INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The present study, Land and Identity: A Sociological Study of the Thadou-Kuki Tribes of Manipur will explore the socio-political construction of space amongst the Hill Tribes, particularly the Thadou-Kukis of Manipur. The issue of land, territoriality and identity has been a contentious subject in the state. The Hill areas accounts for 90 percent of the geographical area. The density of population in the valley was 631 per sq km in 2001 as against the density of population of only 44 per sq km in the hill areas (Singh (ed.), 2009, p. ix). Increasing pressure on land has led to distinctive struggle for identity and territorial claim, not only between the hills and valley areas but also amongst the hill communities.

Manipur’s population has three major ethnic groups: the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas and Kukis¹(Grierson, G.A. 1967, p. 1) of the surrounding hills. The Thadous are the sub tribe of the Kuki community of Manipur. They are the most numerous branch of the Kuki group. As per the 1991 census of the distribution of population in Manipur by mother tongue, they constituted the second most populated tribe with 1,002,30 speakers of the dialect.² The study will use the compromised term “Thadou-Kuki” to refer to the Thadou dialect-speaking group of the Kuki community. In Manipur, the Kuki affiliated tribes are dispersed over the five hill districts, with larger concentrations in Churachandpur, Senapati and Chandel districts (Ray, 1990). The universe of study is in three areas that falls within the Sadar Hills Autonomous District

¹ G.A. Grierson writes that the words ‘Kuki’ and ‘Chin’ are synonymous and are both used for the hill tribes. Chin is a Burmese word to denote the various hill tribes living in the country between Burma and the (then) Provinces of Assam and Bengal (Grierson, 1967). The word ‘Zo’ is another term that has come up to defined the same group of people in the modern day. The supporters of the term ‘Zo’ regarded the name Kuki or Chin or Kuki-Chin as name given to them by their neighbours or employed by the ethnographers to identify the whole cluster of groups of people (Lam Khan Piang, 2005). However, there are still many who oppose the relevance of the term ‘Zo’ as a basis for unification and has continued to uphold the old name of ‘Kuki’ or ‘Chin’.

Council Area of Senapati District; namely Tujang Vaichong Village, Motbung Village and Kangpokpi Urban Town respectively.

The focus of study will be on the impact of British colonialism, post-colonial debates on land, and land related issues. Over a period, various agencies have contributed in the re-ordering and changes in the society. First, it was the laws and policies of the British imperialist: both administrators and missionaries and then that of the modern state. It will try to trace the varied instruments of colonialism that changed the traditional structure and impedes the principality that governs the Thadou-Kuki society. The synchronic question "what there is" based on fieldwork and observation gives a sense of contemporary societies (Saberwal, 2001, p. 33). To enlarge our understanding of phenomena, we also need to take into consideration the pre-colonial and colonial era or "How did it come to be?" This concerns becoming, a diachronic question, which takes us into processes, which were active in the past, stretched over various time horizons (ibid).

The term 'land' does not only mean the geographical meaning of it, but also includes "the people of a country". In definitions like this, we find the term is made more human and it is precisely this aspect of land that will be of interest to sociologists. A person's appointed and culturally defined place on his soil, his territorial citizenship, his type of residence, and those rights which underlie the various uses of his soil form an organic whole which in turn defined him and constitute and determine his identity. The research would centre on the close affinity between land and culture and illustrate how in the tribal realm the study of land would automatically unveil the sociological questions of identity, power, hierarchy, property, inheritance, status, kinship network, gender relations, livelihood and economy.
Review of Literature

1. Nature and Culture

Social ecology is the study of the interdependence of the biophysical and socio cultural domains (Guha, 1998, p. 5). The ecological infrastructures of human society are soil, water, fauna, climate, etc. (ibid, p. 5). The relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ has been studied either in terms of their interdependence by social ecologists or as a binary opposition by eco-feminist and structural anthropologists like Levi-Strauss. “Mukherjee emphasises that the relationship between nature and culture is both interactive and dynamic, with humans trying to mould the environment to their own ends but always having to work within the limits set by nature (Guha, 1998, pp. 19-20).” In studying man-land relations, the thesis focuses on the ‘interdependency’ aspect of the relationship to study the influence of nature on the social structure as also on how the social structure in turn influences the conceptualisation of the ecological relations.

