagers to cultivate and utilize as per their requirements.\(^70\)

The feudal system of the *Haosa* and its prerogatives have however, lost their favour considerably since the time of the British. Consequent upon the developmental schemes taken up during the post-independence days in the country, the institution of *Haosa* has shown further changes. Its importance has greatly declined, and the effectiveness of the institution and its authority waned. With the introduction of the Village Authority Act, 1956 in Manipur, *Haosa* is the ex-officio Chairman of the Village Authorities. The members are no longer nominated by the *Haosa*, but are elected by the villagers themselves, through ballot system. This system has given birth to different parties within a village and, therefore, the village as a single unit could not be cohesive. The solidarity of the whole village which used to be the backbone of the political system is utterly shattered. Villagers are no longer governed by their customary laws, but are administered by the Village Authority Act. The Act says that the villagers have direct participation in the village government and they are the persons who
run the machinery of the Government.\textsuperscript{71}

1.8.3.2.3.1. **Som**: Som refers to the Home in the Thadou-Kuki traditional culture where young people come together for holistic training. It is a bachelors’ dormitory in which all the young boys of village sleep together at night. It was in the Som where one received training in all possible fields of knowledge, wisdom, skills and cultural values. The nature of hostility and practice of tribal raids necessitate the existence of this organization, so that in times of emergency the services of all the able-bodied men might be available at short notice. They have to offer their free and compulsory services to the village. Although the main purpose of this organization is to defend the village from the external dangers, in times of peace they render every possible service to the village community whenever required. Moreover, it is an organization for recreation of the young boys.\textsuperscript{72}

Unlike the dormitory of some Naga tribes, the Thadou-Kukis have no separate dormitory building. They choose any house in the village, which has at least a girl inmate as their dormitory.\textsuperscript{73} In the Som, younger boys are taught all sorts of things, from cutting jokes to taking responsibilities. Stories are told by the elder members and sometimes topics ranging from girls to war become the subject matters of great interest. This organization is also connected with the Thih-Kheng office, because the efficient mobilization of the village youths for defense depends mainly upon his ability of the Thih-Khen to produce weapons. This place is also considered place of learning. Boys of different age-groups who are assigned various jobs and other sundry chores stay together. The boys of younger age-groups learn the things from the older groups. They also learn
social customs and manners. It serves as an institution of learning, discipline and other essential characters necessary for a man in future life. It has thus been considered as a very essential part of the village administration among the Thadou-Kukis.\

1.8.3.2.3.2. **Thempu:** Thempu is the office of the village priest or medicine man. Literally speaking, he is the councilor in charge of public health in the true sense of the term. Persons for this office are chosen from among those who know the Them-Thus (the secret words of medicine). This office is very often regarded as hereditary because the secrets of the medicines are not revealed to each and every person. Thempus generally prefer to teach the secret words to their sons and grandsons. Moreover, to learn this secret costs a lot of money and time. Therefore, very few persons bother to master this knowledge. Thempu will attend to all the villagers in times of sickness, and he officiates on social and religious occasions. The Thempu is so important in the life of the Thadou-Kukis that for an ordinary observer he seems to be the head of the village, because on every occasion- temporal and religious- he takes precedence over the Haosa.\

1.8.3.2.3.3. **Thih-kheng:** Thih-kheng is the office of the village blacksmith. This office goes to the person who has the highest handiness in blacksmithy. He is the authorized blacksmith of the village. He does not charge for what he makes for individual villagers. Everything is done free of cost. He makes agricultural implements, such as hoes, axes, spades etc. and manufactures weapons like swords, arrows, guns, bullets, etc. In recognition of his services, he is given Changseo (a basket full of grain collected) by each family in the village annually, but the rate will be lower than that is received by the Haosa (Chief).
However, this practice is not so relevant for the present society.

1.8.3.2.4. Religion

Generally, most of the tribals including the Thadou-Kukis have been considered animists before they became Christians. It has been said that the natural objects such as stones, trees, mountains, rivers and certain places were believed to be the abode of the spirits and demons. This idea led them to the worship of nature. They did not worship the object but the spirit that dwelt in it. In this case, one should rethink whether or not they should be called animist. They believed that these spirits were forces alive in the nature, which were hostile to man, and have power to harm people bringing them sickness, and the likes. To appease these spirits, people chose to offer sacrifices through the instrumentality of priests appointed and approved by a particular village authority or the Chief. They believed in dreams and visions and lived under the bondage of these spirits and had no peace of mind. Courageous people, who dared challenged the mighty British Empire lived under the constant fear of these spirits and appointed a priest who could serve as a mediator between the spirits and the living being. They also believed the god Nungzai, which is reigning in this world. Some believed this god to be a female god and the wife of Chung Pathen. Nungzai is identified as Satan from whom all the evil spirits originated. All those spirits were considered to be more powerful than human beings but they were not gods in the proper sense. Sacrifices were made in order to ward off their anger and satisfy their appetite but Chung Pathen is the only one God.

The Thadou-Kukis believe that Chung Pathen is the Creator and the sustainer of the whole universe. He is the highest benevolent God who lives in Heaven or in
the sky. Everything concerned with prosperity, growth and strength of life is nothing but the gift of Chung Pathen. Chung Pathen is a good God who does not want appeasement of sacrifice. They believe in the supreme-creator God called Pathen (Holy Father) as the creator of the whole universe and all the things in it. They usually perform an annual worship to Pathen at the village gate to seek His blessings mainly for good health, prosperity and better life here and life after death. They also believed in the existence of a host of deities and spirits (either benevolent or malevolent), residing in the natural world. Sacrifices are usually offered to the malevolent spirits in order to appease them.

This shows that the Thadou-Kukis are not animists who worship trees, stones, and any other natures. Today, the primal faith and worldview had undergone a drastic change as they are exposed to Christian faith and scientific knowledge. The customary usage of a fermented drink or country beer called “Ju” is replaced by tea and the like. In like manner, the primal religious connotations in the performances of rites, ceremonies and sacrifices are abandoned or continued by giving Christian meanings, while the place of village priest is taken over by pastors in the present day.

