Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Manipur is bordered on the east and south by Myanmar. The small tip of southern Manipur adjoins Mizoram. It is bounded on west by Cachar district of Assam, in southeast by North Cachar Hills of Assam, on north by the state of Nagaland. It covers an area of 22,327 sq. kms with a population of over two millions.\(^1\) The state comprises of nine districts viz. Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Bishnupur in the valley and Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel and Churachandpur (the local populace call it Lamka) in the hills. Different ethnic communities of various sizes inhabit Manipur.\(^2\) The major indigenous ethnic communities of the state are the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Zo communities (Kuki-Zomi). Besides the above-mentioned communities, the Bengalis, the Punjabis, the Biharis, etc. who came from other states of India also live in the state.

In Manipur, the Meitei are mainly concentrated in the valley districts viz. Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur which together account for only one-tenth of the total geographical area of the state. The Naga and Zo communities inhabit mainly the five-hill districts viz. Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel and Churachandpur. The Naga communities such as Zeliangrong, Mao, Maring, Tangkhul, etc. are predominant in the three northwestern and northern hill districts of Tamenglong, Senapati and Ukhrul. The Nagas are present in substantial numbers in the southeastern district of Chandel also. The Zo communities such as the Thadou-

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\(^1\) According to 2001 Census of India, total population of Manipur is twenty-three lakh eighty-eight thousands six hundred and forty-three.

\(^2\) Population of the different indigenous tribal communities of Manipur according to 1991 Census of India are as follows: Thadou (1,03,667), Tangkhul (1,00,088), Mao (71,517), Paite (41,108), Hmar (36,092), Liangmai (25,126), Kuki (23,072), Lusei (8,598).
Kuki, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Zou, Lusei, etc. mostly inhabit Churachanpur and parts of Senapati and Chandel districts.

The British administrators and early ethnographers have broadly classified the hill tribes of Manipur into two broad categories - Naga and Kuki. For political and administrative reasons, this classification was used to designate the hill tribes of not only Manipur, but also of the then Lushai Hills (presently Mizoram) and the then Naga Hills (at present a part of Nagaland). These colonially constructed identities have survived even after the masters who had given the names left the region. While Kuki and Naga identities have emerged as overarching identities in the regions, these identities are at times contested from within. The communities that have rejected to identify with externally imposed nomenclature began asserting what they believed to be their 'true and genuine' collective generic name. In Manipur, rejecting outsiders names, the Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Simte, Mate, Kom and others identified themselves as Zomi.3

Colonial Interventions and Boundary Demarcation

Manipur existed as an independent monarchical state for several centuries. In the past, the plain areas (present Imphal area and its surroundings) were under the control of the native Meitei kings. The hills areas were the abode of hill tribes. In the hills, the tribal chiefs exercised authority and control over the hill communities. The people in every hill village considered it their utmost duty to safeguard and promote the interests and above all the freedom of their community and village.4

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3 One writer observed, "There is no 'Kuki' as a tribe in Manipur and it is the Thadou who are officially called Thadou-Kuki". See, T Thangkholim Haokip, 'Kuki Polity with Special Reference to Village Administration', M. Phil Dissertation, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1991, p. 11.
Prior to the British colonial intervention in the political affairs of the Manipur princely state, the political and territorial boundaries of state and villages were rather vague. Boundaries were never rigidly demarcated. The first recorded attempt at boundary demarcation between Manipur and Burma (Chin Hills-Manipur boundary) began with the conclusion of the First Anglo-Burmese War by the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. With this treaty, the king of Ava (Burma) recognized the independence of Manipur. Subsequently, two more agreements were concluded with the Manipur state, one in 1833 and the other in 1834. The Treaty of 1833 demarcated the western boundary of Manipur. The Treaty of 1834 ceded Kubo Valley to Burma. The Treaty of 1834 also demarcated the southeast boundary of Manipur based on an imaginary line drawn northwards from the valley by Captain Pemberton. All this happened before the British colonial master directly controlled Manipur. Even though there were no definite political boundaries, the Pemberton's line had effect on the local indigenous people. In 1881, fearing Burmese aggression, the British Government set up a commission to survey the area and draw a definite boundary between Manipur and Burma. Commenting on the development, Mackenzie noted that some of the Chasad villages situated on the frontier have moved westwards and peaceably settled down as quiet subjects of Manipur, and thus removed the possibility of dispute as to whether they belong to Burmese or Manipur territory. Carey and Tuck wrote, “by the delimitation of the Manipur boundary Howchinkhup lost several villages which his forefathers had conquered and which up to that time had paid him a nominal tribute...The border line between the Chin Hills and Manipur has carved the

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tribe into two..." In this colonial decision to demarcate boundaries, neither the native rulers of Burma or Manipur, nor the indigenous tribal communities, whose territory was being divided, had any say. With demarcation of political boundaries, the indigenous people began finding themselves in two sides of the boundary, as many of them are also living in the Burma's side of the boundary line. With boundary demarcation within their reach, the people on both sides of the border experienced what T K Oommen called 'ethnification' process. New political boundaries, in course of time, shaped the thoughts and feelings of the people, and in the process impacted on the social and political life of the people.

After Manipur came under the direct control of the British in the year 1891, the British, for their own colonial interests appointed a Political Advisor to supervise and guide the administration of the valley region by the king and his men. Though the British started interfering in the valley from 1891 through their Political Agents, they allowed the hill tribes to retain their traditional system of village administration. They were left to be governed by their traditional chiefs based on their customs and traditions. In course of time, the British took the responsibility of the hill areas of Manipur inhabited by different tribes in their own hands. In the year 1894, administrative changes were effected in the state, and Manipur was divided into two administrative units – the valley and the hills. The hill areas were put under the British administration and the valley under the Maharaja. When Major Maxwell was Political Agent, the Chin Hills Regulations Act, 1896 was applied to the hills of Manipur state, and a hill house tax of Rs. 3/- per year per household was imposed.

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8 S Bertram Carey and H N Tuck, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
9 By 'ethnification' T K Oommen mean the process of endangering the integrity of a nation as a result of division or separation of a collectivity of people and their ancestral land, and other processes. Refer T K Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity*, Polity Press, Jaipur, 2001, pp. 13-22.
During this period, there were no sub-divisions or outposts, no garrison of any sort in the hills. The President of the State Durbar relied on petty local officials known as Lambus, who acted as representatives of the central authority.

Later the hill areas were further divided into five divisions, each of which was looked after by a Lam-Subedar. The British officer i.e. the President of the State Durbar indirectly administered the hill areas through their petty officials - Lam-Subedars. Each Lam-Subedar was assisted by the Lambus who acted as middlemen between the tribal chiefs and the people. Even though, the Lambus were to act as interpreters, in actual practice, they also carried out investigation work within their area of operation. They periodically sent reports to the state government through the Lam-Subedar. Apart from this, the hills did not have any proper administrative set up. No provision was ever made in the budget for creating permanent administrative machinery in the hills. Neither the Maharaja of Manipur, nor the British administrators showed any genuine interest in the affairs of the hill tribes. Excerpt for constructing a few footpaths and seasonal roads, they did little to develop the hill region. They were mainly concerned with collecting house-taxes. Their main concern was to check the tribals’ sporadic raids into the valley. There was no personal interaction between the officers of the state government and the villagers. The plight of the hill tribes multiplied as the Lambus often pillaged the villagers. The tribal chiefs saw in the Lambus, who assumed more and more undefined powers in the day-to-day administration of the hill areas, a threat to their traditional authority.