Man’s affinity with his place of settlement is explained by Evans-Pritchard (1969) via the definition of tribe in his book, ‘The Nuer: A Description of the modes of livelihood and political institution of a Nilotic People.’ According to him a tribe is a group of people having: “(1) a common and distinct name; (2) a common sentiment; (3) a common and distinct territory; (4) a moral obligation to unite in war; (5) a moral obligation to settle feuds and other disputes by arbitration (Evans-pritchard, 1969, p. 122).” Each tribe is comprised of a dominant clan and the relation between the lineage structure of this clan and the territory system of the tribe is of great structural importance (ibid).

Robert S. Anderson and Walter Huber in their book, ‘The Hour of the Fox,’ gave a vivid picture of the close relationship between tribe and forest:

To a vast number of the tribal people the forest is their well-loved home, their livelihood, their very existence. It gives them food — fruits of all kinds, edible leaves, honey, nourishing roots, wild game and fish. It provides them with material to
build their homes and practise their arts. By exploiting its produce they can supplement their meagre incomes. It keeps them warm with its fuel and cool with its grateful shade. Their religion leads them to [make]...special sacrifices to the forest gods; in many places offerings are made to a tree before and after hunting...it is striking to see how in many of the myths and legends the deep sense of identity with the forest is emphasised. From time immemorial...the tribal people enjoyed the freedom to use the forest and hunt its animals and this has given them a conviction, which remains even today in their hearts that the forest belongs to them (Anderson et al, 1988, p. 36).

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in, 'Primitive Classification,' discuss the symbolic classifications prevalent in the society. No society is really simple but is complex each in its own way and everything is gendered, not only with regard to human relationships but the categories that people use to classify each element of the social systems. This is then reflected in the practices that orients the social structure and is manifested in the hierarchies embedded in the society (Durkheim et al., 1975). Humans' classify things because they were themselves divided into clans (ibid, p. 82). These classifications are modelled on the closest and the most fundamental form of social organisation (ibid). Therefore, the social organisation influences the functioning of the logical operations or the classification of things (ibid). "All nature is divided into class names and said to be male and female. The sun and moon and stars are said to be men and women, and to belong to classes just as the blacks themselves (ibid, p. 12)." All these constituted systems of hierarchized notions (ibid, p. 81).

Similarly, in 'Coral Gardens and their Magic: Soil-tilling and Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands,' Malinowski wrote about the imposing tendencies of man on nature. The relation between man and soil on the one hand transforms the land. On the one hand, human beings subdivide land, classify and apportion it, surround it with legal ideas, with sentiments and with mythological beliefs. On the other hand, their very relation to the soil also constrained them and shapes their existence. So, human beings live in families, work in village
communities, produce in teams, become organised by a common belief and common ritual of a magical character (Malinowski, 1966, p. 376). Thus, the relationship integrates human beings into a number of social units and transforms the soil from a merely physical into a culturally determined object (ibid, p. 341). Therefore, Mukerjee rightly says that man’s mastery of his region consists not in a one-sided exploitation but in a mutual give and take and this alone could keep alive the never-ending cycle of the region’s life processes (Mukerjee, 1998, p. 23).

The theory of symbolic classification is also applicable to the different form of social differentiation existing in the Indian social structure. In a complex society like India, there are different modes of productive organisation that gives rise to differing rights, duties and obligations, leading to particular patterns of property rights (Singh, 2009, p. 112-136). The right in the soil and the land tenure systems is different under the Caste System and the Chieftainship system of the Tribals. The land system and settlement pattern in most Indian villages are governed by the rules of hierarchy under the caste system which in turn influence the distribution of rights and privileges (as cited in Mandavdhare (ed.), 1993, P. 78). On the other hand, the land system of the hill tribes of Manipur, especially the subject of our study, the Thadou-Kukis’ is largely still governed by the chieftainship system. Under this system, the whole village is under the chief who acts as the overseer and accordingly distribute plots of land to the villagers.