1.8.3.2.5. Status of Thadou-Kuki Women

The Thadou-Kuki society, being patriarchal the entire major decision making power rest among the male in all the fields of activity except in that of the household management where female domination becomes apparent to any
visitor. She is the undisputed mistress of the household, no doubt, but her authority within the household is subordinate to the decision of her husband.

The status of the Thadou-Kuki women in the over-all social milieu is somewhat subdued and inferior to that of their male counterparts in as much as they are not permitted to stand on an equal footing with the males in all matters concerning political, judicial and religious. Nevertheless, their prominent role in Thadou-Kuki economic life raises their social status as equal partners in their total economic life. They not only work hard in all the processes of economic production in the field but also engaged widely in weaving shawls, lungis and go to the market places for economic transactions without any restriction.

The Thadou-Kuki women feel free to participate in any economic activity which is not a taboo. Ploughing, for example, is not prohibited for women; but it is they who are preferred for sowing the seeds and harvesting the crops. Although decision-making is admittedly a male privilege, a loving husband invariably consults his wife before taking a final decision in all domestic matters. In public matters, however, he may not condescend to share his views with the weaker section. No restriction is imposed on her movements provided her activities are within the limits of the Thadou-Kuki norm. Women have no right to inherit parental properties. She cannot inherit immovable property like land and house. Nevertheless, she is free to purchase and possess land and transmit it to her posterity. She has also a right to her mother’s ornaments and cloths.

It is a fact that a man’s status does not change much after marriage; but that of a woman changes to one of the serving the interests of her husband, submission to
whose authority pays her a good dividend of being her husband’s trusted friend and domestic guide. Fertility in women is an asset for womanhood. Infertile woman appears to be less wanted by her husband or her neighbours in spite of other accomplishments. A woman who produces daughters only may not be praised even by her admirers. Birth of sons enhances the status of a Thadou-Kuki woman as she becomes the proud mother of the male inheritors of the lineage and the family properties. **Another handicap suffered by the womenfolk is that they are debarred from performing the religious rites. The village priest is always a man. Above all, they are entirely debarred from participating in the traditional political activities. They could never be members of the traditional village council, not to speak of becoming the chief of a village.**

For a Thadou-Kuki woman there are no holidays. She has to get up early in the morning to bring water and cook morning meal. At the same time she has to pound paddy to dehusk rice. The husband does not help in her domestic work. When morning meals are over, she has to prepare packed-lunch for the day time and follow the husband to the jhum. After finishing the day’s work for the day she has to carry back firewood and fodder to feed the domestic animals at home. As soon as she reaches home she has to prepare evening meals. After finishing the evening meals, the husband takes rest and sleep soundly. But the wife has to dry up wet clothes of the men over charcoal fire at late night. After doing all these, she has to sit at her spinning wheel till late night for she is responsible for providing the garments to all her family members. So, it seems that the Thadou-Kuki women consider only weaving and spinning wheel as a special holiday.
Regarding marriage, the girl has to marry the boy chosen by her parents and her bride price is fixed by them. This is because of the fact that: (a) Women are considered as maidservant and on sojourn in her husband’s family. (b) Women had a bride-price (c) Men consider women as merely child-bearers. (d) Husbands consider their wives as slaves (e) Women are weaker than men (f) Women think always that they had original home and one day they can go back at the time of their husband’s death. Fixing of bride-price could be one of the main reasons for the Thadou-Kuki women being dominated by men and excluding them from the inheritance of her husband’s properties. The term price makes low status to all women. So long as the phrase bride-price is used, the husbands will consider them like a property which can be moveable or changeable at any time and any moment. Hence it is better to change the term bride-price into marriage bond or gift. In doing so, there shall be equality between men and women in the tribal community. After the death of her husband, she is a widow who considers herself that she has no more rights in the family and returns to her parents.\textsuperscript{84}

1.8.3.3. THE HMARS

The Hmars are one of the sub-tribes of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo. They settled in Manipur in 1872. They are a distinct community with respect to their traditions, culture, and social customs. The Hmar people are united by common tradition, common language and customs. They claimed that they originated from Singlung, which is located somewhere in central or south-west China. According to their history, ancestors of Hmar belong to the Chinese dynasty. In the course of their movement, southward through the borders of the Himalayas and eastward, they resided for some time in Shan State in Myanmar. Here they
became acquainted with agriculture and the use of iron implements. In 1871 the British government conquered their mountain territory, and then the land was divided into Mizoram, Cachar and north-Cachar (Assam), Tripura and Manipur, and Chin Hills. In Manipur, they are mostly found in the Tipaimukh, Jiribam and Churachandpur areas.

Ecology plays an important role in shaping the mode of livelihood of the Hmars. They depend considerably on forest products. The impact of ecology on the economy is indispensable, and the environment has significantly influenced their economy which can be divided into two divisions: traditional and subsidiary occupations. Shifting cultivation by hoe culture is the main and traditional occupation as well as blacksmithing, carpentry, poultry-raising, basketry, priesthood, herbal medicinary, etc. The village chief and his ministers have control over the yearly jhumming. Rice is the main crop of shifting cultivation. Maize is another important crop which is sown broadcast in the same field. Hunting and gathering wild vegetables from nearby forest supplements the daily consumption. Food gathering is the women’s job in most of the Hmars families.

The Hmars are the worshippers of supernatural beings, benevolent and malevolent, by whom their everyday life is surrounded. Pathien is the supreme god who is the creator of all beings. They have a rich culture and embrace customs of the traditional society as their way of life. However, it is a well-known fact that change is inevitable for any society at any point of time, at any place. The wave of change has reached the Hmar society in their social, economic, political and religious aspects.⁸⁵
1.8.4. THE NAGAS

It is not clear how the name "Naga" was derived. There have been several attempts made by anthropologists and historians to trace out the origin of this word. Some have connected the “Naga” with Sanskrit “Ng” meaning mountain as the people live mostly in the high hills. Thus it implies “hill man.” However, Verrier Elwin points out that, "the derivation of the word is still obscure." Even four decades after Elwin made this observation the question remains unanswered. Attempts have been made to present explanations put forth by different scholars in order to discover the truth of this matter. The issue is complicated due to the continuing process of identity assertion, formation and expansion movement of the Nagas themselves. The Puranas and Epics refer to many Naga dynasties. The first reference to "Naga" in the Ahom chronicles dates back to the 9th century A.D. when the Ahom-Tais or Shans were living in upper Burma and had not crossed to the Brahmaputra valley.

