ABSTRACT

Historical Geography of Ukhrul and Adjoining Areas

Leklai Huileng*

We know that man’s relations to his environment are infinitely more numerous and complex than those of the most highly organized plant or animal. In every problem of history there are two main factors, variously stated is heredity and environment, man and his geographic conditions, the internal forces of race and the external forces of habitat. Along with this the geographic element in the long history of human development has been strongly and persistently. It is in this background that I decided to work upon our region of Ukhrul from where I hail. I decided to work upon the theme of ‘Historical geography of Ukhrul and adjoining areas’ in order to understand the region in its multi-dimensional aspects and the contribution which the people of the region had made in the past. My attempt has been to unravel the personality of Ukhrul and its impact upon the adjoining areas through the geographical understanding of the region.

Historical geography is a discipline in which the geographic study of a place or region at a specific time or period in the past is analysed and attempt is made to understand the impact in terms of historical and geographic changes over the population. It is an attempt to understand why and how the two forces historical and geographical, hand in hand, shaped the destinies of people in a

* Ph.D Scholar Enrolment No.2079/2005Deptt of History, Manipur University Canchipur, (Manipur) 795003
specific region over a period of time. It also unravels the natural resources of the region which the people discovered and used for their survival.

In our research we have looked into these aspects and have also highlighted the migration aspects. During our research we found that geographic conditions prevailing in Ukhrul led to its isolation as on the land side, a great sweep of high mountains restricted intercourse with the interior where pockets of isolated communities had got their settlements established. Such colonists, after migration in a remote region were necessarily few and could not be readily reinforced from home. Their new and isolated geographical environment favoured variation. Heredity passed on the characteristics of a small, highly selected group. The race was kept pure from intermixture with unknown people, owing to the social and cultural abyss which separated them. Several onslaughts of migrating people pushed several of the already established groups to move further on and thus frequent replacements of ethnic people led to the spread of villages and people all over the region.

The new economic and social activities of a transplanted people become the vehicle of a mass of indirect geographic influences which contributed to the differentiation of the regional character. Ukhrul experienced this. In our research we found that the environment of Ukhrul produced a social rejuvenation of the Tangkhuls. New conditions presented new problems which called for prompt and original solution, making a demand upon ingenuity and resourcefulness of the individual and therefore work to the same end as his previous removal from the paralyzing effect of custom in the old home-region. Normally those who migrate to new areas are the youth and youths represent activity and energy. Hence the energy, initiative, adaptability and receptivity to new ideas all youthful qualities which characterize the Tangkhuls can be traced back to the stimulating influences, not of bracing or variable climate, but of the abundant opportunities offered by great rich unexploited region that Ukhrul was. It has been often said and believed that variation under new natural
condition, when safeguarded by isolation tends to produce modification of the colonial type. This is the direct effect of a changed environment. The modification of human development by environment is a natural processes. It involves the persistently through vast periods of time. Slowly and deliberately does geography engrave subtitles to a people’s history. Neglect of this time elements in the consideration of geographic influences accounts equally for many an exaggerated assertion and denial of power. Evaluation tells the story of modifications by a succession of infinitesimal changes, and emphasizes the permanence of a modification once produced long after the causes for it ceases to act.

Here in our study of the Ukhrul region we have applied the well established fact that a race or tribe develops certain characteristics in a certain region then moves on, leaving the old habitat but not all the accretions of custom, social organization and economic method there acquired. These travels with the migrant people while some of these are dropped others are preserved because of utility, sentiment of habit. We have distinguished the achievements of the Tangkhul people under the various classes of geographic influences.

Sometimes the geographical environment of a people may be such as to segregate them from others and thereby to preserve or even intensify their natural characteristics or it may expose them to extraneous influences to an infusion of new blood and new ideas. Ukhrul being an area shut off by mountains has tended to develop homogenous people since the basic characteristics of the region limits and prevents the intrusion of foreign elements and when once there are introduced as it had happened in the past, it encourages their rapid assimilation by the strongly interactive life of a confined locality. Therefore large or remote areas are as a rule distinguished by the unity of their inhabitants in point of civilization and race characteristics. While discussing the people of the region of Ukhrul we have kept in our mind the viewpoint that an easily accessible land is geographically hospitable to all
new comers, facilitates the mingling of peoples, the exchange of commodities and ideas. The amalgamation of races in such regions depends upon the similarity or diversity of the ethnic elements and the duration of the common occupation. The broad open valley of Imphal contains a multiple mixture of several stocks the Meiteis the Mayang, the Pangals Kukis and the Naga groups. These elements are too diverse and their occupation of the valley too recent for amalgamation to have advanced very far as yet. We did find attempts at amalgamation of several classes of the Meitei communities but there is not much evidence of total integration or amalgamation happening at the social level. A complete fusion has not been observable among them. Homogeneity is not there as we find in the region of Ukhrul.