Moreover, the rights to land in the Thadou-Kuki villages are gendered by the custom and tradition of the society. Women do not have equal access to land as the men despite the fact that the tribal societies are largely understood to be egalitarian in nature. Bina Agarwal in, ‘A Field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia,’ advocated the importance of individual ownership in promoting the well-being and empowerment of women. She asked the crucial questions: “Which organizational forms of landownership and control and institutional support structures could help establish women’s effective command over the land they claim? What legal reforms are still necessary? Would a greater
female presence in public decision-making bodies help promote rural women’s concerns? What would strengthen women’s ability to bargain with the community and the State and within the household (ibid, p. 467)?” Agarwal suggested many points for the struggle to attain social legitimacy of women’s claim for independent resources like land including—bargaining with the state (ibid, p. 496) and increasing women’s presence in public decision-making forums (ibid, p. 499). Many other scholars like Nitya Rao (2005), Smita Tewari Jassal (2001), M. Indira (2007), Tiplut Nongbri (2003), Kelkar and Nathan (1993) and Madhu Sarin (2003) also wrote on the question of woman access to land. Though they wrote about different context and locations, the underlying message is the same—women marginalisation and lack of autonomy over land.

Another concept that has been widely used to analyse the nature–culture relationship in the thesis is the concept of ‘reciprocity’ given by George E. “Tink” Tinker in his book, “American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty”. He posits four fundamental cultural differences between American Indian people as against the European people (Tinker, 2008, p. 7). They are: spatially as opposed to temporality; attachment to particular lands or territory; the priority of community over the individual; and a consistent notion of the interrelatedness of humans and the rest of creation (ibid).

Contrary to the biblical creation story of the Christians which sees human beings as privileged over the rest of creation, in American Indian cultures, there is no privileging of human beings in the scheme of things in the world (ibid, p. 66). Yet there are expectations of human beings towards his fellows in the created realm: from bears and squirrels to eagles and sparrows, trees, ants, rocks, and mountains (ibid). This is where the concept of “reciprocity” comes in. “Reciprocity involves first of all a spiritual understanding of the cosmos and the place of humans in the processes of the cosmic whole. It begins with an understanding that everything that humans do has effect on the rest of the world around us. Even when we cannot clearly know what the effect is in any particular act, we know that there is an effect (ibid, p.68).” The knowledge that
our every action has a corresponding affect necessitates the need to formulate a compensation of some form or some act of reciprocity (ibid, p. 68).

This necessity for reciprocity applies where there are necessary acts of violence as in hunting or harvesting (ibid). This is relevant to activities like harvesting of vegetable foods such as corn or the harvesting of medicinal such as cedar, even when only part of a plant is taken (ibid). "The ideal of harmony and balance requires that all share a respect for all other existent things, a respect for life and the avoidance of gratuitous or unthinking acts of violence. Maintaining harmony and balance requires that even necessary acts of violence be done "in a sacred way". Thus, nothing is taken from the earth without prayer and offering (ibid, p. 70)." These ceremonies of 'reciprocity' are often wrongly interpreted by missionaries who thought of these ceremonies as vain human attempts to placate some angry deity. In truth, they are sacrifices engaged in for the sake of the whole community's well-being (ibid, p. 69). The concept of reciprocity, which is a hallmark of most American Indian ceremonies, goes to the heart of issues of 'sustainability' which aims at maintaining a balance and tempering the negative affects of basic human survival techniques (ibid, p. 70).

2. Culture Ecology

Environmental influence on the cultural life of people has been widely studied in different societies. The classical work of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowsi on the Trobriand Islanders (1972, 1982, 1966, 1960), Marcel Mauss on the Eskimos (1979), Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer society of Sudan in Egypt (1969), Raymond Firth on the Polynesian society of Tikopia in Solomon Islands (1957, 1959) and Levi-Strauss's (1970) study of binary opposition of nature and culture are some of the studies conducted on the impact of the environment on the cultural life of the people, thus, revealing the close sentiment between land and man.

Marcel Mauss in "Seasonal Variations of the Eskimos" argues based on his study that the limitation on Eskimos settlements depends on the way in which the
environment acts, not on the individual, but on the group as a whole (Mauss, 1979, p. 35). In summer, individual Eskimo families live in tents, dispersed and scattered over an immense area; in winter, these families congregate in concentrated settlements composed of multi-family houses, often linked to one or more communal houses or Kashim, where collective ceremonies are performed (Mauss, 1979). Summer is marked by individualisation and winter by homogenisation.