One theory of the origin of the Naga was propounded by a British explorer and tea cultivator, S.E. Gait, the great historian of Assam in 1906, who wrote, "The collective designation by which they are known to the Assamese seems to be derived, as suggested by Holcome and Peal, from ‘Nok’ which means folk in some of the tribal dialect. When strange parties meet, they are said to ask each other term Noke or Nok meaning ‘what folk are you’ and Nokrang meaning ‘the people of the sky’. Meanwhile a few Naga scholars who want to discount the colonial writer's view proposed two theories.

One is that Naga was derived from the Kachari word Nokka (Nokhhar) meaning warrior fighters as the Kacharis came into violent conflict with Nagas. Another
is that it was derived from the Burmese word *Na Ka* meaning pierced ears. Though the final word has not been said on the derivation of the Naga, it is certain that the name was given by outsiders, the inhabitants of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, to mean the Naga. The name was popularized and enforced by the British colonial authorities. The Nagas are concentrated in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of India and Naga Hills of Upper Myanmar.

The tribes of Manipur who are now under the Naga fold are among the early inhabitants of the hills of Manipur. The name Naga was given to them by the British on the basis of their policy of identifying and classifying the tribes of Nagaland and Manipur. Like the Kukis, the Nagas occupy different areas of Manipur hills. The Nagas of Manipur includes the Tangkhul, Mao and Maram, Jaliangrong and the Kabui.

1.8.4.1. TANGKHUL

The Tangkhuls are a sub-tribe of the Nagas, inhabiting in the eastern zone of Manipur. The Tangkhul village is a composition of 3 or more clans led by their respective leader called *Wungva* (Chieftain). In a village, families of clans live together forming separate colony of their own clan. Thus a village has 3 or more colonies and is known as *Tang*. Each village is an autonomous state with no appellate court. Only in cases involving two or more villages, the chiefs and chieftains of the villages concerned jointly decide the case. Since the village lands are divided and apportioned to each clan at the time of their settlement, the portion of land received by a clan is supposed to be their properties.
The Tangkhuls points to Makkhel as the ancestral place from where they migrated to their present habitat. A legend indicates their migration was from Samsok (Thungdut) in Kabaw valley of upper Burma. It shows the settlement of the Tangkhul up to the western bank of the Chindwin. Tangkhul was perhaps a name given by outsiders, but there is one view that it was derived from 'Tangku', one of the three progenitors. According to T. Luikham, the original name of the Tangkhul is Wung. Regarding the racial composition, the Tangkhul features consist of sharp semi-Aryan features and Mongoloid elements. There are two groups, the northern Tangkhuls, who use spears as their major weapon, and the southern Tangkhuls, who use bow and arrow as their weapon.88

The Tangkhul women have no right to her father’s properties. There is a saying: *Mayarnao mathameilungna Shanao mazungmuiyana* (Men are rock, women mists). Meaning once a woman gets married, she becomes a member of her husband’s family, a different clan. Hence, a woman has no right to inherit her father’s landed properties. But any amount of movable properties or wealth she can receive at the pleasure of their parents. There is one condition under which a woman can enjoy the right to her father’s landed properties. That, a man who has no son, with the permission of his heir, can allow his married daughter to use wet rice cultivation so long as she lives. The land shall come back to her father’s house at her death.89

1.8.4.1.1. Village Council/Chieftains

The Village Council is a body of representatives from each and every clan. They are not elected. The eldest of a family, by virtue of his birthright, shall represent his clan to the Council. In the case of big villages, where many members are
required to administer the village, sub-chieftains are accepted to represent their respective sub-clans. Chiefship and chieftainship are all hereditary. Since a woman is not an heir to her father’s house, her representation in the Village Council is out of the question. However, she has the right to attend the court to plead with her family members, especially, in the event of one of her sisters involved in a dispute.

The Village Council is an open darbar. Both men and women are permitted to speak and plead for a relative who is a party in a case. They are guided by their representative. After hearing from both parties, as well as from the members of the Council, the Chief or Headman pronounces the judgment. His order is final and binding. All villagers are kept informed of all matters relating to village affairs. Since the elders give protection to their younger brothers, they have full confidence in their leadership in the family matters also. It is true, legally women have no standing in the Village Council, nor do they have any right to inherit immovable properties from their parents. However, it is a phenomenon that the Tangkhul from of old had great respect for women. In speech and in practice, women are given the first place.90

1.8.4.1.2 Customary Laws and Women

The Tangkhul Long constitutes Customary Laws for smooth administration and peaceful co-existence. The Long is a Federation of all the Autonomous Tangkhul Villages. While making their laws, the Village Council enacts certain provisions to upgrade the dignity of women in their society. These provisions are unique—perhaps, no other is so kind to their women folk than the Tangkhuls. Out of many, following are some of the important provisions:
(1) **Pukreila:** A woman married to a man belonging to another village (village exogamy) is known as **Pukreil.** Under their Customary Laws, a **Pukreila** is a free woman, a citizen of her father’s village as well as of her husband’s. Even during a conflict, a **Pukreila** can move freely between the warring villages. The law says, “You shall not harm a **Pukreila**”. As such, when there arises some trouble between the villages of her father and her husband, she can go as mediator. She takes her husband’s word to her father and again she brings her father’s word to her husband for a peaceful solution. She can play an important role to bring about peace between the warring camps. There had been many conflicts averted through the goodwill and wisdom of a **Pukreila.**

(2) **Pukreila’s Prerogative:** When two villages failed to settle a case, a **Pukreila** has her prerogative to intervene. Holding her *zeithing* (a traditional iron staff), she goes between the two lines of battle, shouting, *Shapharia! Shapharia!* (enough, enough)... At her shout, the fight ceases. There shall be no more fighting after this. And that is the end of the fight. And case is compromised. In the matter of land dispute, the verdict of the **Longwo** (long chief) comes through the intervention of a **Pukreila** which is her prerogative.