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Introduction of Christianity and Modern Education

The coming of the colonial rule opened the door for the Christian missionaries to set their feet in the princely state of Manipur. The first missionary to enter Manipur with full support from the British authorities was William Pettigrew from the Arthington Aboriginese Mission Society. He started his work in Imphal on February 6, 1894. The local Meitei king viewed Pettigrew’s work as an attempt to impose upon them what he called the ‘government’s religion’. It may be noted that the Royal government of Manipur had already declared Vaishnavite Hinduism as a principal religion by a royal edict in 1705. Maxwell, the first British Political Agent considered this move of the Meitei king alarming and expressed his fear that trouble might arise if Pettigrew was allowed to continue his missionary work. Maxwell, served ultimatum to Pettigrew to leave Imphal or discontinue his mission activities. He also advised Pettigrew to work among the hill tribes - in the northeastern part of Manipur among the Tangkhul tribes. Accordingly, Pettigrew moved to Ukhrul in the early part of 1894. There he started his mission work among the Tangkhul community. Pettigrew soon engaged himself in learning the local dialect, and carried out translation work in Tangkhul language. In due course, the missionary movement began to extend to the Kuki inhabited areas of Sadar Hill, north of Imphal. Among the Kuki, local institutionalized church was established by the local Christian converts. As the number of tribal Christians grew, some Christian tribals’ began to hold petty clerical posts in the government offices. The Manipur Durbar allowed the missionary

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16 This development took place in part of present day Ukhrul and Senapati district.
activities among the tribes on the condition that they should not attempt to extend the missionary work in the valley. That gave Pettigrew the opportunity to work freely among the hill tribes of Manipur. Another missionary, U M Fox joined Pettigrew in 1911. The southern hills (present day Churachanpur district) of Manipur remained untouched by any missionary activities until 1910. It was on May 7, 1910 that a Christian missionary Watkin Robert reached among the Zo communities of Churachandpur. They reached Senvon, a village on the Manipur-Mizoram border from Aizawl. The missionaries set up mission schools to impart education to the people. The NEIG Mission Compound (old Churachand) became the centre of literate culture in southern Manipur. By the time India became independent considerable number of Paite elites had emerged among the Paite community.

Direct Involvement of British Officials in Hill Administration

During the time of J Shakespeare, the British administrators issued boundary documents to all village chiefs. Through the effective machinery of chieftainship and its council of elders, the British could effectively control and secure the support of the hill tribes. They also collected hill house tax of Rs 3/- per year from each household through the tribal chiefs. The chiefs in return got the support and patronage of the British administrators. The British did not encounter any serious challenge to their authority in the hills until the outbreak of Kuki Uprising in 1917 (in local parlance it is known as Zogal, which means ‘Zo rebellion’). The First World War broke out in the year 1914. The British Government made efforts to involve the indigenous tribal people in the war efforts. Many of the hill tribes were engaged in the

19 Hereafter referred to as Zogal.
Labor Corps. The corps so recruited were sent to the European continent to help/join the allied forces. This forced recruitment for the labor corps had sparked an anti-colonial protest, which came to be known as Zogal of 1917-1918. The British suppressed the rebellious Zos with force. However, it cost the government of India nearly twenty lakhs of rupees. Large number of tribal people and the forces engaged in the operation died during this period.\(^2\)

In the aftermath of Zogal, the British administrators gave more importance to the hill administration and administrative reforms were introduced in the hill areas. For efficient administration, the hill areas of Manipur were re-organized in 1919 into four sub-divisions, one with headquarters at Imphal and the other three in the hill areas. The Imphal headquarters was under direct administration of the President of the Manipur State Durbar (British ICS Officer of Assam cadre). The other three were placed under Sub-Divisional Officer viz. Southwest Area with headquarters at Churachanpur under B C Gasper as Sub-Divisional Officer, Northwest Area with headquarters at Tamenglong under William Shaw as Sub-Divisional Officer, and the Northeast Area with headquarters at Ukhrul under L L Peters as Sub-Divisional Officer. The President was given overall charge of administration of the entire hill areas of Manipur. He was assisted by some officers of the State on behalf of the Maharaja. Under this reform, neither the Maharaja, nor the Durbar had any real share in the administration of the Hills. What is important to be noted is that even after the active participation of the British officials in the hill administration, they allowed the hill tribes to continue with their respective traditional systems of administration of justice.

Statement of the Problem

The influence of colonial administration coupled with the introduction of new social values and system among the hill tribes had profound influence on the traditional life and practices of the people. Wherever the missionaries operated, they made efforts to educate the people by opening up mission schools. This opens up new vistas and opportunities for the hill tribes. These developments, especially evangelizing works, modern education, introduction of new social values and institutions among the hill tribes contributed to the birth of new group of people - modern elites from among the tribal communities who contributed considerably to social and political awakening of the hill communities. Consequently, under the leadership of the newly emerging elites, many of the indigenous tribes gradually transformed themselves to more organized and politically conscious communities.

In the hills of Manipur, the ethnic identity assertions have first started among the Nagas and Thadou-Kuki communities. Apart from making efforts to unite their own communities, the upcoming elites among the Nagas and the Thadous attempted to bring other smaller ethnic communities under their domination. Such attempts appear to have caused apprehensions and a sense of insecurity in the minds of smaller ethnic communities in the hills of Manipur. Lack of resources and numerical disadvantage experienced by smaller communities compelled certain smaller ethnic groups to merge or identify with larger ethnic communities or nationalities. In this category falls the so called old-Kuki group in Manipur such as the Anal, Aimol, Monsang, who have shifted their ethnic affiliation by accepting Naga as their identity. Although the weaker among them succumbed to the pressures, some communities
who had reached a certain level of social, political, and economic awareness and development and witnessed the rise of modern educated elites, asserted their separate ethnic identities. In this backdrop of the quest for identity, the research study seeks to examine the political identity discourse among the Paite community.

The Paite, a trans-border community of India and Burma, belongs to the Zo people\(^{21}\) of Tibeto-Burman family. The Paite primarily comprises of all the Paite speaking clans / tribes of people residing in the hill areas of Manipur and adjacent states, who accept their identity as Paite. In India, the Paite are recognized as a scheduled tribe (ST) community in Manipur and Mizoram. In the state of Manipur, they are mainly concentrated in Churachandpur district. In the state of Mizoram, the Paite are found in Champhai and Aizawl districts. The people claiming to be Paite are found in other northeastern states as well. The Paite are also found in Chin state of Myanmar.\(^{22}\) As in the case of many other hill communities in northeast India, different colonial and post-colonial developments such as the arrival of Christianity, growth of modern educational institutions, introduction of modern political and administrative institutions and processes, development of market economy, and rise of ethnic organizations appears to have contributed to identity consciousness among Paite. Apart from these objective factors, the Paite elites also seem to have contributed considerably to the process of construction of Paite and Zomi identities among the Paite community. Given the influence that the emerging elites exercises over the Paite community, examining the socio-economic background of the modern Paite elites, their interests and outlook, and the roles that they have been playing in

\(^{21}\) Brief discussion of the Zo / Zo people is made in Chapter V.

\(^{22}\) For more discussion on Paite, refer, T Jamkhothang and H Kamkhenthang, ‘A Brief Introduction to the Language and Culture of the Paites (Tedim Chins)’, in K B Singh (ed.), An Introduction to Tribal Language and Culture of Manipur, Manipur State Kala Akademi, Imphal, 1976, pp. 108-136.
the construction of Paite and Zomi identities among the Paite would help us in understanding the politics of construction of identities among the smaller ethnic communities in northeast India.

**Review of Literature**

Over the years, several academic studies have been made on ethnic situation in India. In their pioneering work, *Ethnicity and Nation-building in South Asia*, Urmila Phadnis and Rajat Ganguly provided a comparative appraisal of the dynamics of ethnic communities and politicization of ethnic groups in multi-ethnic countries of the Indian sub-continent. The writers attributed the emergence of ethnic political movement in the region to the legacy of Western colonization and decolonization. In their view, incorporation of several distinct ethnic groups into one political unit was the main reason for frequent social and political turmoil in the Indian sub-continent. During the colonial period, the common objective of achieving independence from the colonizer somehow prevented serious ethnic cleavages among different ethnic communities. However, once the colonial masters had gone, the dominant or majority cultural group wanted to impose their social, political and cultural norms to other subordinate groups in the name of nation building. The growing assertiveness of the majority ethnic communities for restoration and promotion of their political, economic and socio-cultural privileges has led to rise of ethnic feelings and movements on the part of the ethnic minorities. This has made ethnicity and ethnic identity as crucial variables in the formation, reformation and consolidation of state structure in South Asia.  