Evans-Pritchard studies the Nuer society of Sudan in Egypt. The oecological (ecological) rhythm divides the Nuer year into two main divisions: the wet season when they live in villages and the dry season when they live in camps. The camp life falls into two parts, the earlier period of small, temporary camps and the later period of large concentrations in sites occupied every year (Evans-Pritchard, 1969, p. 93). Human social system, culture, religious values and economic pattern grew around the land. This is especially so in the case of the tribes of India whose source of sustenance is immediately from the forest products and produce.

For Evans-Pritchard, as he wrote in, "The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People," ecological space is more than mere physical distance, though it is affected by it (Evans-Pritchard, 1969, p. 109). The characters by which seasons are most clearly defined are those, which control the movements of the people: water, vegetation, movements of fish, & C (ibid, p.96). "Oecological (ecological) distance, in this sense, is a relation between communities defined in terms of density and distribution, and with reference to water, vegetation, animal and insect life, and so on (ibid, p. 109)." The time of a notable event is referred to the activities of that time, such as the formation of the early cattle camps, the time of weeding, the time of harvesting, and so on (ibid, p. 100). Likewise daily activities are timed by what Evans-Pritchard has called the 'cattle clock' (ibid, p. 101). The passage of time through the day is marked by the succession of tasks, which constitute the pastoral daily regime, and this is
used to coordinate their actions (ibid, pp. 100-101). ‘I shall return at milking’, ‘I shall start off when the calves come home,’ and so forth (ibid, p. 102).

The Nuer year is divided into two seasons, *tot* and *mai*, but the terms refers to the cluster of social activities characteristic of the height of the dry season and the depths of the rainy season. In this sense, Nuer may use the words as verbs in utterances such as ‘going to *tot* (or *mai*)’ in a certain place (ibid, p. 95). The times correspond to localities, to village residence and to residence in the cattle camps. Thus, his main concerned was the influence of ecological relations on the institutions of the society.

Savyasaachi (1991) studied the cultural ecology of the Koitors who lived in the forest of Abujhmar in Bastar in Madhya Pradesh. For him, a change towards modernization does not necessary mean an improvement in the living conditions of marginalised peoples. “Under the protectionist policy the process of social modernisation of tribals in India has been mediated primarily by groups of Hindu landlords, money-lenders and Christian missionaries. As regards economic modernisation, in general the tribal people over a period of time came into direct relation with the state with reference to land, forest and shifting cultivation (Savyasaachi, 1991, p. 260).” The protectionist policy does not recognise the possibility that man and forest can constitute a living space. It does not protect the forest for the Koitor but protects it for commercial exploitation. The Koitor participation to the market economy reduced them to unskilled labourers (ibid). In fact, the ban on shifting cultivation is destructive as they fail to provide an alternative mode of livelihood to the shifting cultivators (Savyasaachi, 1991). The policy labelled those engage in shifting cultivation as “relics of a pre-historic age” (ibid, p. 262).

Savyasaachi (2001) in the article, “Forest Dwellers and Tribals in India,” took the case of the Onges of Andaman Islands to describe how ritual identifies those elements that transform a place into living space. “The competition for ‘place’ between the Onges and the spirits is the basis of their movement across ‘space’
(Savyasaachi, 2001, p. 86)." It is their notion of work for self-sustenance like gathering food which shapes their living space (ibid). They believe that, although spirits, humans, and animals share a common space, it is through their different capacities for movement that each remains alive within their different places within that space (ibid). This space is shared between nature (including humans) and supernatural (including spirits), and between human beings and non-human beings (ibid, p. 87).

Ramachandra Guha in, “The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya”, studied the Kumaun and Garhwal region of Uttarakhand in India. He brings out the crucial relationship between colonialism and ecological decline through the introduction of commercial or scientific forestry. He argued that ecological history cannot merely be the history of changes in landscape. Ecological history ought to link environmental changes with changing, and competing, human perceptions of the ‘uses’ of nature (ibid, pp. ix-x). The Chipko Movement was primarily a peasant movement in defence of traditional rights in the forest and only secondarily, if at all, an ‘environmental’ or ‘feminist’ movement (ibid, p. viii). The traditional customary uses of the forest like ‘the lopping of trees and grazing, and the burning of the forest floor for fresh crop of grasses were curtailed because they were a serious threat to rationalized timber production (ibid, pp. 49-50). This led to Alienation of humans from nature. The loss of community ownership had effectively broken the link between humans and the forest (ibid, p.55). “Although the government had, in certain areas, made over limited tracts of forests to the villagers (the so-called ‘third class’ or ‘village’ forests) the proviso in the forest act that these forests must first be declared ‘reserved’ strengthened suspicion of the state’s true intentions (ibid, 55-56).”