(3) **Yorla and Varei:** A woman loses her identity from the day she is married. She is to be identified as her husband’s family. Yet her privilege of being a daughter of her parents remains in the life of the family. In order to reckon this unbreakable tie of a family, they adopt a special link call **Yorla-Varei.** A woman when married becomes a **Yorla** (brother’s lineage) and her brother remains as **Varei** (sister’s lineage). This lineage is remembered in every important function, like marriage, new building construction, obituary, etc. When there is an important function in the house of her brother, she (**Yorla**) shall bring her privileged share, ranging from ornament to cloth to buffalo. For an obituary, she
shall bring a cloth. All Yorlas have their due or privileged contributions according to their culture. Likewise, the brother (Varei) shall contribute his due share for such important functions and celebrations in the house of his sister (Yorla). A Tangkhul woman (Yorla) cannot inherit her father’s properties.

(4) *Best Inheritance of a Woman*: Tangkhuls celebrate their biggest festival, called *Luira* (Virgin dance). The dance is open to only virgins. Customarily, all the virgins in the village shall join the dance. If any unmarried refused to join the dance, her character is suspected. Virgins’ Dance is a secret declaration of virginity. They dance half-naked in the open field; therefore, this is the best time for the young people to select the Most Beautiful Girl of the year.  

1.8.4.2 MAO and MARAM

The Mao and Maram are the two endogamous populations of the Naga tribes of Manipur. They are mainly concentrated along the rugged hills of the Senapati district of Manipur. The Mao and Maram Nagas derive their name from the two most important villages in their area-Mao and Maram. Like the other Nagas, these two tribes share the same legend of their origin at Meikhel, a village between the Mao and Maram areas, situated at about ten miles south east of Kohima town, Nagaland. The Mao and Maram who claim to have a common origin, but perpetually feud with each other are nevertheless closely allied by inter-marriage. The two patri-oriented Naga groups are mainly cultivators and practiced both shifting and terrace forms.  

1.8.4.3. JALIANGRONG

The Zeliangrong is the combined name of the Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Puimei. The Zeme and Liangmai were known to the British as Kacha Naga,
whereas the Rongmei and Puimei are popularly known as the Kabui, a name given by the Meiteis of Manipur. The Zeliangrong people, according to the legend preserved in their religious hymns and folk songs, originated from a mythical cave called Taobhei; they moved to Makhel and to Ramting Kabin and then to Makuilondi. From this settlement they migrated to the south, west and north. Makhel is thus an important point of dispersal in their migration to the western Manipur and Barail range. How the name 'Kacha Naga' came to be applied to the Zeme and Liangmai by the British is unknown; whether it was the Angami word Ketsu or Ketsa meaning deep forest or from the name of a peak called Kacha in Zema country. Nothing is known clearly about the derivation of Kabui. The ancient chronicles of Manipur refer to the Kabui, Tangkhul, Anal and others as very ancient tribes.⁹³

1.8.4.4. KABUI

The Kabui is one of the sub-tribes of the Naga tribe. They are found in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. They called themselves Rongmei. They are divided into four clans: Kamei, Golmai, Gangmai, and Langmai. Each clan except Langmai is again divided into seven sub-clans, five sub-clans and two sub-clans respectively. All clans and sub-clans are exogamous. The Kabuis have a common totem (Kabui). They have their own dialect, known as Kabui, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family.

Agriculture is the traditional and principal occupation of the Kabuis. Rice is the main crop cultivated in their field. They also grow different kinds of seasonal vegetables. Hunting all types of animal and gathering forest products are also traditional occupations. Fishing is another economic activity in which they are
actively engaged. There is a village council of elders for the smooth running of the village. The council is headed by a chief, known as Khullak pai. He is assisted by four other important office bearers viz Khumbi, Mantri, Lublak and Changlow. Khumbi is an elderly person who is in charge of the youth dormitories, three others are members of the council and they offer their services any time. The Village council is responsible for maintaining peace and welfare of the village. Familial, social and political disputes are solved by the village council.94

Conclusion

Youth Dormitory was found among all the tribals societies in Manipur. In every tribal village, in pre-Christian days, the boys had their sleeping house or dormitory. Here all the young men of the village slept together. The Tankhuls called it ‘Longshim’, the Rongmeis ‘Khangehnu’, the Hmars ‘Buonzawl’, the Mizo ‘Zawlbuk’ the Zous ‘Sawm’, and the Thadous ‘Som’. Among the Nagas, the girls also had a house or dormitory for sleeping together, but among the Kuki-Chin tribes, such places of sleeping together for the girls were not common.95 A quick perusal would show that tribal customary laws which subsume the people’s beliefs, customs, social norms, precepts, rights, and usages practiced since time immemorial, are not conducive to the interest of women indeed.

But, for few exceptions most of the customary or personal laws, particularly those relating to property and marriage, are highly oppressive to women. Although women shoulder heavy economic responsibilities commensurate with men, tribal customary laws, like those of non-tribal
societies, deny them equal rights to property. The system of inheritance among most tribes unquestionably favours men. In general, women are entitled only to maintenance rights and expenses for marriage, while men inherit land and all other movable and immovable property.96

1.8.5. THE PANGANS

Muslims are called Pangals or Pangans in Manipur. They started settling in Manipur around the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The brother of King Khagemba revolted against him and went to Cachar, Assam to seek military help. From there he got many Muslim soldiers under the leadership of one General Bimbol. But he was defeated by Khagemba and one thousand Muslim soldiers were captured. King Khagemba allotted them specific areas like Lilong, Keirao, Sekta, Yairipok, Hafta etc. within the valley. They were given local Manipuri women in marriage and were allowed to settle in the state. They were also given specific yumnaks. Later, a record by the name of Pangan Thorakpa was maintained to record their migration, necessary and activities. But they were not absorbed into the Meitei salai structure.