Ukhrul lies between 24.15 to 24.45 North latitude and 98.8 to 94.45 East longitude. It has an area of 4,554 Sq.km. It is located in the East of Manipur, bordering Myanmar in the East and Nagaland state in the North, Chandel in the South, Senapati in the West and Imphal valley in the South West.

The territories of the Ukhrul people, the Tangkhuls, include its places, rivers, mountains and hills, fauna and flora and the various activities of man. The history of man in several civilizations has flourished in the hills and also along the rivers in the world where they have contributed to the emergence and destruction. History and geography goes hand in hand as the people without territory and territory without people cannot be imagined in normal circumstances. Since both are interrelated our attempt is to study the personality of the region of Ukhrul in their historical growth.

The mountains, rivers and the people in their geographical distribution play their part in shaping the history of the region. The geographical location provided by natural products and their socio-economic and political ramifications have imparted the very foundation of the people in the region.
The region of Ukhrul is hilly with rugged mountainous ranges and rivers flowing in the east, the west, the north and the south direction. There are different mountain ranges which include the Patkai range which stretches from the Sub- Himalayas. Mapithel range that touches the valley of Imphal and the Angoching range which acts as the border between India and Myanmar in the east of Ukhrul. The Mountain range in Ukhrul can be broken up length wise into four ranges viz. Kachouphung (3114mt), Shirui Kashung (2,835mt), Zingjui Matha (2342mt), The Highest peak is the Khayangphung (3114mt. Above sea level). The most popular and well known is the Shirui peak where the world famous Shiroy Lily (Lilium Mackleanae) grow. It is the highest peak in Ukhrul region. The other notable peak of the area is the Kachouphung Peak (3500mts).

Important rivers include Sanalok, Irl, Nungshangkong, Tretlok, Challou, Rangazak, Tayungpi, Maklang. These rivers form the backbone of agriculture in the background of the region. Near the river one finds the plain area that constitutes of the alluvial soil which is one of the best soils for rice. The fauna and flora that is abundantly found bear their impact upon the economy of the region. The rare bird tragopan bythii is found in Shirui hill and Khayangphung. The Shirui hills have the rare flower of Lily grow which have different stories to tell about its nature, and the myths related with the Tangkhul History. Orchids of different colours are also seen in the jungles of Ukhrul where we see beautiful trees and flowers in Ukhrul. Big and small hornets of different colours roam around in the air which signifies the richness of flora and fauna in the region.

Historical and geographical background of Ukhrul is considered important to in order understand the building up of its people’s culture in the area. The cultures of its people are unique particularly of those who occupied the area that long before. The major tribes of Ukhrul are the Tangkhuls who formed the bulk of the population and the Kukis who resides in the borders
areas scattered here and there. The Mayangs and the Nepalis also form a part of the demographic settlements. They are usually businessmen and cow herder. They live with enmity although there were a few clashes among them in the past. The natural environment and climate has influenced peoples’ activities in many ways.

The people living in Ukhrul region belong to mostly Mongolian stock with stalwart, athletic characteristics. They are medium in size and height with broad shoulders and high cheekbones. They are brownish in colour. Hair colour is black. The girls keep their hair long while men keep the middle hair of the head and cut from the side. Usually they have round face and a strong physique. Men do not keep moustaches. The Tangkhuls are brave in their own ways. They defend their village as their prestige. The Tangkhul pierce their ears as their fellow counterparts the other Nagas do.