Another important question asked by the book which is relevant for our thesis is—whether it is possible to relate the subordinate position of women in Uttarakhand to the enthusiastic support given by them to the Chipko Andolan (ibid, p. 109). The popular conception of Chipko is that of a romantic reunion of
humans, especially women, with nature (ibid, p. 173). "The dramatic act—often threatened but rarely brought into play—of hugging the tree to save it from the contractor's axe is the chief characteristic with which the movement is identified (ibid)." The hill women traditionally bore an extremely high share of family labour. They collect fodder, firewood and carry water, which form their main chores besides farming (p. 169). Their participation in Chipko (movement) may be partly due to an outcome of the increasing difficulty with which the tasks was accomplished in the deteriorating environment caused by deforestation (ibid, p. 175). The movement also shows the local people attachment to and dependence on the forest for their livelihood.

Clifford Geertz in, "Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia," introduce the concept of 'involution' to describe those culture patterns which, after having reached what would seem to be a definitive form, nonetheless fail either to stabilize or transform themselves into a new pattern but rather continue to develop by becoming internally more complicated (ibid, p. 80-81). Geertz gave the example of the Javanese cane worker. The Javanese cane worker remained a peasant at the same time that he became a coolie and persisted as a community-oriented household farmer at the same time that he became an industrial wage labourer. So, he had one foot in the rice terrace and the other on the mill (ibid, p. 89). In order for him to maintain this dual and uncomfortable stance, the estate has to adapt to the village through the land-lease system and various other "native-protection" devices forced on it by an 'ethical' colonial government, but, even more comprehensively, the village had to adapt to the estate (ibid, pp. 89-90). This mode of adaptation can be termed as "involutional". In the process, the basic pattern of village life was maintained and in some ways even strengthened, and the adjustment to the impingements of high capitalism affected through the complication of established institutions and practices (ibid, p. 90).

In land tenure, in crop regime, in work organization, and in the less directly economic aspects of social structure as well, the village faced the problem posed
by rising population, increased monetization, greater dependence on the market, mass labour organization, more intimate contact with bureaucratic government and the like. However, this did not lead to a "dissolution of the traditional pattern into an individualistic ‘rural proletarian’ anomie, nor yet by a metamorphosis of it into a modern commercial farming community" (ibid, p. 90). Geertz named this form of society as "post-traditional" (ibid).

In a similar line, Pierre Bourdieu’s book, ‘Outline of a Theory of Practice,’ is an ethnographic study on the agricultural cycle of the Kabylia people of Algeria. The ‘door of the year’ is the first day of ploughing and is considered the most decisive turning point of the transitional period (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 100). On the first day, each family sacrifices a cock, and associations and contracts are renewed (ibid). Then, there is the slack season or the dry season of the year (ibid). Ploughing and sowing begins immediately after the inaugural ceremony (which is also a rain-making rite), as soon as the land is sufficiently moist and this activity may go on until mid-December or even longer, depending on the region and the year (ibid). After the crops are harvested, there is also a period devoted to rest and to the celebrations of a plentiful harvest (ibid, p. 104). Bourdieu wrote about the significance of agricultural calendars in the agricultural life of a community.

Just as genealogy substitutes a space of unequivocal, homogenous relationships, established once and for all, for a spatially and temporally discontinuous set of islands of kinship, ranked and organised to suit the needs of the moment and brought up practical existence gradually and intermittently, and just as a map replaces the discontinuous, patchy space of geometry, so a calendar substitutes a linear, homogenous, continuous time for practical time, which is made up of incommensurable islands of duration, each with its own rhythm, the time that flies by or drags, depending on what one is doing, i.e. on the functions conferred on it by the activity in progress. By distributing ‘guide-marks’ (ceremonies and tasks) along a continuous line, one turns them into ‘dividing marks’ united in a relation of simple succession, thereby creating ex nihilo the question of the intervals and
correspondences between points which are no longer topologically but metrically equivalent (ibid, p. 105).