The extent of inter-marriage between Muslim men and Meitei women can be seen by the names of the present Manipuri Muslims, Sahep Khanba, Tomba etc. Instead of Urdu names, which are used by the Muslims in other parts of India, they have got Meitei names. Lately, however, most of them have started using Urdu names. They also used to worship the Meiteis’ god Sanamahi and have only recently started adhering to the tenets of Islam more strictly. They have now opened Madarasas, institutions for teaching Islamic scriptures. All of them speak Meiteilon, the Meitei language, and only a handful knows Hindi or Urdu.
Although the wives of their ancestors were Meitei women, the Meiteis do not now like to marry into a Muslim family. The Meitei women marrying Muslim men are looked down upon by the Meitei Hindus, but as mentioned earlier, when Meitei men marry Muslim women, they are accepted after going through conversion and a purificatory rite.  

1.9. THEORATICAL CONCEPTUAL AND DEFINITION

1.9.1. Concept of women empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.

Women’s empowerment is a global issue, and discussions on women’s rights are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. Empowerment is a word widely used but seldom defined. It is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted nor can it be given away as alms. It has to be acquired and once acquired; it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved.

Empowerment should not and cannot stagnate as a word of law but has to emerge and transform the individual from within. Indian philosophy has given us a wonderful term Shakti to explain this idea. The verb root Shak implies
power and energy and translates as the ability to do something. Shakti, implying power, is both static/latent and kinetic. The world principle is evolved from the meaningful interaction and union of Purusha and Prakriti, Shiva and Shakti. Moreover, Shakti is not an extra temporal entity but is said to form the life essence. As Frank Morales succinctly remarks: “Shakti is manifest as the very affective ability of all the forces of nature.” Mimamsakas view Shakti as the “inherent power of all things.” For the Naiyayika logicians, Shakti “is the function or property of any cause.”

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building, leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making powers and control, and to transformative action. It is also the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. The goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology, to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetrate gender discrimination and social inequality, and to enable poor women to gain access to and control over both material and informational resources. Empowerment is not externally bestowed upon people, but instead, women need to be the agents of their own empowerment; outsiders and inside organizations can only help create the conditions favourable to women's empowerment and can support the process that works in these directions. Longwe's (1990) framework of empowerment encompasses the welfare of women, satisfaction of basic needs, access to resources, conscientization to attain gender equity, participation in the decision-making alongside men, and control, which refers to the ultimate level of equality and empowerment. Here, the balance of power between men and women is equal and neither party has dominance over the other.
1.9.2. Meaning of women empowerment

Women’s empowerment is essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term Women's Empowerment means:

1. Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed,
2. Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the fight to control one's life,
3. Gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power, and
4. Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi-level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over these resources. 101

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines empower as enabling or giving “lawful power or authority to somebody to act.” This definition has to be carefully considered to avoid possible misinterpretations. One, the giving of
power centres round a power head, which bestows or grants power from a position of authority. Two, “the lawful power or authority” may remain a word of law or scripture, which does not translate into reality. Expanding the dictionary meaning, an article entitled “What is Empowerment?” defines empowerment as “increasing the choices available to and capacities of the poor transforming the power structure of society. At its core, empowerment means having more control over the forces that shape one’s life.”

Another dimension that becomes visible is the intricate dynamics of power and gender, which dominates the current intellectual debates on empowerment. There is a need to address empowerment as a central social issue and not as women’s concern alone. Empowerment cannot be confined to a few policies made and bills passed by governments. As Shakuntala Narasinha rightly points out in her article, “Women’s Empowerment Year: Beginning with a Band, Ending with a Whimper”: “This is the crux, and till socio-cultural attitudes are addressed, there can be little meaningful empowerment for gender parity.”

Empowerment of women according to Sahay

1. Recognizing women's contribution, women's knowledge
2. Helping women fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
3. Women enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity
4. Women controlling their own bodies
5. Women becoming economically independent and self-reliant
6. Women controlling resources like land and property
7. Reducing women's burden of work, especially within the home, and
8. Promoting qualities of nurturing, caring gentleness, not just in women but also in men.

Women's empowerment includes both a personal strengthening and enhancement of chances and collective participation in efforts to achieve, equality of opportunity and equity between different genders, ethnic groups, social classes, and age groups. It enhances human potential at individual and social levels of expressions. Empowerment is an essential starting point and a continuing process for realizing the ideals of human liberation and freedom for all.105

1.9.3. Empowerment of women: an overview

Empowerment is the process by which the disempowered or powerless people can change their circumstance and begin to have control over their lives. More importantly, empowerment means the way they think of themselves, seeing themselves not as victims of circumstance but as architects of their own destinies. They are the real heroines. Empowerment results in a change in the balance of power in the living conditions, and in the relationships. Perhaps the most important effect of empowerment is that the person says: “Now I have no fear.” Empowerment is both individual and collective. Women in an informal economy are socially and economically weak and vulnerable, and it is only by the process of coming together that they can be empowered.

In the last two decades women's status in society has undergone a tremendous change. The last decade has unleashed the strength and spirit of Indian women, and now they are able to control and manage their lives to a large extent, making independent decisions covering all aspects of their lives. Although
women constitute almost one half of the population of the world, their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men in most countries, including India. This is largely due to gender disparities and patriarchal mindset of the people. Women have almost always been oppressed and marginalized, and new initiatives by the UN and other women's movements have led to gender sensitization, enforcement of laws effecting lives of women for change and empowerment.

The changing social and political situation of our country offers us many serious challenges and opportunities. The most crucial among them are the challenges of poverty, exploitation and oppression experienced by the majority of Indian women. The changing times in today's world have encouraged many women to seek their own identity, value and worth of their lives, through the contributions they make to the family and society at large. Increased awareness about rights has motivated the submissive and sacrificing woman to become conscious of herself as a person with her own identity and personality. She now wants to be regarded as an individual with feelings, aspirations and desires, in fact as a human. 106

Thus, women’s empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components:

1. Awareness building about women’s situations, discrimination, and rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working in a group.
2. Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organize, manage and carry out activities, to deal with people and institutions in the world around them.

3. Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home, community and society.