We have some probable evidence that men of Old Stone Age might have been staying in the Khangkhui caves. The antiquities left by men living in the surrounding areas of the caves may have some affinities with the folks and their folk tales which inform us about their lineage. In the past the forest was thick and dense, furious man-eater-wild-animals were in plenty. The tools that were used by the people were primitive. Therefore, it was not safe for men to live in unprotected open spaces. This led them to live in caves. These shelters became their homes. They shut the mouth of the cave with a big stones to protect themselves when attacked by the animals, enemies and ward off cold. The Makhel region and Khangkhui caves or the caves of Sajik Tampak region bear out such assertions. Khangkhui caves entrance is small but inside it is broader. We also have the Hunpung cave. The cave is at the foot of the mounds near the Nungshang river. The caves are in high rocky mounds which are accountable for the early man’s survival. It can be viewed well from the southern side and the other side of the cave is under cover with dense forest. It is well polished stone cave that gives more impression that there lived humans of Stone Age.
It is believed that Makhel is the dispersal place of the many tribes especially the Nagas. From there they went in different directions and settled down in their present respective places. After their departure from Makhel the Tangkhul people finally settled in the Ukhrul region. The migration from Makhel to Ukhrul seems to be true because the migration that took place involved majority of the Naga groups. The origin from Makhel is supported by the Stone Monuments and oral stories handed down by the forefathers of not only the Tangkhuls but also of the Naga group.

The history of another dispersal place of Tangkhul is associated Meizailung 11Km away from Ukhrul. The oral tradition reveals that originally they came from Samsok region via Imphal valley. They dispersed from Meizailung and went in different directions. There are still stone monuments at Meizailung which remind them of their dispersal place. They settled down in different sites and so numerous villages sprung up. These are recorded in our study.

The Tangkhuls remember their migration from Samsok to Kham-Lungpha. It is situated in the south east of Ukhrul. They have oral traditions which highlight their migration to this place from Samsok which is supported by monuments of stone ‘megalith’ erected at the sites during their migration. Many villagers of south Ukhrul have migrated from Kham-Lungpha.

With the passage of time the Tangkhul’s settlement is sub-divided into traditional names according to their topography. They are Raphel or Luhupa (north) and they occupy the northern side of the Ukhrul. The easterners among Tangkhul are known as Ram Khayang. The north Easterners were known as ‘Sampu’. The central Ukhrul is known as Kathur. The western Ukhrul villages are known as Kharao. The inhabitants of the region south to Ukhrul are known as ‘Kamo’. Raikhang is sub-divided into Veikhang and Raizan. They settled on the central east of Ukhrul. They formed group among
themselves and have relationships in political, social, cultural and religious spheres. Within this division zone wise, there are several villages within their parameters.

Most of the Tangkhul villages are at the summit of a hill or on the ridge of a high sloping range which provided a commanding view over the surrounding areas. Villages were established rather strategically to keep the enemies in sight from the top. It was because of this fact that the villages in the Tangkhul areas were found mostly on the hilltop considering the security of the village from their enemies. The other important criteria were sources of plenty of water. A source of water has been considered by people as the basic need for survival. Therefore, the ancestors of the Tangkhul community also used to select a place (site) having abundant water source for settlement. It also used to be a place which could easily be protected from the enemy. Thus, every Tangkhul village is always located on the crest of a hillock rather than on the river bank or plain areas within the village land. We were informed by the chiefs that it was due to the constant war among the villages that safety was given the first preference in choosing the site of village. The village was well protected by the thick forest or the deep gorge where men couldn’t climb or go through easily. Huge trees and bamboo grooves guarded the village. There was a deep curved way out known as Vankhur in the villages that are covered by big trees. When the enemies attacked them they used these routes for safety sake. Deep curved paths for way out were kept as secrets to be used in case of emergencies by the families or the community members. A safe passage needed to be secured.

During the course of our data collection we tried to understand the meaning of the names of the villages of the Tangkhuls which were scattered in the various regions of Ukhrul and its adjoining areas. The villages of the Tangkhuls had different names for each village. The names of the villages were
adopted according to the situation, time and the place having its characteristics hidden in its meanings. The names were also given according to the event that happened at the place in those days. e.g. Phungcham. It means ‘Phung’ (site or hill) Cham (old). Thus the place Phungcham means ‘the old site’. This place is the first place where in the Tangkhul came to reside in Ukhrul. After that they got scattered all over the Ukhrul region and settled down in different villages at different locations. Halang a village name was not given at the time of its settlement but after their settlement, when they the villagers, had won many inter village wars against the other villages, the name ‘Halang’ was given in which ‘ha’ means ‘area’ and ‘Lang’ means ‘victorious’. Thus this village name was given in accordance with its victory trait and its capabilities.