3. Identity as a Changing Processes

Among the classical sociological theorists, one finds detailed references to the question of identity in the writings of Charles Horton Cooley and George H. Mead. Charles Horton Cooley developed his concept of "the looking glass-self", in his book, "Human Nature and the Social Order." He formed the idea of 'self' through the process of introspection (Cooley, 1922). The kind of self-feeling a person has is determined by the attitude toward this attributed to that other mind (ibid, pp. 184-185). A social self of this type is called the reflected or looking-glass self (ibid, p. 184). The self-idea has three principal elements: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification (ibid, p. 184)." For him, self-consciousness and social consciousness are inseparable.

The concept of 'self' and 'I' also takes a central place in the work of George H. Mead. In his work, "Mind, Self and Society," Mead refers to the transformation of the biologic individual to the minded organism or self. According to Mead, the quality, which marks out man from other animal, is that they have mind through which they can gain control over the others. This takes place through the agency of language, and language in turn pre-supposes the existence of a certain kind of society (Mead, 1972). "The self has a character, which is different from that of the physiological organism proper. The self is something, which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1972, p. 135)." The essence of the self is cognitive: "it lies in the internalized conversation of gestures, which constitutes thinking, or in terms of
which thought or reflection proceeds (ibid, p. 173).” Hence, the origin and foundations of the self as in the case of thinking are social (ibid).

Porta and Diani stresses on the importance of collective action in the formation of identity. The construction of identity cannot be simply reduced to psychological mechanisms; it is a social process (Porta et. al, 1999, p. 85). They wrote that identity is not an immutable characteristic, pre-existing action. In other words, the evolution of collective action produces and encourages continuous redefinitions of identity (ibid, p. 87). With collective identity less dependent on direct, face-to-face interactions and more dependent on the media system and the telemetric revolution, (ibid, p. 88) the existing differences between the concept and meaning of space, land and even territory have increased in the present century. Erik H. Erickson recognised the impact of the society on the individual’s identity formation. He spoke of identity formation as a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). Another powerful aspect of social identities agreed upon by nearly all theorists is their historicity, or their evolutionary, and de-evolutionary, developments (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3).

We have discussed identity theories from a more individual level to a broader collective definition and that identities are capable of changing when influenced by its environment. The next identity questions that need to be understood for the purpose of our study are—“how are they formed, and how can they be transformed? Are identities simply the congealed effect of collective historical experience, or are they imposed on individuals from external forces, always within a strategy of domination? (Alcoff, 2003, p. 2).” For Linda Martin Alcoff, individuals make their own identity, but this may not necessarily happen under conditions of their own choosing. Identities are often created in the crucible of colonialism, racial and sexual subordination, and national conflicts, but also in the specificity of group histories and structural position (ibid, p. 3).
4. Cultural Identity and Colonial Discourse

In understanding the role played by colonial discourses in identity formation and its impact on the changes in land system of a Thadou-Kuki society, let us look at the postcolonial theories that will be relevant for our study. "'Post-colonial,' with its double meaning, denotes 'after colonialism' as well as the continuation of colonially produced social structures and cultural perceptions (Perera, 1998, p. 3). "Colonial discourse is a system of statements that can be made about colonies and colonial peoples, about colonising powers and about the relationship between these two. It is a system of knowledge and belief about the world within which acts of colonisation take place. Although, it is generated within the society and cultures of the colonisers, it becomes that discourse within which the colonised may also come to see themselves (as cited in Ashcroft et al, pp. 62-63)."

Based on his experiences as a Christian Palestinian having an American citizen and a resident of New York City, Edward Said demonstrated the paradoxical nature of identity in an increasingly migratory and globalised world (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 4). He insisted that all cultures are changing constantly, that culture and identity themselves are processes (ibid, p. 5). For Said, "identity is not static but is something that 'each age and society re-creates...over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions' (ibid, p. 112-113)."

"Orientalism" is the generic term employed by Edward Said in his book "Orientalism" to describe the Western approach to the Orient. Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice (Said, 1978, p. 73). In addition Edward Said uses the word "orientalism" to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line (ibid). The Oriental is considered to be irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal"
meaning that the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks (ibid, p. 40). “The division of the world into East and West had been centuries in the making and expressed the fundamental binary division on which all dealing with the Orient was based. But one side had the power to determine what the reality of both East and West might be (Ashcroft, 2002, p. 59).”