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ethnicity as a strategy of interest alliances in the context of pluri-cultural realities of India. In the book, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*, Susana B C Devalle looks at ethnicity as manifested in the context of Jharkhand experience as a process evolving through time rather than dwelling on description of fixed ethnic forms. Atul Kohli, Amrita Basu, D L Sheth, and Gurpreet Mahajan, have also contributed to the understanding of identity problems and community conflicts that emerge within the framework of nation-state.

Coming to northeast India, Nirmal Nibedon in his book, *Northeast India: The Ethnic Explosion*, examines the ethnic and nativistic factors shaping the politics in the northeastern region and studies the challenges that ethnic assertions pose to Indian state. He observes that the feeling of being ethnically and racially different from the rest of the sub-continent is one of the major factors of ethnic explosion in the region. Research on other northeastern states also gives considerable insights into the dynamics of ethnic movements in the region. The works of B Datta Ray, A K Baruah, Manorama Sharma, P S Datta, L S Gassah, Susmita Sen Gupta, etc.,

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26 Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (eds.), *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.
29 B Datta Ray (ed.), *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in Northeast India*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983.
give idea of the role of the emerging educated middle class elites in different ethnic communities and their contribution to construction of those ethnic identities. In *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics*, and also in his article, 'Middle Class Hegemony and the National Question in Assam', A K Baruah links contemporary problems and conflicts of Assam with the dominant role and politics practiced by the Assamese middle class. Manorama Sharma in her book, *Social and Economic Change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony*, argued that the middle class elites in Assam maintain their hegemony over the Assamese society through the articulation of interests relevant to majority of the Assamese masses. P S Datta maintains that the emerging middle class in northeast provides leadership and definite direction to different ethnic groups by articulating their interests in tune with the changed political environment and legal framework of the political environment. L S Gassah in ‘Traditional and Emerging Leadership Pattern in Khasi-Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya’, highlights the role of the newly emerging elites in arousing political consciousness among their community in order to protect, preserve and promote the rights, customs and culture of their people. B Datta Ray's edited book, *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in Northeast India*, provides us useful information about the role of the educated elites in various states in the northeast. Susmita Sen Gupta, analyze the role of elites in directing the course of regional politics in Meghalaya, thereby, presenting a comprehensive appraisal of politics of regionalism in the state.

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Ethnic situation in Manipur has attracted the attention of a good number of writers and social scientists. Considerable work has been done to understand the general history, politics, and ethnic dynamics of Manipur. Bimal J Dev and Dilip K Lahiri’s *Manipur: Culture and Politics*, and Naorem Joykumar Singh’s *Colonialism to Democracy: A History of Manipur 1819-1972*, gives interesting account of political developments that took place in Manipur. In *Bleeding Manipur*, Phanjoubam Tarapot gives an insider’s story of the ethnic armed conflicts in Manipur. Rajat Kanti Das’s work, *Manipur Tribal Scene* highlights how kinship, marriage, and others have shaped the structure of tribal society. Lucy Zehol in *Ethnicity in Manipur: Experience, Issues and Perspectives*, highlights the issues of ethnic identity problems of the Nagas, the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people, and the Meitei.

B K Roy Burman’s article ‘Ethnicity and Stratification in Manipur’ describes the ethnic processes, identity dilemmas and identity shifts among the tribal communities of Manipur. R K Ranjit Singh’s article ‘Ethnicity among the Small Tribal Groups of Manipur: An Anthropological Analysis’ studies how group chauvinism affects the interaction between groups and acts as the vital force behind the erupting ethnic tensions.


K Muana, Naorem Saratchandra Singh, Grace Don Nemching, etc., throw light on historical, anthropological and linguistic account of the community. The socio-cultural and political changes that have taken place as a result of introduction of Christianity among the Paite have been examined in these studies. Coming to the Zomi of Manipur, scholars like Thangkhangin Ngaihte, L S Gangte, Vumson, L Chinzakham Ngaihte, Neihsial Tualchin, Chinkholian Guite, Sing Khaw Khai, L Vanlalruat Guite, L Lam Khan Piang, Khup Za Go, and Prism of the Zo People provide us information about the historical, anthropological, economic, cultural aspects of the Zo people, their political participation, political aspirations and political movements.

Objectives of the Study

From the review of existing literature, it is evident that several academic studies have been carried out at regional, national and global levels to understand the

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45 L Chinzakham Ngaihte, op. cit.
47 Chinkholian Guite, op. cit.
history of ethnic communities and nature of ethnic conflicts and identity politics in
different communities and regions. On the Paite and the Zomi, one comes across a
few interesting descriptive, historical, anthropological, linguistic, and political studies.
However, so far there has been no systematic work that examined and analyzed the
process of formation of Paite identity and Zomi identity consciousness among the
Paite community and the role played by the Paite elites in directing the Paite politics
in Manipur. Moreover, none of the available studies on Paite-Zomi examined the
politics of identity formation among the Paite community using the rich theoretical
insights into the issues of ethnicity and identity available to us. In view of these
limitations in the existing literature on the Paite community, there is a need to study
the role played by the emerging elites in the construction of Paite and Zomi identities
among the Paite community by using appropriate theoretical insights.

Therefore, in the light of relevant theories of ethnicity, the present study has
set three objectives:

i) To understand the emergence and growth of modern Paite elites in
    Manipur;

ii) To examine the social, economic, and ideological background of the
    Paite elites in Churachandpur district;

iii) To study the role of Paite elites in the formation of Paite identity and
    Zomi identity consciousness among the Paite in Manipur.

Theories Explaining Roots of Ethnic Conflicts

The scholars working on ethnic related issues have come out with various
theoretical approaches to explain ethnic dynamics and account for the factors
responsible for ethnic conflicts. Some of the major theories of ethnicity may be discussed in brief here, so that we could see which of the theories are relevant to understand the problem that we seek to explore.

**Primordial Theories**

Scholars like Clifford Geertz, Yu V Bromley, Pierre L van den Berghe are associated with primordial theories. The primordialists consider ethnicity as rooted in 'human nature' based on the 'given' cultural markers such as religion, language, customs, descent, etc. They claim that ethnic communities and nations are natural units of history and integral elements of human experience. Life attachments that stem from common descent, place of birth, kinship, religion, language that are sacred and 'spiritual' in character are central to ethnic groups. These 'attachments' constitute the 'givens' 'rooted' in the non-rational fundamentals of human personality. Clifford Geertz, describe how even in industrial societies the ethnic identities based on primordial ties persist along side secular and civic ties. Geertz pointed out that in the new states of Asia and Africa, the drive for personal identity based on the continuing attachment of given 'primordial' features persists even in the face of modernization. Pierre L van den Berghe went to the extent of arguing that primordial attachments that form the bases of ethnicity are biological and genetic in nature. In a study of the American's 'Beyond the Melting Pot' experience, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P Moynihan argued that in spite of a high degree of mobility and intermarriage between

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groups, ethnic identities continue to persist in American society. Various immigrant
groups like the Italians, Jews, Puerto Ricans, etc. even up to the third and fourth
generation, by and large maintain their distinct name, identity, and for the most part,
primary group ties.\(^{56}\)

The fact that new cultural groups can be created out of pre-existing
communities does not belittle the significance of primordialist perspectives. While
many primordialists admit that some aspects of culture are changeable and that the
boundaries of ethnic groups may be shifted in the course of social and political
movements, they stick to one point that ethnic groups are based on distinctive cultures
or myths of origin that have core features that persist through time.\(^{57}\) In the world
today, no group can authentically prove their real origin. As such, it is a belief in
common descent but not actual ancestor that primordialists considered important.