There are some villages in which their names were called differently by other villagers. Kharasom village is known generally as Tasom, Wahong called the Kharasom village, Khaneozu. Likewise, Loree villagers called Hunphun as Hafhan. In this way, every village had its own understanding and meanings when they called the villages by a particular name. It is a fact that Meiteis had changed many names of the villages of the Tangkhuls on account of their different pronunciations. Hungphun chief’s clan or relatives were known by the name ‘hungphun woshi’ which also meant that such people were ‘residents of Hungphun’. The word ‘woshi’ or ‘washi’ means the residents and is a corrupt form of Sanskrit word ‘washi or bashi’ which means residents of a place. Incidentally it is the village of Hungpung with which the meiteis are deeply associated since the remote past. Perhaps their history originates from this place. The chief of Hungpung were two brothers and one of them became progenitor of the meiteis.

The idea of naming villages carries a great significance, as among the Tangkhuls, they unravel their history. The naming process shows us from which place the people had migrated from. The village names even tell us how
the village had been named long ago or at the time of their existence or creation or how they got corrupted. Names of villages signify the historical meanings associated with culture also.

In the region of Ukhrul the Tangkhuls are predominant tribe and as such they administer the village and the people through their customary laws. The village land belongs to the chief. Here we have analysed the historical aspects of the chieftainship who not only controlled the village and its neighboring areas but also shaped the politics emanating from his decisions. In several cases where the villages were isolated geographically, the chief’s responsibilities increased for maintaining his authority among his villagers properly.

The chief or headman who is known as ‘Awunga’ or ‘Anga’ stand for ‘king’ in Tangkhul community and is normally, the founder of the village. He is the first person to venture into the particular place which may have been infested with ferocious animals, poisonous reptiles or other dangerous unknown factors and brave it. He is considered as path blazer. As per the Tangkhul folklores, the chief or Awunga kindled the first fire raising the smoke as a sign of establishment of human settlement in that area. Thus, other persons who may desire to settle in that particular village could come but only after having sought permission and acknowledged his chieftainship, since the chief is the first among the family of the place.

In the past, when there was inter-village war and rivalry continued, the chief always led in the battle field and recognized the braves with awards and honours. The warriors were awarded in the form of titles or materials. The village Chief was therefore, the religious head, the Chief Judge, the chief administrator and also the chief commander at the time of war and head hunting. In his position he had all the three powers, judicial, executive and legislative assimilated as one and so he was very powerful. The village elders
acted in unison to advise him and correct his course of decisions. But such advice were not binding upon him.

Administering the villagers and their land was not a difficult task in the Ukhrul region because Self government was well pronounced since the ancient times among the Tangkhuls. The chief was the head of administration. His words and decisions were to be taken seriously and observed. There was no authority to control him except the village council of elders who normally gave advice but it was not always binding on him to accept. The village councils differ from village to village. It depends on the number of the clan that existed in the village. The members of the council were mostly seniors’ and elders from different clans.

The village council performed certain administrative functions in areas like water supply, construction of village footpath guarding their village, etc. though the specific work allotments were not defined well officially, their day to day allotments were given when the people sat together. They didn’t neglect their duties if they were assigned any charge and their cooperation with the chief always showed their sincerity. It was a system based upon trust for each other and mutual respect.

The villagers and the chiefs are inseparable. They had a cordial relationship. They, together, protected their villages and administered the affairs of the village. Though the chief was considered as their leader there was unanimous decision in the administration of the village. Therefore, we can maintain today that in hindsight they had democratic form of administration.

The main source of law emerged from social customs, public opinions, orders of the chief, religious practices etc. The social custom which has its genesis from the beginning of its existence plays a very important role in the Tangkhul society. It was unwritten, but the custom that was followed could not
be violated as it was considered sacred. The breach of such tradition was and is considered a desecration of social norms as such committing sin. People refrained from committing sinful acts for the fear of God and life in the next world.

The Tangkhul society had high regards for public opinion which played an important role in the decision making on any problem that arose within the village and even outside. The decision was taken by the chief after he had heard the people. Often the public opinion became important force for the source of law for the future generations. The traditions, taboos, custom etc. were also sanctified through public opinions.

They had faith in the supernatural power and were afraid of curses. The compliance to the rules and regulations connected with the name of deity was made compulsory as that of a law which generally none dared to disobey. The violators are known by the word ‘Sharra’, which means ‘do not’ or ‘not to commit’ any violation of established norms and rules. It was used only when serious matters arose. The common people allowed ‘the earth and the heaven’ judge when the case was beyond their hands or understanding. The almighty’s intervention was sought.