Edward Said in his book, “Culture and Imperialism,” discuss the importance of culture in maintaining the hegemony of imperialism. Said’s strategy for resistance elaborated through the term “voyage-in” encapsulates the two phases of decolonisation: “The first is the recovery of ‘geographical territory’, while the second is the ‘changing of cultural territory’. Hence, primary resistance that involves ‘fighting against outside intrusion’ is succeeded by secondary resistance that entails ideological or cultural reconstitution (as cited in Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 108).”

The Saidian strategy of resistance is the ability to make the ‘voyage in’, which is to write back to imperialism (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 116). “Said is adamant that rather than a ‘politics of blame’ which is ultimately backward-looking and self-defeating, post-colonial peoples may resist most effectively by engaging that dominant culture, by embarking on a ‘voyage in’, a powerful variety of hybrid cultural work which counters dominant culture without simply rejecting it (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 116).” These ‘voyage in’ represents a still unresolved contradiction or discrepancy within metropolitan culture, which through co-optation, dilution, and avoidance partly acknowledges and partly refuses the effort. The “voyage in” then constitutes an interesting variety of hybrid cultural work and is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures (Said, 1994, p. 244).

The Post-Colonial critic Homi Bhabha in his book, ‘The Location of Culture,’ offers a deconstruction of racial difference. Bhabha argues that the racist or colonial discourse in the west is predicated upon a binary opposition between racial identities: west/east, white/ black, colonizer/colonized, with the first term
in each coupling privileged over the other. Unlike Edward Said’s analysis which has been popular for several decades and which proposes a flat relation of domination and subordination, between the occident and orient, the work of Homi Bhabha has made the case that the relation between the colonizer and colonized is characterised by ambivalence (Seidman, 2001). The relation between the colonizer and colonized is a two-way exchange. It is not just an outside culture being imposed upon a colonial culture, but also the way colonies, despite their disempowerment and disadvantage, respond to that outside culture, and in many cases translate its imposition into acts of social insurgency and forms of culture innovation (Bhabha, 1994). He continues that the native subject, through the process, which might be described as psychological guerrilla warfare, can circumvent the operations of colonial power. Bhabha makes the analysis of the subjectivity of the colonizing experience, of its unconscious, central to the post-colonial experience (Seidman, 2001, p. 26).

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of “fixity” in the ideological construction of otherness (Bhabha, 2001, p. 388). “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction (Bhabha, 1994, p. 70).” “The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourses, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of similar fantasy and defence – the desire for an originality, which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture (ibid, p. 75).” Bhabha said that the discourse of colonialism is frequently populated with ‘terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 70).

For Bhabha, ‘Mimicry’ emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. “…Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite (ibid, p. 86).” Consequently, mimicry is “…the sign of a double
articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power (ibid)”. Bhabha gives as his example, Macauley’s infamous ‘Minute’ on Indian education in 1835, in which Macauley argued that the British in India needed a “...a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect—• in other words a Mimic man raised ‘through our English school’, and as a missionary educationist wrote in 1819, ‘to form a corps of translations and be employed in different departments of Labour (ibid, pp. 87)” The desire of colonial mimicry has a strategic objective, which Bhabha calls the “metonymy of presence”. This refers to the inappropriate signifiers of colonial discourse like the discriminatory identities constructed across traditional cultural norms and classifications, the Simian Black, the Lying Asiatic (ibid, p. 90). Thus, the partial imitation subverts the identity of which is being represented, and the relations of power, if not wholly reversed, certainly begin to fluctuate.

Susan Visvanathan in her book, “Friendship, Interiority and Mysticism: Essays in Dialogue,” wrote about the various ramifications of the Colonial discourses in India. The work of the missionaries often ran parallel to that of the colonial government (Visvanathan, 2007, p. 128). “The latter would legalise change when it became inevitable. The missionaries were catalysts in that they provided motivations and impulses to the possibilities of change (ibid).”