The primordialists scholars have been subject to criticism from different
quarters. It is held that cultural and biological determinism are insufficient theories of
the self, and that social and political identities are created through both primary and
secondary processes of socialization. To see ethnic identity awareness as solely a
natural growth of primordial ties is questionable, for it underestimates the powerful
influence that politics exert on people's lives. In contemporary society, multiple
identities are common as identity varies according to situation. The primordialists pay
little attention to the political construction of ethnic identity and hence, fail to explain

\(^{56}\) Nathan Glazar and Daniel P Moynihan, cited in Paul R Brass, 'Elite Competition and Nation
Formation', in John Hutchinson and Anthony D Smith (eds.), Nationalism, Oxford University Press,

\(^{57}\) See especially Charles F Keynes, 'Towards a New Formulation of the Concept of Ethnic Group',
why and how particular ethnic identities emerge, change and dissolve, or why so many people choose to emigrate to and assimilate with other ethnic communities.  

**Relative Deprivation Theory**

Relative Deprivation theory stresses the importance of relative deprivation in the distribution of available resources, social benefits, and opportunities between different ethnic groups. Individuals and groups feel that they have certain inalienable rights. They include the right to live a good and self-sufficient life which the group believed that this can be achieved (which the people think they are capable of) if the social means are made available to them. According to this theory, the feeling of being marginalized and discriminated by dominant communities within the state and the resultant feeling of frustration and deprivation precipitate ethnic identity consciousness among the less dominant groups. In other words, ethnic feelings are aroused by sense of relative deprivation arising out of objective exploitation of groups by an alien group, or of one social class by another.

Scholars like Paul Brass and Pradeep Kumar point out the problems with this type of explanation. In fact all ethnic movement justify themselves in terms of existing deprivation or anticipated oppression by a rival group. This however, is not in itself an explanation for the emergence of ethnic consciousness. As pointed out by Paul Brass, it is not the case of relative deprivation or status inequalities between different, but of competition for resources valued equally by different ethnic groups.

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that precipitate ethnic consciousness. There is no way of measuring or even describing adequately the levels of relative deprivation experienced by different ethnic groups in different societies to test the basic theory that those groups which experience the highest levels of relative deprivation may be expected to be more nationalistic. Secondly, the theory accepts the arguments and myths of nationalists as data to demonstrate relative deprivation rather than seeing them as myths themselves in need of explanation. Third, the deprivation theory cannot explain nationalism of the privileged ethnic groups such as that of Afrikaners in South Africa. Pradeep Kumar also pointed out the limits of relative deprivation theory by taking the case of emergence of regional feeling in India. According to Pradeep Kumar, in India, centrifugal pulls have been strongest in regions with relatively better economic development as in Punjab, Tamil Nadu, etc and they are sometimes weakest in the economically least developed regions like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. He also noted that the economic factor may not be sufficient factor to generate regional pulls, and one has to go beyond the socio-economic syndrome to understand some of the other subjective and objective factors that may be necessary for a mass scale mobilization on regional issues. It requires more than the growing awareness of economic deprivation, and this, according to Kumar happened to be ‘identity’ politics. As he put it, “you can’t convince a group, even less mobilize it, on the issue of economic deprivation unless you first identify or create one”.

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Relative Deprivation theory talks about the social conditions that give rise to ethnic consciousness and identity, but they do not account for individuals and agencies that articulate the needs of the community. Moreover, the significance of cultural features does not find a significant place in their analysis.

**Rational Choice Theory**

One of the well-known instrumentalist approaches is Rational Choice theory. Rational Choice theory views individual behavior as the result of the interaction of structural constraints and the sovereign preferences of individual. The structure first determines the constraints under which individual acts. Within these constraints, individuals explore various possible courses of actions. The course of action ultimately chosen is selected rationally. The Rational Choice theory sees ethnic identity consciousness and group solidarity as the results of ‘rational choices’ of the individuals’ within the group. These groups of people maximize their access to public goods / goals through strategy of preferences. Michael Hechter, who is associated with this kind of analysis, constructs models of group solidarity on the basis of individual pursuit of public goods. He explains ethnic solidarity as response to economic, political and cultural marginalization. To the question as to why people join ethnic movements led by the elites, Hechter says that people do so as they expect to receive a net individual benefit in return. In other words, individuals associate themselves with ethnic organization as long as it delivers individual benefits to its members.

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According to Michael Banton,\(^6\) the application of Rational Choice theory for understanding ethnic relations depends on four presuppositions. First, the action of every individual is determined by the net benefit that one gets in return. Secondly, actions at one moment in time have a corresponding influence on the available alternatives between which individuals will have to choose at subsequent moments. Thirdly, socialization makes people recognize their dependence on others, and thus make them realize the necessity to forge group ties. Fourthly, it is only through collective action that an individual can realize his or her aims / ends. The realization of benefits that socialization entails compel individual’s to join hands with others for collective action.

The Rational Choice theory lays stresses on the critical role of ethnic organizations. The organizations serve as the major source of private rewards and punishments that motivate the individual to participate in collective action.\(^7\) Rational Choice theorists view that a rational man will comply with group norms and thereby contribute to the maintenance of social order. Collective action and social order rest on the belief that free riding and crime do not pay. Rational actor will commit crime to attain his or her goals, unless deterred by the fear of punishment. The Rational Choice theory explains the persistence of ethnic solidarity in terms of individual calculations and advantages.

Rational Choice theory has been criticized for giving much emphasis to rational preferences or choices of the individuals, ignoring the pre-existing social


groups. It transforms all choices, including cultural ones, into economic choices. This kind of analysis views ethnic differences as located more in the mind than in the genes or cultural differences. Their accounts leave no place for collective values, memories and emotions, but only for goods of wealth, status and power. Moreover, it ignores that ethnic assertions are influenced more by emotions rather than by reason. Consequently, it fails to explain why ethnic conflicts are so often intense and unpredictable, and why the masses so readily respond to the calls of ethnic leaders.

Class Based Approaches

Many scholars influenced by Marxism approached ethnicity from the perspective of classes and class interests. Marxian interpretations of ethnicity view ethnic phenomenon as by-product of the contradictions of class-divided societies. In general, Marxist scholars give less importance to the role of ethnic, racial and nationalist groups. Classical Marxism believed that attachments based on ethnicity, race, caste and tribe would diminish with the growth of modernization. In their place, classes would assume central position and with the intensification of class contradictions, ethnic consciousness gives way to class-consciousness. Since Marx’s prediction did not come true, the scholars following Marxist line were compelled to explain the continued persistence of ethnicity in the modern world. Working within the broad Marxist paradigm, some of them came out with interesting theories on ethnicity.

The Split-Labor Market theory is one such approach, which analyze ethnicity from the perspective of class. This approach places labor competition at the centre of racist or nationalist movements. It conceives ethnicity as markers used by employers, especially the bourgeoisie class, in their attempt to exploit and divide the working class. According to this theory, society is divided into three classes: those who own the means of production i.e. the bourgeoisie class, the highly paid laborers and the lowly paid laborers. The bourgeoisie split the labor market in order to strengthen their position in the system. This enables the dominant bourgeoisie to earn huge profits from the more oppressed sections and pay more for the privileged among the working class. The bourgeoisie class stabilizes the system by securing the support of the more privileged working class by making use of ethnicity.