In the administration of justice importance is attached to the establishment of guilt through evidence. Among the Tangkhuls there are many forms of oaths. To deliver justice to the people at different stages references were made to the oaths taken. The most common custom among the Tangkhuls to decide the case was through Ngalei Khamakei (biting of soil), Tara kazang (submersion in water) and through duels. Ngalei Khamakei (biting of soil) oath was common in any boundary dispute. They arbitrators would go to the disputed land and both the parties will bite the soil that was dug out from the disputed land. The offender would die first as they believed that Ngalei Khamkei never leaves the offender from being punished by their Creator.
Another form to decide a case was through water submersion. The two parties were taken to the river or a lake which they thought had enough water where the individual’s body could be submerged in water. In this form of judgement both the parties had to submerge themselves in water and the person/persons who could stay longer in water, won the case.

Normally, the chief owned a large part of the village land. Its subjects were allowed to use the land with the authorization of the chief of the village. In fact since the village was founded by the village chiefs he had the real authority to avail it at his will. He made the villagers avail land for cropping. The villagers occupied the land and made terrace fields for cultivation. Later the land was transferred to his son and his successors and the land turned into private land. There are some lands owned by the clan. A descendant of one man if he didn’t divide the land or property and the family household increased that land became clan-land in future e.g. Horam clan, Huileng clan, etc have a clan land. Thus the land holding among the Tangkhuls have four types of ownership viz. a) public land b) land owned by clan c) private land and d) chief’s land.

According to Tangkhul laws of inheritance the chieftainship, ipso facto, went to the eldest son. However, there are some villages where the chieftainship was given to the younger son. The reason could be the refusal of the eldest son to take the burden of the chief. As all the responsibility was shouldered by the younger brother, the chieftainship became hereditary by the younger brothers’ generation. Later, the elder descendant claimed the chieftainship but it could not be returned easily as the crown of chief was taken under several processes of religious rites and sacrifices. Thus, there were several problems which arose in many villages over the the issues of chieftainship, some claiming in their own rights, or under the provisions of the newly enacted laws in the past.
Family is the most important institution of social system in the Tangkhul society. It is the social unit of the society, or for that matter, of the village. The family consists of father, wife and their children. Father is the head and the protector of the family. In the event of the death of the father the eldest son succeeds. The eldest son has the responsibility to shoulder the burden of the family problems and concerns. Thus, the eldest inherited the properties of the household. He also shared among his brothers where he retained a lion’s share.

The Tangkhul custom primarily rejects the inheritance of father’s property by women. They do not practice dowry system like the other communities. However, the presents are given in marriage to the girls presents or gift system or practice is widely prevalent among the Tangkhuls. Women work from dawn to dusk. They looked after the household chores and worked in the fields. They played an important role in running the family. They are looked upon with respect and they have the liberty as men in many cases at the home front.

The Tangkhuls desired large families in the past. The women gave birth to many children, as many as she could. Birth of a son was welcome but daughter was also given the same importance. There was equality between men and women. But in some cases the women were not allowed as it is even today to take part as men in the discussions of village matters. They were also not allowed to participate in the village councils. But in the family matters and rituals women’s presence was indispensable. They played an important role in shaping and moulding their family and society.

The economic activities of the people pertain to production, exchange or distribution and consumption of goods and services. Agriculture activity has as ever remained the primary activity of the population although the land available for it was scarce. Besides agriculture, their economy pertains to domestication of animals, craftsmen, artisans and others who carried out
economic activities like trading, crafting, sculpting in wood and stones, carpentry, gold and silver smithy, weaving in cotton, silk, woolen fabrics, salt-making, peasantry, etc.

Agriculture depends on climate and soil. It is the top soil, a few centimeters in thickness that supports the crops. If the same is eroded, raising of crops becomes difficult. Hence, the people in this region have a great stake in the preservation of soil and its maintenance. People are aware of the negative impact of jhum cultivation upon the region yet it is practiced even today. The economy of Ukhrul, in the hills is primarily based on agriculture, wet terrace and shifting cultivation. Deforestation followed by erosion of soil affects all the three types of cultivation. Further, it leads to soil exhaustion and loss of fertility in the hills and occurrence of flood in the plain. Heavy deposits of sand and silt in river beds of Iril, Imphal and Thoubal have been noticed in the past to have caused a rise in flood levels.