4. Action to bring about greater equality between men and women.

Venessa Griffen viewed empowerment as:

1. Having control, organizing further control.

2. Having a say and being listened to.

3. Being able to define and create from a women’s perspective.

4. Being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women’s place) and

5. Being organized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make.

From the above viewpoint, empowerment means being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home. Power also means having women’s contribution recognized and valued.107

1.9.4. Process of empowering

Empowering of women presupposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the perception of and expectation from women in our society. To help women attain economic independence must be the first priority for such a change. When a woman attains economic independence, she naturally becomes the mistress of her own body and author of her own decisions. She even can take free choice of her sex life, and no one can force her or use her for their
pleasure and benefit. A scientific perception of women's needs is essential for the process, which leads to empowering. Empowering of women is necessary for sustainable development of a community.

Sustainability implies a state of balance and equilibrium in factors related to human life which can be social, political, financial environmental and even spiritual. It is the state of all those factors that influence the process of growth of a human being, and his/her holistic environment has to advance in unison but independently yet supporting each other. In the case of women, equality, social justice and freedom have dynamic roles to achieve such sustainability. But the nation of sustainability often becomes the victim of unsustainable tradition and political opportunism. If a human being is forced to live in an inhuman and degrading situation, sustainable development becomes unattainable. Hence, corruption, nepotism, violence, inequality, exploitation and oppression are counter-productive to sustainable development.108

1.9.5. Strategies of empowering women

The process of empowerment involves not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also equal participation in decision-making processes, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains.109 Given below are the some of the important strategies of empowering women suggested by two scholars. According to Sahay, women can be empowered through:

1. Empowerment of poor women

Empowerment of poor women is the means to poverty alleviation. The goal of poverty eradication can be effectively achieved if poor women could be organized into groups for community participation as well as for assertion of
their rights. Any strategy of sustainable development relating to poverty eradication has to involve the large number of poor women. Social mobilization and building organization of the poor are essential prerequisites for poverty alleviation. Self-Help Group formation with an accent on saving, credit and financial resources for development is an effective strategy for empowering women.

2. Education and training

One of the most critical components in the development of a society is the investment in human development. The South Asian countries are the poorest, most illiterate, malnourished and least gender-sensitive. The Human Development Report on South Asia (1998) shows that South Asia has the lowest adult literacy rate (49%) in the world, which is lower than that of Sub-Saharan Africa (57%). In India Public Primary education facility has been expanded and national literacy shows an increase of 12% between 1991 and 1997. Participation of women in educational programs has grown faster than that of men. Female literacy increased two and half times faster than male literacy between 1970 and 1995.

However, these achievements are small as India still accounts for 30% of the adult illiterates all over the world, where 24% of girls of primary age are still not in school compared with 16% of boys. Poverty and other economic and social pressures continue to be major challenges to the achievement of education for all. Keeping girls out of school is costly and undermines development. Poverty can be effectively tackled by educating girls. Educated
women keep their families healthier, show concern for their children's education and nutrition.

3. Political participation

There is low representation of women at all levels of political institutions. Women still face major obstacles in seeking higher positions in society. Political participation is a human right, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Women are poorly represented at different levels of political life and decision-making. Thus, there is widespread neglect of women's priorities by politicians and bureaucrats. As per Human Development Report's 1999, women hold only 12% of the world's parliamentary seats and only 8.7% of those in the least developed countries. In India, the process of political elected bodies has helped in the wider mobilization. On many occasions elected women have provided leadership for organizing women and addressing and fulfilling legitimate demands such as widow pensions, gas connections, etc. There is growing realization among women that local elections are a means to bring positive change in their lives.

In different parts of the country, the SHGs have jointly put women candidates up for election in local bodies such as Zila Parishad, Gram Panchayat, etc. Women are motivated to change the tradition. Their political campaigns often emphasize solving issues that affect daily lives like safe drinking water, schools, health centers, roads, etc. Some women have taken the agenda further by displaying a mature understanding of the contexts in which the political economy functions. In our society men, having rigid attitudes, resist the
political empowerment of women. There is a feeling that women should only contest reserved seats and not general seats.

In some parts of our country there are some changes, for example, women in the village of the hill state of Uttaranchal are waging their own political battle of assertion and articulation of their identities. Several NGOs working in the area try to educate women about voting behaviour and election procedures. Elected women members learn to negotiate their newfound positions in an inherently male-dominated system, fighting adverse institutionalized practices like corruption. Women face many obstacles while contesting election such as sabotage threats, boycott and pressure from family. However, women on gaining the political power can bring rapid change in the lives of other women and attain equality.¹¹⁰

Measures suggested for women's empowerment according to Nagalaksmi are wide-ranging, but primarily it focuses attention on rejecting all restrictions, controls, limitations, values etc., on the grounds that these are imposed on women only by the patriarchy and are the revelation of male dominance. Some of her suggested measures are as follows:

1. Since women are vulnerable to violence because of their female sexuality, both in society as well as in home, adequate safeguards must be ensured. As a value this has been promoted by males, in their own interests, since this would ensure that the children of a woman are born to the correct father. A number of restrictions are imposed on females, which is improper. All measures and restrictions are manifestations of violence against women, which curtails female sexual-expression so that women will remain faithful to their husbands.
2. Empowerment of women is an essential ingredient in protecting women's right and has to be looked at from a holistic perspective. Violence against tribal women and girls should attract more public notice, as an issue of social concern to realize the dream that the 21st century would be the women's century.

3. A parliamentary committee, on empowerment of tribal women has to be set up to serve as an effective monitoring mechanism on measures like:
   (a) Early finalization and adoption of national policy for empowerment of tribal women.
   (b) Organizing women into self-help groups.
   (c) Initiation of a women's component plan to ensure that not less than 30% of funds or benefits flow to women, from the development sectors.
   (d) High medical care should give priority to reproductive child health care.
   (e) Universalizing the ongoing supplementary feeding program and mid-day meal scheme.
   (f) Easy and affordable access to education of tribal women and girls.

4. There is an urgent need for equipping women with necessary skills in modern emerging trades which could keep them economically independent.

5. There is a strong need to bring about change in the social construction of women in general and the tribal women in particular.