The Split-Labor Market theory considers ethnicity as created or nurtured by the bourgeoisie of the dominant ethnic group or nationality. It is used to mark off 'super-exploited' class as inferior, and to bind the more advantaged workers to the ruling class through the ideology of ethnic solidarity, thereby masking conflicting class interests within that group. In the name of ethnic solidarity, the capitalist class persuades the privileged workers to support the system and to align themselves against other workers.

Middleman Minority theory is another class based theory. According to this theory, society is divided into three classes' viz. the dominant rich capitalist class, the

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middleman minority and the poor workers. This theory seeks to explain the social, political and economic relations that exist between these three classes of people in a capitalist society. The theory assumes that certain groups of people in society occupy middle rung position in the social and economic work place. These are people mostly of immigrants' communities / backgrounds. While majority of the immigrants communities are poor, unskilled workers, there are also some who are highly skilled workers. Due to their sheer numbers, some of the ethnic groups are over-represented in some business. For example, during the 1900s most American Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were poor workers and small merchants. They were initially employed in the garments industry, building and retail trades. However, by 1905, a significant number of them emerged as big entrepreneurs and even had a toehold in law, medicines and dentistry. Writing on the American Jewish community, Jacob Lestchinsky stated that due to their entrepreneurial skill and capital, they become largely owners and employers as compared to other ethnic groups. As a result, a disproportionately large numbers of them were self-employed. In-spite of their success in commercial pursuits, they were frequently denied social recognition and political power that success ought to have brought. They were even perceived by the host society to have no political commitment in the host society, but only financial interests. As a result, the workers and the capitalists of the host society come together against the sojourner community. The capitalists soon monopolize middlemen position and thus, the latter become subject of discrimination by the host society. Their status and position in the society is that they are not welcome by either the dominant group or subordinate groups. They are trapped in their 'middleman'

minority status. Any attempt made by them to move into the economic niches controlled by the dominant group is perceived as an intrusion into the domain of the dominant group. As such, the dominant group's attitude towards them is that they pose a threat to their economic and political interests. The workers also harbor resentment and hostility towards middleman minorities and blame them for their lack of access to power and resources. This perspective by the lower classes helps the dominant group ignore its responsibility for the cycle of exclusion and maintenance of power and resources in the social, political and economic set up. They serve as distribution links between the producers of goods and those who buy them. As such, they fall in the category of classes between the capitalists and the subordinate working classes. The consequence of such marginalization and discrimination faced by the middleman minority was the growth of ethnic economy based on ethnic ties and the subsequent emergence of ethnic market.

We may also note here the views of Tom Nairain's explanation of the emergence of ethnic nationalism. Nairain highlights the close link between the bourgeoisie and ethnic nationalism. According to him, the bourgeoisie are the instruments of nationalism. Using the notion of 'uneven development' to account for the emergence of ethnic nationalism, he argued that ethnic nationalism emerges only when the problem of underdevelopment is reflected in a given society, perceived in a certain way, and then acted upon. The response to such feelings of deprivation is manifested in the first place among the intelligentsia, who are the most conscious and awakened section of the middle classes. His view on the fight against the domination

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75 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
of foreign rich bourgeoisie is that the relatively poor middle class and intelligentsia of the less advanced countries mobilize the people along cultural lines and harping on their ethnic diversities. In this way, Nairain shows that the intelligentsia can construct the feeling of ethnic nationalism by making use of social means available to them. Whatever differences among the Marxian protagonists' interpretation of ethnic antagonisms, they share the view that ethnic movements are not essentially political, or primordial, but one that have material roots in the relations of production. The class-based explanations have validity in advanced capitalist societies where forms of alignments and conflicts are based on class interests. Unlike the developed countries where society has been divided into antagonistic classes, in the northeastern region of India, the communities are not yet divided along lines of antagonistic classes and class ideologies. Major forms of social and political alignments and conflicts in the region are still based on ethnic considerations.78

**Elite Competition Theory**

Another important instrumentalist approach is Elite Competition theory of Paul R Brass.79 According to Brass, ethnicity is a modern phenomenon, socially and politically constructed. To him emerging elites in modernizing societies undergoing dramatic social change facilitate the process of development of politically conscious ethnic communities out of existing ethnic groups. This process involves competition and conflict between the ethnic elites of the dominant group and those of the non-dominant group, and between the states and ethnic elites.


Brass believes that ethnic identity (trans)formation takes place in the course of elite competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits and social status within and among different ethnic categories. This competition arises from the broader economic and political environment rather than from the cultural values of the ethnic communities in question. In their competition for gaining the support of the masses and for achieving political goals, the cultural forms, values and practices of the ethnic groups becomes as political resources. The competing community elites strengthen exclusive identities through manipulation of objective cultural markers and turn them into subjective feelings among the communities. In the movement to create greater internal solidarity and to press more effectively ethnic demands against perceived rival groups, ethnic elites increasingly stress a variety of ways in which the members of the group are similar to each other and collectively different from others. However, Brass admits that mere elite competition is not sufficient condition for achieving communal mobilization. For successful mass mobilization, the ethnic elites have to go beyond competition. The success of elites is determined by factors like growth of literacy, standardization of local language, ability to communicate with group members effectively, strategies (goals) pursued by elite political organization, etc. If the ethnic elites succeed in mobilizing and transforming an ethnic group, emerging ethnic community or nationality does not necessarily become an entirely new entity, but one whose boundaries have been transformed.

Nowadays, there is a widespread recognition that elites are to some extent constrained by external circumstances such as economic factors or public opinion.

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80 Ibid., p. 21.
81 Ibid., pp. 62-66.
82 Ibid., pp. 17.
Moreover, values, movements and ideas in the course of history are determined by a number of variables, almost all of which are beyond the control of individual leaders. Ethnicity is a group or community affair, and not a personal choice. Paul Brass' Elite Competition theory has been criticized for viewing ethnicity as a property of individuals rather than of the collectivities. While the instrumentalist theories explain how group identity can be manipulated, they fail to explain why the 'masses' should so readily respond to the call of ethnic origin and culture.

Theories Relevant to Understanding of Construction of Ethnic Identities

Before one looks at empirical facts, one may start the work with an understanding of theoretical contributions made on issues concerning ethnic communities. Considerable academic work has been carried out to understand, explain and analyze the factors and forces that determine the construction of ethnic identities. Some of the theoretical contributions directly relevant to the present study may be discussed here.

In his edited book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Fredrik Barth approached ethnicity from transactionalist perspective. Barth conceptualized ethnic groups as units of self-ascription and identification based on subjective factors, chosen by the members from their past as well as present conditions. Instead of focusing his analysis on the internal constitution and history of ethnic group, Barth emphasizes on the processes of making and

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85 Anthony D Smith, 1996, op. cit., p. 446.
maintenance of ethnic boundaries. By deviating from the dominant sociological and anthropological perception on the central role of cultural stuff in the definition of ethnic groups, Barth said that ethnic boundaries define the group. In a multi-ethnic or national situation, in spite of the continuous inter-ethnic contact, interdependence, and flow of personnel across the groups, boundaries persist. The primary agent to the persistence and durability of ethnic boundaries is because of the structural differences and political perceptions of the group, not the cultural stuff of the community. Selective cultural features, not all cultural differences or similarities, go into making and maintenance of the socio-cultural boundaries of the group.