It is not known when Jhumming and paddy cultivation was started here but it is believed that the people might have learnt the process at the time of their migration or when they had settled down as we have the evidence of equipments used for agriculture at the site of Samsok. The equipments speak volumes about their agricultural practices in the region.

In the case of terrace cultivation there are certain compulsions as it is very difficult to terrace the field. The land must have gentle slope and soil should be deep. There should be some source for irrigation, either from some natural spring or mountain brook from where water source can be diverted to the narrow elongated terraced fields. Repairing of bunds and maintenance of soil fertility is no less a problem. It is convenient to prepare terrace fields in wide river valleys along the gentle slopes where plots of bigger size could be
carved out and draft animals could be used. Such types can be seen enroute Khangkhui cave in some villages along the road. Some of the best type of terracing can be seen in Ukhrul and its adjoining areas.

The terrace farming in Ukhrul largely depends on the seasonal monsoon wind that occurs in the month of May, June and July every year. Cultivation begins to operate during January till the crops are harvested in November. Paddy cultivation depends on the supply of water. Thus irrigation and monsoon both form the backbone of agriculture. The water coming from the small rivers and streams is used for irrigation. Any shortage of water after plantation would affect the harvest return. Therefore, water was properly supplied to the crops till harvested. ‘In the case of villages which possessed terraced fields, we find a mass of customs relating to the equitable distribution of water through-out the terraces. The more powerful villages in the interior of the hills have a large area for cultivation on terraces which are cut out of the hillside and carefully irrigated. For manures the Tangkhuls used animal waste, rice husk, dead leaves and plants for maintaining the soil fertility. They also dug up small ponds for keeping fish in the paddy fields.

On the other hand the eastern and southern Tangkhuls practice shifting cultivation. In this type of cultivation they fell the trees during the months of December, March and April. The dried up trees are burnt down. After that the field is cleaned for sowing seeds. The process is carried out till the crops are harvested in the months of October and November. On the same area cultivation is carried out for two- three years. After that it would remain fallow for not less than fifteen years to allow regain its fertility. The system of Jhum cultivation has many drawbacks. The crop is entirely dependent on the rainfall for moisture. But unlike terrace cultivation, shifting cultivation has advantages of cultivating different types of crops like ginger, maize, pumpkin, and other vegetables, millet, garlic, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, gourds, etc.
The tools and weapons used by the people were very primitive in the early days. They used more or less the same weapons which had been brought by them at the time of their migration. Spades, axes, daos made of iron were used extensively. It is mentioned in the oral stories that the Tangkhuls during their journey belonging to first group cut down banana and Polar trees. Many tools and weapons were discovered from the site of Samsok by Khaiyar of Lunghar village. The finds have included spears, knives, bangles, necklaces, etc. The tools used for cultivation were not only made of iron but also probably of hard and strong wood and animal bones. The scarcity of iron was faced till about 1900 AD as is told by Yarho. Since agriculture and head hunting were the main practices among the Tangkhuls in Ukhrul, weapons and tools were made of good quality. But after their migration to the present place there was no invention of new weapons. The musket was used by the Kukis but the Tangkhuls had no knowledge about the musket.

Rice is the main food crop for the people living in Ukhrul. It is the staple food of the people since the early times. The other important crop next to rice is maize. In every Jhumingly-cultivated land one will find maize cultivation. It is one of the best suited land for cultivation. It is grown everywhere. Maize production is high in the region. Besides maize, wheat, pulses pea, beans of various kinds, grams, soya bean oilseeds, linseed, mustard seed, tobacco and cotton is grown.

Different varieties of fruits like Pear, Mango, Lemon, Gooseberry, Strawberry, Jerry, Mulberry, Fig, Groundnut, Walnut, Banana, Papaya, Peach, etc. are cultivated in this region.

Since the ancient times Ukhrul has had a trade relation with other countries and neighboring areas. It is being alleged that the iron, sea shells and goods were imported from South East Asia via Burma. The Tangkhuls did not have the knowledge of extraction of iron from the ore. We believe that the iron
was imported from other countries with which the ancient Tangkhuls had trade contacts. The traders in the valley from whom the crude metal was purchased were obtained by them either from the Kakching-people or from the plain areas. Besides, sea shells were commonly used by the Tangkhuls indicating that the Tangkhuls had trade with other neighbouring countries especially some who had sea shores.