6. The majority of tribal women workers are not members of unions, yet these women have a positive attitude towards them. The major constraints being family situations, occupational, environmental social, cultural and traditional factors.
1.9.6. Empowerment of tribal women

The issue of empowerment as an idea is quite a new concept, and the concept of *Empowerment of tribal women* has been contextualized and acquired new connotations in recent years among various scholars such as social scientists, policy planners, developmental activists and also politicians. The concept, throughout the world has its root in the women's movement. It is since the mid-1980s that this term became popular in the field of women's development.

Looking at the history, we can see that marginalized groups such as workers, peasants, women, dalits, especially tribals, had no place in the historical process of development. Moreover, the rulers of our country never bothered about their welfare. In India, the sixth five-year plan (1980-85) was a landmark for the cause of women. It is here that the concept of women and development was introduced for the first time. It was realized that no more piece-meal strategies would work, but an integrated approach would deliver the desired goals.

‘Empowerment’ is a word of our times – a word that promises much to all those who have until now been kept outside the circle of power. It is a word that has entered the vocabulary of the women’s movement and almost one might say, been appropriated by it. The word and its use marks a movement forward, which means going a step ahead of the documentation, the analysis and the debating of women’s problems, of the struggle to give women back their rightful place in the human society.

In its simplest form, empowerment means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance, which is both a process and result of the process. It is transformation of the structures or
institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources like, modernity, feminism and empowerment.

In India, tribal communities do not come under any particular homogeneous category and widely differ among themselves in certain aspects such as livelihood, various languages they speak, physique, geographical regions, mode of living, levels of development, etc. The unique similarity among the tribes is that they live in different geographical locations and general social backwardness, especially when compared to non-tribes.

There had been a gender bias among ethnographers who have overlooked the importance of females in shaping the primitive social arrangements. Whatever knowledge these ethnographers have gathered about females is through males, there is nothing in relationship, which is genetic, and it is always the shared experiences, which shape the structure. Indian history specifies the traditional and modern position by the way the women's question is projected in the dominant Indian discourse.\textsuperscript{115}

Is it possible to empower ourselves without disempowering someone else? Can there be power for one without exploitation of another? For example, the struggle between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, at once both a joke and a tragedy, spells this out most clearly. A woman receives power when she becomes a mother-in-law, only because she has the daughter-in-law completely in her power. This is a human phenomenon.\textsuperscript{116}
Women are not able to the opportunities given to them under the constitution. Though the constitution of India has a concern to guard the rights and privileges of women by emphasizing special attention to the status of women, it also confers equal rights and opportunities to men and women in the political, economic and social spheres.¹¹⁷

The impact of technology on them is not simply a question of their position in terms of participation; rather it has much to do with the precise definition of tasks within the production and their relative value. The impact is also less positive and more negative as any technological change generally means unemployment and marginalization for the majority of them. They have been marginalized or neglected in each steam of thought as the modernized forces and institutions strengthening masculinity. However, the power of monoculture is being questioned due to the emergence of new social forces.¹¹⁸

Tribal women have limited access to those provisions and needs that assure good quality of life to individuals such as education, health and financial assets. Their role and influence in decision-making, both at home and outside are largely restricted with a greater share given to men.¹¹⁹

For empowering women, merely giving equal rights with men would be no good to them. Their basic problems will remain, by and large, unresolved unless some fundamental changes are brought about in social and political systems responsible for the continuance of gender inequality. Political reservation and provisions of jobs to some middle class women are not sound methods for empowering them. A concerted attempt has to be made to evolve strategies for political empowerment for the majority of poor and illiterate women, in rural
and urban areas. The 73\textsuperscript{rd} amendment act is a landmark in the history of efforts for empowering women. In this regard the state should intervene through legislative and policy programs as an indispensable measure.\textsuperscript{120}

Empowerment of marginalized groups involves not only the process of creation of political space for these groups by the state and civil society, but one can say that it is a process of liberation from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. It also represents the hopes and dreams of marginalized groups for a social environment free of inequalities disfavoring them politically, economically, and socially. In order to include tribals, especially women, in the development process, it is important to include them and rewrite history.\textsuperscript{121}

What women need is the strength to deal with the problems of daily life, a sense of having the power to deal with everyday problems, as well as large ones. The power to make their own decisions, without being constrained by traditional ideas of honour or sacrifice, an ability to see beyond these ideas, to see things with their own minds. To have power is to know, it is to take responsibility for oneself, primarily, then for others. Without understanding, without knowledge, there can be neither power nor freedom – the right kind of freedom and power, that is.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, one can suggest that there is a need to improve the position of tribal women through local empowerment, so that they can take their decisions within their social ranges.

1.9.7. Qualitative Indicators of Women’s Empowerment

1. Increase in self esteem, individual and collective confidence.

2. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large, and women in particular such as women’s health,
nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy etc., depending on the programme.

3. Increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care.

4. Increase or decrease in work loads of women as result time and time for child care.

5. Changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in the community.

6. Visible increase or decrease in levels of domestic violence and other forms of violence perpetrated on the women and girl child.

7. Visible changes in women’s participation levels examples are, more women attending public meetings, training programmes and their participation in other events related to their lives.

8. Increase in bargaining/negotiating power of the women as an individual in the home and community as well as in collectives of women.

9. Increased access to and ability to gather information and knowledge not only about the project, but also what affects their lives.

10. Formation of cohesive and articulate women’s groups/collectives at the village level, district, block, state and national levels.

11. Positive changes in social attitudes amongst community members towards discrimination against women and the female children.