The Soviet ethnographer Yu V Bromley's work, *Theoretical Ethnography* defines 'ethnos' as a historically formed community of people who have common, relatively stable features of culture, and distinctive psychological traits, and the awareness of their unity and distinction from other similar communities. To Bromley, the expression of 'ethnos' is so strong that it persists through generations and through a variety of social forms. He also acknowledges the importance of self-consciousness including awareness of opposition for the functioning of an ethnos. Thus, to Bromley, an ethnos combines both objective and subjective elements. Like Barth, he also stresses the importance of boundaries for the existence of an ethnos. "There can be no ethnos without boundaries separating it from other similar communities". The members of ethnic communities are aware of their distinctive features as well as their ethnic affiliation. In other words, it is in ethnic interactions

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89 The closest word for the word 'ethnos' is people denoting communities of people having their own self-identification. For detail, see Yu V Bromley, *Theoretical Ethnography*, General Editorial Board for Foreign Publication, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1984.
that one's ethnic identity gets consolidated. Bromley approach is often classified as a primordialist perspective. But it needs to be made clear that Bromley does take the cognizance of the effects of the prevailing economic and political conditions on the character and nature of the ethnos. Shanin, commenting on the significance of Bromley's work, says that it has been able to explain the persistence of ethnic or cultural distinctiveness in the Soviet Union, which is supposed to have withered away in the face of rational socialist planning.\textsuperscript{92}

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has highlighted the relational and situational nature of ethnicity in his work, \textit{Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives}.\textsuperscript{93} According to T H Eriksen, ethnicity presupposes minimum contact between different cultural groups. Ethnicity is socially constructed in situations of cultural encounters and through people's way of coping with the demands and challenges of life.\textsuperscript{94} Ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group. Not cultural differences that are presumed to be 'actually there', but features which are viewed as socially relevant, that are more important for understanding of ethnic relations. Thus to Eriksen, aspects of relationship between ethnic groups is based on a distinction between 'they' and 'we.' He sees ethnic categorizations as fluid, negotiable and manipulable.\textsuperscript{95}

Ernest Gellner, in his theory of nationalism, highlights the temporal aspects of social transformation in nineteenth century Europe. He posits three stages of human history viz. hunter-gatherer, the agro-literate and the industrial – in which the

\textsuperscript{92} Cited in D V Kumar, \textit{Modernization and Ethnicity}, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, p.1.
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.} p. 19.
industrial stage with its high cultural development is feasible for the rise of nationalism. Thus, to Gellner, modern nation are the result of the transition of societies from agrarian to industrial system, which gives rise to increase in literacy and mobility. Nations as understood in the contemporary world, argues Ernest Gellner, do not have deep roots, but are modern in origin. Gellner calls ethnic background of nations as irrelevant. They are like navels, which do not have much significance to the understanding of origins of nations. For him, nationalism invents nations even where they did not exist.

In contrast, Ethno-symbolism approach, advocated by scholars John Armstrong, Anthony D Smith, and John Hutchinson, holds the view that historical and / or sociological explanations are necessary for understanding the continuing emotional attachment of people to their primordial ethnic ties / past. Ethno-symbolism approach emerges from the theoretical critique of modernist approaches, as well as from a different reading of the historical records. As Anthony D Smith put it, ethno-symbolism emerged in response to systemic failure to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby precluding any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism. This failure stems from serious inadequacies in the social constructionism and instrumentalism that underpin their modernism, in providing convincing accounts of cultural and political phenomena like nations and nationalism. Smith further pointed out three limitations of modernism: i) a failure to distinguish

genuine constructs from long-term processes and structures in which successive
generations have been socialized; ii) a concentration on elite actions at the expense of
popular beliefs and actions; and iii) a neglect of the powerful effective dimensions of
nations and nationalism. While ethnic communities are composed of individuals, there
is much more to these collective identities in terms of their shared values and norms,
memories and symbols. Ethno-symbolists sees power of ethnicity / nationalism in
the modern world in the rediscovery and reinterpretation of popular living past such
as myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages by modern nationalist
intelligentsia. These cultural and historical elements form the bases for competing
claims to territory, patrimony, and resources. They provide motives for conflicts as
well as solidarity. They are not simply pretexts by which the atavistic emotions of the
masses are manipulated, nor are they simply invented traditions as claimed by Eric
Hobsbawm to channel and control the energies of the newly mobilized and
enfranchised masses. History and culture form integral parts of the fabric of popular
visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations
are embedded and through which their elite must forge their strategies. In short,
ethno-symbolist scholars seek to overcome the limitations of instrumentalist versions,
while acknowledging the modernist insights of nationalism.

Critiquing Smith’s definition of 'ethnic,' T K Oommen writes that it equally
fits the definition of nation. In Citizenship, Nationality, and Ethnicity, T K
Oommen views ethnicity as an ongoing process, which emerges as a result of
conquest, colonization, and immigration and the consequent disengagement between
culture and territory.\textsuperscript{103} He views ethnies as aliens in their own homeland. Moreover, most of them are deprived collectivities both in symbolic and material terms. He also conceives of ethnicity as interactional, rather than attributional one. As identity seekers, human search for identities will continue even in the face of modernization. Disappearance of old identities would see emergence of new ones to fulfill the social, cultural, and political needs of the people concerned. Oommen also believes that an ethnie can transform itself into a nation and vice versa. As he says, language is common to both nation and ethnie. When an ethnie identifies itself with a common homeland, which they can claim as their own, it becomes a nation. Thus, to Oommen, nation is a territorial entity to which the people have emotional attachment. It is the fusion of territory and language. An emotional attachment to a common homeland is the critical minimum for the existence of a nation. When nation dissociate itself with its homeland, they become an ethnie.\textsuperscript{104}

Oommen has identified six processes of 'ethnification', a process through which the link between territory and culture is attenuated and the possibility of a nation sustaining its integrity is put into jeopardy. First, a nation may continue to be in its ancestral or adopted homeland and yet, it may be ethnified by the colonizing or native dominant collectivity. According to Oommen, this process can take place under three circumstances: (a) Transforming the original inhabitants of a territory into a minority and marginalized collectivity. Oommen cites the case of natives of the First World. In the context of India, he cites the case of Tripura where the indigenous people were compelled to be ethnic communities in their homeland. (b) Wrong categorization of certain collectivity especially by analysts so as to imply that they

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., pp. 13-22.
have no moral rights over its ancestral or adopted homeland. Oommen includes the Muslims of Bosnia, the Hindus of the Kashmir valley and the Jews in Europe as 'ethnified' collectivities that have been created by wrong labeling. (c) Ethnification process, which arises because of division of their ancestral homeland into two or more state territories, thereby endangering their integrity as nations, eg. Nágas, Mízos, Kurds. Secondly, ethnification processes can also occur when an immigrant collectivity is denied complete economic and political participation in their adopted new homeland. Oommen takes the case of the Pigians of Indian origins and the Jews under the Nazi regime.105 Thirdly, ethnification process takes place due to the continued identification of immigrant people with their ancestral homeland even after several years or decades. Fourthly, ethnification occurs when a state attempts to 'integrate' and homogenize different nations in its territory into one people. Fifth, even though people who migrated to alien lands are eligible to basic human and citizenship rights, they are not allowed to enjoy them. They are ethnified in that they are treated as strangers and outsiders. Finally, ethnification also occurs when immigrants do not want to identify with the identity of the host society even when they are accepted as co-nationals by the host society. These people might even wish to return to their homeland. In all the above processes, the relationship between territory and culture are relatively weak.106

In *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Paul R Brass107 defines an ethnic group as group of people dissimilar from other group in terms of objective cultural criteria such as language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or customs, religion or race and containing within its membership elements for a

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complete division of labor and for reproduction.\textsuperscript{108} The subjective, symbolic or emblematic use of objective cultural markers creates internal cohesion and differentiates one ethnic group from other ethnic groups. Paul R Brass not only points out the role of objective cultural criteria in the making of ethnic feelings, but also highlights the role of other groups. He recognizes the permeability of the defining objective markers. Like Oommen, Brass also believes that an ethnic group can transform itself into community and nationality. However, his approach is different from that of Oommen. To Brass, objective cultural markers are essential, but they do not provide sufficient impetus for ethnic transformation to begin.\textsuperscript{109} Only when a group becomes politically conscious of its cultural identity and further uses them for achieving group solidarity and interest, the group becomes a subjectively self-conscious (political) community.