There was an organization for the well being of the neighbouring villages to carry out trade which also made rules and regulations for the villages. These organizations played an important role in the socio-political and economic lives of the people. This organization fixed marketing day once in a year at Somsai. On these days various kinds of goods were brought and exchanged for other commodities. Every village was represented by one member each to discuss issues that arose within the villages. They formed the executive members of the organization. They tried to solve every problem amicably. The rules and regulations laid down were strictly maintained and violators were severely punished.

There was no such specific class as traders. All those who were able to make essential goods were considered as traders. In other words, those people who could make or produce more than their needs had some surplus which they could sell or exchange. For instance, the Kamo were fine workmen of canes and bamboos. Raphei produced salt and Kharao produced cloth. In the olden days barter system was the only mode of exchange among the Tangkhul. Thus, trading was a necessity rather than meant for gaining profit.

The trade route that was used by the Tangkhuls depended on their relation and familiarity of the place. There was as such war with every unknown inhabitant of the villages surrounding them. Their acquaintances with the other people hugely depended for their safety and survival. The trade relation was built up according to their relationship. During the course of
interaction with the village chiefs we learnt that the Tangkhuls didn’t travel long distances for their trade and commerce. They had trade relations with only few villages in their vicinity. They mostly remained confined to intra-village trade though inter-village trade was also practiced.

The most important profession among the Tangkhuls was cultivation. They were adept in cultivation of various types of crops that their forefathers had brought with them at the time of their migration. Other than cultivation they also knew the art of weaving and other handicrafts such as making baskets, hao-plates, cups made of bamboo for drinking water, wine etc. They had expertise in handicrafts. All these products were made of wood and bamboo. There were blacksmiths, potters, basket makers, etc. Hunting was part and parcel of Tangkhul’s lives. Apart from these that reflect upon the activities of the people in this region we found that for economic needs they also practiced forestry, dairy (rearing of animals), fishery, procuring wool, cotton threads, dyeing and weaving clothes, making shawls.

The potters, like the village smith, also contributed enormously in the economy of the Ukhrul region at the village level. The art of pot making in the region of Ukhrul was confined to the village like Longree, which is situated North of Ukhrul. Pots of different sizes and shapes were made for various purposes—e.g. for preparing rice beer, water containers, cooking pots of several shapes and designs, cups, bowls and other containers.

The practice of pisciculture is very old and in the past fish was for home consumption only as they could not get enough surplus fish for sale. The economy of the local people got a boost whenever, they had surplus fish to sell. It is said that the people in the valley thronged to buy the fishes which had been brought from the hill areas as they were tastier.

The Tangkhul young men and women during their early days used to gather in a big house/dormitory known as Morung. This is called ‘champo’
among the Lothas, Arichu among the Aos, ‘Dekha Chang’ among the Sema nagas, ‘Kichuki’ among the Angami Nagas and ‘Longshim’ among the Tangkhuls. This dormitory-culture was an integral part of the people in the adjoining areas of Ukhrul. Here, they learnt how to weave and other arts which could provide them opportunities for pursuing occupations, later. Weavings of various kinds, embroidery and design work and the handicraft works were taught in the dormitories at night. Here, men learnt the art of wielding weapons to fight their enemies and discipline themselves. It was the institution of education for both, men and women. Various professional trainings were also imparted. Both, the boys and girls learnt various techniques so that they could become self-sufficient and self-dependent one day. We were also informed by several villagers that in morungs normally women were not allowed to enter as that act may bring bad luck to the clan in general and the village in particular. The villagers were categorical in stating that the morungs were organized on the clan system. What is important here is that the morungs are also known as the ‘Batchelor’s House’ and are commonly found among the Kukis, Chins, Mishmis, Mikirs, Lushais, Abors, Garos, Singphos tribes of this northeast region. It therefore, strengthens our opinion that there exists many common bonds amongst the people of this region and that they got diversified on grounds of searching for political identities of their own. Assessments made through factors of historical geography to great extent not only support our views but also give credence to it.