12. Awareness and recognition of women’s economic contributions inside and outside the household.

13. A woman’s decision-making over the kind of work she is doing. Is her income and expenditure in her control or is she still subservient to male members in the family?
We must remember that the world conference on women (Beijing, 1995) could be taken as the culmination point for the process of empowerment. It has provided a broad-based activity schedule, to the national, regional and global agencies.\textsuperscript{123}

\section*{1.10. STATUS AND ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN}

\subsection*{1.10.1. Status}

The concept of the status of women has involved more contradiction than consensus. Diverse views of status have been given by social anthropologists and sociologists. At the conceptual level, as far as modern sociology and social anthropology go, the term status has included all culturally prescribed rights and duties inherent in social positions. Initially, status referred only to the \textit{ascribed} one. But lately the \textit{achieved} status has also been given due place in sociological and anthropological parlance. Likewise, the concept of status is also connected to \textit{role}. Ralph Linton, the eminent American Anthropologist, treated role as the more dynamic aspect of status. And within this perspective status and role cannot be dissociated.\textsuperscript{124}

Status denotes position in terms of rights and obligations to society. A general trend in the literature on the status of women has been to compare it with that of men. This indicates that their status is based on role and it is understood only through the rights and roles of their male counterparts. Generally, the status of women has two dimensions:

(i) The extent of control enjoyed by women over their lives, and

(ii) The extent to which they have access to the decision-making process and effectively in position of power and authority.
Besides these two, certain indicators such as level of literacy, employment, political participation, decision about marriage, management of domestic affairs, etc. are also adopted to assess the status of women. It is obvious that a precise and complete assessment accounts for both qualitative and quantitative factors. It is also necessary to look into both ascribed and achieved statuses of women in order to understand this complex issue of women, particularly in tribal societies. Tarcott Parsons (1951) identifies six attributes of status which are both ascribed and achieved. They are:

(i) Membership in a kinship unit
(ii) Personal qualities
(iii) Achievement
(iv) Possession
(v) Authority
(vi) Power

Ralph Linton has made a distinction between achieved and ascribed status. In general, the criteria of ascribed status must be birth or biologically hereditary qualities like sex and age. But in a socially defined role, which accompanies such a status, there may be very important elements of expected achievement. In the opinion of Linton, status and role are concepts serving to connect culturally defined expectations with patterned behavior and relationships, which comprise social structure. He further observes that each person in society inevitably occupies a multiple status and that for each of these statuses, there is an associated role. In the backdrop of the above discussion, it is possible to generalize that in determining the status of women in any society, there are four important factors to be considered, namely, social status, economic condition,
political empowerment, and psychological condition. The status of tribal
women in the North-East may also be seen in terms of these four factors:

A. Social Status
(i) Social standing as mother, daughter, sister, wife, etc.
(ii) Extent of control enjoyed by women over their lives in social matters like
marriage, divorce, family and inheritance.

B. Economic Condition
(i) Extent of control enjoyed by women in property rights e.g., to own property,
to manage property, to sell property and to inherit property.
(ii) Occupation and livelihood: to work for a salary and to have control over
income and distribution of work in the family.

C. Political Emancipation
(i) Extent to which women have access to decision/policy making.
(ii) Extent to which women are effectively empowered in position or authority.

D. Psychological Condition
(i) Attitude of the society towards women.
(ii) Mind-set of men and women towards women.

Role and status are two sides of the same coin. According to Linton, “there are
no roles without status nor status without roles-the roles represent the dynamic
aspect of status.” However, Bierstedt disagrees. According to him, though there
is no status without a role, and no role without a status, and though both status
and role are usually correlative phenomena, it is possible to have one without
the other.
1.10.2. ROLE

Role is the behavioral aspect of status. Status is occupied but role is played. A role is the manner in which a given individual fulfills the objectives of a status and enjoys its privileges and prerogatives. A role is what an individual does in the status he/she occupies.\textsuperscript{125}

It is generally believed that the North-East tribal women enjoy a high status because their societies are egalitarian, they have no purdah system, there is no restriction on women’s movement, food habits, attire and widow remarriage, and when a woman is troubled or when she is ill-treated by her husband, she is supported by her parents, brothers and clan members, etc. For instance, Firer-Haimendorf writes:

Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages.\textsuperscript{126}

Although it is generally believed that the status of tribal women is high, men in their own societies do not treat them as their equals. The customary laws of the various tribes of the region are also clearly in favor of men, who continue to subscribe to them in order to retain their superiority vis-à-vis women in their own societies. This is one of the most unfortunate aspects of tribal people in the region, and factors like education, occupation, and religion do not seem to have had any success towards overcoming such gender bias among men. Images of women in tribal societies of the region are rather negative. They are often equated with animals or birds and conceived of as having less intelligence or wisdom.
Thus, we find proverbs among the Mizos, which say that women’s wisdom cannot extend beyond the bank of a river; that a wife and an old fence can be replaced at any time; and an unbeaten wife and an uncut weed of the field are both unbearable. They consider women’s words as having no value because “a crab’s meat is not counted as meat, so also a woman’s word cannot be counted as words.” In traditional Garo society, women are ridiculed with the saying that just as a goat is without teeth, so a woman lacks brain. Among the Nishis of Arunachal, a man’s social status is reckoned in terms of the number of wives and mithuns he possesses.

The Mayon of Manipur consider women as having no principles because they do not have a permanent clan, for their clans change into that of their husbands when they marry. This kind of attitude towards women reflects their status in the family and society on the whole. In all tribal societies of the region, notions such as the following reflect the basically patriarchal society:

(i) Birth of a male child is auspicious.

(ii) Man is the provider and protector of society.

(iii) A woman is subordinate to her husband.

(iv) Birth of a female child is welcomed for the reason that she will help her mother in household chores and serve her brother.

Further, a wife is usually not associated with any decision-making process involving money. For example, in the case of the Arunachal Pradesh all matters relating to purchase and disposal of any family property or those relating to bride-price, etc. are decided by men only. It is also believed that in tribal societies, girls are free to marry whoever they like and parents simply agree to
their will. But facts reveal that among some Naga tribes, the opposite is true. This is also true in the case of the Thadou-Kuki women. Parents among the Angami and Konyak Naga tribes and even among the Nishi tribe of Arunachal arrange marriages. The girl’s parents demand huge property as the bride-price for their daughter. The girl has no option to choose her life partner. If she refuses her parents’ choice, her family discards her. Women rarely have property rights.

As a daughter, a woman is not entitled to own any ancestral property. If a woman is the only child, the ancestral property will be given to her father’s immediate male relatives. In terms of political empowerment, tribal women, whether belonging to matrilineal or patrilineal society, were not allowed to take part in the deliberation of the village council nor were they allowed to address or even stand before the village crowd, not to speak of assuming the office of chief or village headman. Even in the Khasi-Jaintias society, women were not allowed to enter any dorbar or council because politics was considered solely men’s affair.127
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