According to Brass, formation of nationality out of ethnic category involves three stages. The first stage involves the movement from ethnic category to community, which entails creation of a self-conscious language community out of a group of related speakers, the formation of a caste (ethnic)\textsuperscript{110} association, or a community of believers from the followers of a particular religious leader. Brass relates this phenomenon with the early stages of modernization in multiethnic societies where languages have not yet become standardized, where religious groups have not become highly structured and compartmentalized, and where social fragmentation is prevalent. Brass believe that the movement from ethnic group to community is a transition that some groups never made, that others made initially in modern times, and still others undergo repeatedly at different points in time. The

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p, 19.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p, 63.
\textsuperscript{110} Inside bracket is mine.
second stage in the transformation of ethnic groups, according to Brass, involves articulation and acquisition of social, economic, and political rights for members of the group or for the group as a whole. At this stage, the demands of the group in question (may) range from a relatively modest civil, educational, and political rights to / and opportunities for individual members of the group or for recognition of the group’s corporate existence as a political body or nationality. Brass believes that ethnicity also involves a claim to status and recognition either as superior or equal to other groups. If an ethnic group succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights through political action and political mobilization, it has gone beyond ethnicity to establish itself as a nationality. To Brass, the politicized ethnic elite, who constitute the most articulate and dominant sections of the community, becomes the social agents of identity construction.

Benedict Anderson propounded his ‘imagined community theory’ in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson perceives nation as an imagined political community, which is inherently limited and sovereign. A nation is imagined because the members of the nation never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The imagined character of the nation differentiates one nation from another. The nation is *limited* as it is bounded by boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. It is sovereign because the concept comes into maturity at a stage of human history where the legitimacy of the divinely ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm was destroyed. Nations dreams of being free from pre-national religious forces and the stamp of this freedom is the sovereign state.

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111 Paul R Brass, *ibid*, pp. 22-23.
Finally, a nation is imagined as a community, as it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. This fraternity makes people willing to die for such limited imaginings.\textsuperscript{113} Prior to the emergence of national culture was the dominant religious culture. National culture replaced the predominant religious culture, and this transformation was facilitated by the development of print capitalism. The development of print capitalism, which was the central theme of his theory was responsible for the development of nations. Print-capitalism made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.\textsuperscript{114} To Anderson, the development of print languages, which owed much of its success to print-capitalism, laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. They created unified fields of exchange and communication above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the diverse dialects / languages were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community. Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which helped build image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. The printed book kept a permanent form, capable of reproducibility and dissemination. Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print: language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 56-57
The 'invention of tradition' thesis is associated with Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm does not believe in the natural origin of nation or the essential role of history. Instead, he sees national consciousness as a modern phenomenon constructed around the ruins of the past. It is a forced consciousness constructed by a particular group of people, an intelligentsia of some nebulous design. Hobsbawm identified the nineteenth century, around the time of the French Revolution as the period of emergence of nationalist ideas. Nationalism often arise from confrontation with others, an increasingly common experience as 19th and 20th century Europe saw increasing contact with others from differing ethnicities and religions as the world economy promoted large population movements and novel information about others.

Hobsbawm central arguments on the emergence of nationalism and national consciousness rest on his belief that many of the traditions which were considered as very ancient in their origins were in fact invented comparatively recently. He based his analysis on process of invention or creation of Welsh and Scottish 'national culture'; the elaboration of British royal rituals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the origins of imperial rituals in British India and Africa. By emphasizing on the constructed nature of nationalism Hobsbawm, in fact presented a complex linkages between past and present, thereby, deepening our understanding of communities and nationalities cherished myths.

Various theories of ethnicity discussed above have highlighted different aspects of the nature and dynamics of ethnic communities and the politics of identity formation. The availability of diverse approaches or theories on ethnicity indicates

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that no single theory can explain all aspects of ethnicity. Primordialists emphasize on passion and self-sacrifice emanating from 'primordial' attributes such as language, religion, territory, and kinship. Primordialists talked about close relation between ethnicity and kinships and ethnicity and territory. They also explained the way in which such primordial attachments can generate powerful sentiments of collective belonging.\textsuperscript{117} However, their accounts give little information on the activities and role of individuals who are taking the lead in all ethnic movement and identity assertion. This gap is filled by the explanation given by the instrumentalist scholars, which clearly shows that ethnic feelings can be constructed among members of ethnic communities through the actions of the ethnic elites. Some of the constructed identities in the world are readily accepted by the group concern because they contain certain elements, which are viewed as sacred by the concerned community.\textsuperscript{118} In contemporary societies, most people share strong attachment based on primordial features that have emotive significance, that remain with them and get reflected either consciously or unconsciously in their daily life activities.\textsuperscript{119} Even social scientists who are instrumentalists or constructionists recognize the presence of objective cultural 'givens' which are manipulated by the ethnic community or elites. Primordialists at the same time cannot ignore that the identities are contextual, situational and fluid. In spite of the fact that some of the modernist scholars have demonstrated a sort of arbitrary 'invention' and manipulation of traditions which were frequently almost imposed and / or used as instruments of political manipulation, they also very often strike a code in the minds of the people as modernist scholars like Hobsbawm has conceded in his study. Despite great diversity in cultural distinctiveness among ethnic


\textsuperscript{118} T K Oommen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 38.

groups, it is evident that each ethnic group has at the very centre of its values and beliefs a cluster of 'truth,' which justifies the group’s existence.\textsuperscript{120} Previous traditions were revived, reformulated and continuously adapted by communities aspiring to national status and to meet various social, political, and cultural challenges. It is in this context that the ethno-symbolists approach becomes relevant. Smith discusses the power of ethnicity and the continuing emotional attachment of people to their ethnic roots and pre-existing ethnic ties. A community of people engaged in the search for identity usually traces their origins and ethnic pasts in order to legitimize their claim.\textsuperscript{121} Ethnic beliefs and myths become a rallying point for marginalized and submerged communities aspiring to national status and territorial recognition.\textsuperscript{122} In his other work entitled \textit{Nationalism and Modernism},\textsuperscript{123} Smith maintain that in-spite of great cultural changes in the contemporary world the key identifying features of an ethnic have been maintained and reproduced for centuries by intelligentsia. Smith says what modernist theories systematically overlook is the persistence of ethnic ties and cultural sentiments in many parts of the world, and their continuing significance for large numbers of people. In fact, ethno-symbolist approach synthesizes both the primordialist and instrumentalist / modernist approaches by acknowledging their insights, while at the same time pointing out their limitations. In the absence of written records (which is the case with many of the indigenous communities of India’s northeast), it is difficult to ascertain how old these traditions and ethnic beliefs are. Nevertheless, the continuing relevance of ethnic pasts and roots to many of the contemporary indigenous tribal communities shows dynamics interactions between

\textsuperscript{120} Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{121} Anthony D. Smith, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{123} Anthony D Smith, 1998, \textit{op. cit.}
the people influenced ‘primordial sentiments’ and its mutual maneuvering by the community and their leaders / elites in the name of community interests.

The review of different theories of ethnicity and different perspectives on construction of identities clearly show that no single theory is adequate to explains the different inter-related issues such as development of ethnic community, nature and dynamics of the ethnic elites, politics of boundary making, role of language and literature, and the relevance or irrelevance of the memories of the past in the construction of identities that the research study sought to understand. Therefore, the study relies on scholarly insights of Paul R Brass, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D Smith and Eric Hobsbawm for understanding and analyzing dynamics of Paite elites and their role in construction of Paite and Zomi identities.