The region of Ukhrul is well known for herbs and medicinal plants. From several areas these medicinal plants used to be collected by the village medicinal practitioners, Maibas and Maibis for treating common illnesses of the commoners. The treatment is performed through different ritual processes, propitiation, appeasement, etc. The treatment is accompanied by medicine from plant and added magical remedies to cure the illness. They are Ginseng plant (Genus Panax), Maharna (Artemisia ambrosifolia), Japan Khawo, Yaingang (Curcuma domestica), Hankha (Adhatoda vasica), Nana rong (Musa
sapiantun), Heinou (Mangifera indica), Champra (Citrus-aurantifolia),
Khamaithei (cucurbita maxima), Hanvathan (plantago manjus), Sitapolna
(helianthus annus), Awathabi (caripee papaya), Kongreihan (Centeila asiatic),
Chanam (Allium sativum), Shiruihan (Menthe viridis), Touch me not
(Mimossha pudica), Hui (Ginger officinal), Aloevaera (Aloe barbadensis),
Wodharla (Eclipta prostrate),

The social conflict in the region that took place since time immemorial
has been continuing even to the present days in the territory of Ukhrul and its
adjoining areas. Historical artifacts, monuments and materials that include
social class for their regional dominance who want to control the area. It deals
with the reactions of the people of Ukhrul and its adjoining areas. Geo-
historical parameters are considered in detail. Politics flourishes in geo-
historical areas and yesterday’s politics becomes today’s history and therefore,
historical geography witnesses social conflicts and their settlements in due
course of time. The strategic use of forests and other land areas made the
Tangkhul warriors rather fearsome.

The social conflicts taking place in the Ukhrul and its adjoining areas
were group centric as well as ethnocentric. Here, we reflect upon the relations
between the Manipuri Meiteis, the Tangkhul and the Kuki at different points of
times and also between the British and the Hill tribals particularly, the
Tangkhuls. We also reflect upon how the people of Ukhrul and its adjoining
areas reacted to the British during the First and the Second World Wars. We
also incorporate the Naga and the Kuki turmoil and its present scenario. The
Manipuri and the Burmese relations also affected the regions. Though
geography does not change, history is always built upon aspects of the
geographical socio and political structures and sub-structures. Theories of
structuralism begin to emerge from these bases of developing forces.
The response of the Tangkhuls in the ensuing war for supremacy in Ukhrul and its adjoining area was partly a confrontation of two entities for regional dominance. Many Tangkhuls and Kukis were killed and the villages were subdued. There was fierce battle in every village at the time of invasion. Event after their invasion they remained alert on the villager and the enemies. On the other hand Anglo- Kuki war had taken a toll of many lives and put the Kukis into a different kind of torture and suffering. It is therefore, necessary to discuss at least the battle that took place within and adjoining areas of the present Ukhrul region. The Anglo- Kuki war 1917-1919, was an open challenge to the British imperialism and is undoubtedly a great watershed in the history of Manipur. The Kuki and the Tangkhuls understood the geo-politics in historical perspectives and therefore, were against the British.

The Meiteis and the Nagas did not save them from political conflicts. The Meiteis were the majority community in Manipur, so they tried to dominate the other communities where as the Nagas never accepted other’s dominance. From the early days their villages were independent and no one ruled over them. So the Nagas struggled to throw out the majority dominance. But the conflicts between the different communities exist even today.

The internecine strife in which the villages of Tangkhuls engaged till the nineteenth century, had far reaching consequence. Some of the weaker sections of Tangkhul groups from different migration groups were absorbed by their more powerful groups. With the balance of power of the neighbouring villages or the villages that survive by themselves were left independent though some tributes were to be accepted from the defeated villages.

The Tangkhul villages abandoned their village on different grounds, which was mainly due to inconvenience, had become unsafe on account of communal crises, had been ravaged by diseases, had been invaded by the enemies or wanted to search out for new venture or had been burnt down by
fire. In some cases the village was deserted due to communal clashes. The
desertion had been taken not under the orders of the chief. It was the wish of
the people who preferred to seek a new and better place. The village migration
from one place to another was not a new thing to the Tangkhuls but it had been
practiced since older times. Thus the Tangkhuls who migrated from different
directions deserted their villages, one after another and got settlements
established in Ukhrul region.

Despite the fact that the region is intensified with isolated villages and
the people have settled down with many difficulties, we found that there was
increase in population, more intermingling and understanding between the
communities. We found that the contact with outside world had raised their
ways of thinking and living. The impact of modern ideas was also discernible.
The geographical features had great impact upon the minds of people who had
remained either isolated or when they had remained in the midst of bigger
settlements. In this connection we have evaluated the relationships of the
Meitei’s with the Tangkhuls and their other cognate groups. Our consensus
view is that the communities of Manipur shared the same territorial space in the
past and have together evolved into political entities that they are today. at the
social plane there exists a deeper relationship between the many groups,
however much they deny. It is historical truth which is discernable in their
customs, rituals and customary laws.