Concepts, Meaning and Working Definitions

As the research study revolves around ethnicity and role of ethnic elites in the identity discourse of a community of people, it is imperative to present the working definitions of / the meanings assigned to the key terms used in the research study such as ethnicity, ethnic community, ethnic elites, identity, and other related terms. Ethnicity has been perceived both from the subjective feelings of the community as well as the objective conditions that facilitate or obstruct the communities’ perceptions of themselves. Ethnic community is a politicized cultural group already drawn into the vertex of modernity, but falls short of attaining the status of a nationality. Any group of people, which uses cultural symbols to create internal cohesion and to differentiate themselves from others, is a subjectively self-conscious
political community. An ethnic community is different from a tribe as they are already drawn into the process of modernization. Many of the communities, which were labeled as tribes in India, had become politically conscious of their status and their rights. As such, many of the communities, which are officially recognized as tribes have indeed, became ethnic communities. Today in northeast India, we hardly find primitive tribes untouched by modernity. Although the communities still follow many traditional tribal practices, in economic and political sense they have already emerged as ethnic communities, conscious of their rights and their role in the Indian national polity and economy. A single or a group of ethnic communities sharing the same culture, common myths and same political aspirations, and inhabiting contiguous geographic area forms a nationality. By the expression, 'smaller ethnic communities', we refer to numerically smaller and politically and economically weaker ethnic communities in the designated region.

In the study, ethnic identity refers to ethnic self-awareness on the part of people as belonging to a particular ethnic community. It includes principles of 'inclusiveness' and 'exclusiveness', carried out by distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The collective ethnic identity consciousness evolves out of the communities' desire to safeguard their social, cultural and political rights and satisfy certain basic and universal human needs such as recognition, security, autonomy, etc. In situations where different ethnic groups live together, one or more groups

125 This understanding of evolution of human society/community undergoing different stages of development has been subscribed by many prominent scholars like Paul Brass, Gellner, etc.
126 Yu V Bromley, op. cit., p. 11.
may attempt to consolidate and strengthen their group identity. They may also strive to secure their social, political and economic rights and interests for the advancement of the community. Such assertion of ethnic identity by one or more groups may lead to conflicts between the different ethnic groups or even with the state. The term ethnicity basically explains the complicated nature and processes determining the relations between the ethnic communities.129

Ethnic elites refer to the individuals within the community who take the lead in educating, organizing, and mobilizing its members in pursuit of the interest of the ethnic community.130 As society and social values change, the nature of the elites also changes. For the present study, it will be suffice to say that the term elite refer to ethnic community elites who emerge within the community and are organically linked to it. The ethnic elites comprise of a broad spectrum of influential people within the ethnic community, such as traditional chiefs, church leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, intelligentsia and students / youth leaders. The ethnic elites directly or indirectly play an important role in the construction and consolidation of ethnic identity consciousness. They take the lead in constructing the political identity of a community and works towards building internal cohesion and solidarity by making use of certain ethnic markers.

The ethnic community tends to develop organizations through which collective feelings and collective identities are pursued. Ethnic organizations reinforce community solidarity either through the ethnic goals they pursue or through the

homogeneity of the ethnic membership. As communities become more conscious of their rights and identity, the ethnic organizations come into existence to articulate their interests inside and outside the ethnic boundaries. Besides the efficient pursuit of collective interests, ethnic organizations also serve as one important markers of the group with its homogeneous membership and also serve the important function of making visible the broader unity of the community. The ethnic elites make use of ethnic based organizations to generate political consciousness among the community members, and through them propagate and articulate the interests and values essential for the survival of the community.

Methodology, Collection of Data and Analysis

The research study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary sources include materials collected from central and state government records, census reports, NSS data, minutes of meeting proceedings, documents and literature of different Paite and Zomi organizations, memoranda and petitions, autobiographies and other writings of prominent Paite-Zomi elites that provide first hand information on the identity issues and politics of the community.

Secondary data are drawn from academic works available in the form of books, articles in relevant journals, magazines and newspapers and relevant theses and dissertations.

In addition to the above, in-depth interviews were undertaken with a cross section of the Paite elites with the purpose of getting firsthand information about their

\[131\] Benjamin B Ringer and Elinor R Lawless, op. cit., p. 62.
socio-economic background and for understanding their role in the construction of Paite identity and Zomi identity consciousness among the Paite. For this purpose, initially a list of hundred active Paite elites in Churachandpur district, playing significant roles in politics, business, bureaucracy, church, students and youth wings, and also in the fields of literature, academics and journalism was prepared. For preparing the list of Paite elites, the scholar took the help of Paite newspapers such as The Lamka Post, Manipur Express of several years, referred to Paite history and literature and discussed with members of different Paite organizations.

The list so prepared includes the names of important surviving traditional chiefs, church leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, intelligentsia, and students and youth leaders, who have played important roles in political and social life of Paite community. The list is broadly classified into five categories – i) the politicians, ii) the intellectuals, iii) the bureaucrats and businessmen, iv) students and youth leaders, and v) the traditional and church leaders.

Using stratified random sampling method, five members are chosen from each category at random through a lot and a sample of twenty-five persons was identified for the purpose of interview. Taking into consideration the size of Paite population and the compact area they occupy, the sample size of twenty-five Paite elites was considered as representative. The structured schedules were administered to these elites.

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132 We choose Churachandpur (Lamka) district as our area of survey as more than ninety percent of Paite of Manipur resided in the district.
133 Politicians include MPs, MLAs, sitting and former state ministers and party leaders belonging to the community, and MDCs.
134 Intellectuals include teachers, journalists, editors, etc.
135 Under bureaucrats and businessmen category, only those persons playing active role in public life of the Paite community are taken into consideration.
136 Student and youth leaders are those persons active in the Paite organizations.
137 We are aware that some individuals can be placed in more than one category. But for the purpose of survey, we took into considerations how the individual would like to identify themselves.
members to secure data on their social, economic, and ideological background. Efforts are made to crosscheck the claims made by the informants through empirical observation of their movable and immovable properties and also by talking to others who have knowledge of the persons included in the sample.

In-depth interviews were also undertaken with the Paite elites so chosen to examine their perceptions about Paite and Zomi identities and to understand the roles played by them in their respective domains for advancement of the cause of Paite and Zomi interests.

Based on the data collected, the study sought to understand different interrelated issues such as the development of ethnic community, nature and dynamics of the ethnic elites, politics of boundary making, role of language and literature, and the relevance or irrelevance of the memories of the past in construction of identities. As we found that no single theory is adequate to explain all issues that we sought to understand, to interpret and analyze the data, the study relied on theoretical insights of different thinkers such as Paul R Brass, Benedict Anderson, Fredrik Barth, Anthony D Smith, and Eric Hobsbawm.

The findings of the study are discussed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter II discusses the emergence and growth of modern Paite elites and studies the socio-political changes and development that had influenced the emergence of indigenous elites among the tribal communities in Manipur. Forces that had shaped the political orientation and the growing influence of the indigenous modern elites were also discussed. Chapter III analyses the socio-economic background of Paite elites and their perceptions on community issues and their role in Paite politics. Their ideological orientation, political affiliation, nature of voting, and political identity are
also discussed in the third chapter. In chapter IV, the study focuses on the construction of Paite identity by throwing light on the contributions of the indigenous elites to the development of Paite script and language, formation of different Paite organizations, the role they played in the movement for official recognition of the tribe and in codification of Paite customary laws. The language politics of the Paite elites for strengthening the identity base of the community are also captured in the chapter. Chapter V examines development of Zomi consciousness among the Paite. Apart from identifying forces and factors that generated Zo / Zomi consciousness, the study emphasizes on the controversy over the common nomenclature among the Zo communities in Manipur, the question of indigenous name vis-à-vis imposed nomenclature, the politics of Zomi movements, the fall out of Kuki-Naga and thereafter Kuki-Zomi conflicts. Contribution of indigenous intelligentsia to Zomi identity and Zomi consciousness as represented in vernacular songs and lyrics are also the main emphasis of the chapter. The concluding chapter sums up the major theoretical and empirical findings of the study and draws some conclusions and observations based on the research findings.