Another aspect of colonial discourse brought out by the book which is relevant to the thesis is the dialogue between the natives and the missionaries. “How should a native Christian continue to live as a Christian amongst his own people? How do you distinguish between the social and the religious? (ibid, p. 150). The engagement to Christianity often requires that the converts be in denial of their former world and worldview in order to conform to the colonizer’s understanding of the world. Conversion as a change of heart and being is possible dialogically by a process of seeking and trying to understand the spiritual experience of the other (ibid, p. 160). In her article, “Missionary Styles
and the Problem of Dialogue," Visvanathan writes about the dependence of the colonial missionary upon the native catechist. He assisted the missionary in the work of evangelization, in pastoral engagements and involvements, in education work as native teacher or master, in medical work as doctor and dresser, as translator and colporteur, and of course in Zenana work, as Bible woman, teacher and visitor (Visvanathan, 2007/Visvanathan, 1993, p.9). Therefore, local people were active participants in the projects of the mission societies.

Susan Visvanathan’s book, “The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba,” is an ethnographic study of the practice of Christianity in a small community in Kerala and the local people’s interpretation to the new religion. The two questions posed by the book that is used by the thesis are: “How do Syrian Christians perceive the past to which they are inextricably bound by their identity? (Visvanathan, 1999, p. xi)” and “What does it mean to be a Christian in terms of ritual and belief? (ibid)” These questions have been contextualised to the case of the Thadou-Kukis and their experiences with Christianity.

The book also discussed the property rights and domestic relationships of the Orthodox Jacobite Syrian Christians of Kerala. Stridhanam or female’s wealth is the spaces in which the book discussed the concept of property rights. “Stridhanam is generally a very large sum of money (often running into lakhs of rupees) given by the father of the bride to the groom’s father. The woman no longer has a share in her father’s property (Visvanathan, 1999, p. 110).” As Susan Visvanathan had stated in the case of the Syrian Christian household, inheritance customs express the dominant place of the patriarch in the Thadou-Kuki society as well.

As the Thadou-Kukis or Kukis did not have written records before the advent of the British, the accounts of the colonial administrators and Missionaries became an important basis for understanding their history and identity. John Macrae’s ‘Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas,’ published by the Asiatic Researches in 1801
was the pioneering literature for the Kukis. He wrote about the origin, institution of chieftainship system and marriage, modes of warfare and settlement of disputes, cultivation and domestication of animals, concept of god or the 'supreme being' (Macrae, 1979, p. 188). He noted that the Kukis were savage people with a most vindictive disposition: blood must always be shed for blood (ibid, p. 189). Rev. M. Barbe, a missionary in the interior of the district of Chittagong wrote about the migratory and independent nature of the Kukis in 1845. He called them 'children of nature' due to their mastery over nature and its resources. The Kukis would venture on hunting excursions when their agricultural labours are finished (Barbe, 1845, p. 386).

Another book that has been widely used in this thesis is by Lieut. R. Stewart's writing 'Notes on Northern Cachar,' in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1855. The uniqueness of his writing is that he was able to give a clear-cut distinction between the old Kukis and new Kukis ways of life. He draws the cultural parallelism and differences between the groups of people clubbed together under the banner of Old Kukis and New Kukis, and also their differences with the neighbouring Nagas. The book is a broad outline of the people residing in North Cachar hills in the 17th century (Stewart, 1855). G.A. Grierson's 'Linguistic Survey of India,' is based on a survey done in 1903-1928. He listed the Thado (Thadou) as belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family of language. The total speakers of Thado (Thadou) dialects during the period of his survey were: Manipur—20,000, Naga Hills—5,500, Cachar Plains—5,403 and Sylhet—534, totalling to 31,437 (Grierson, 1990).

Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear wrote 'The Lushei Kuki Clans' in 1912. The group classified as the New Kukis were synonymous with the Thado (Thadou) clan. He

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3. John Macrae was a surgeon with the British East India Company at Chittagong. His writing was based on information given to him by a native of Rangamati district who was a captive of the Kukis for twenty years.

4. Grierson did not include North Cachar.
estimated the Thadou-Kuki population in the northern Cachar Hills and in the un-administered tracts between the Naga Hills and Manipur on the west and the upper Chindwin district of Burma on the east to be about 37,000 souls. The four main families are the Doungel, Sitlhou, Haokip and Kipgen. He gives accounts of the various institutions in the society like priest ship, marriage, warfare, religious rites and sacrifices and Thadou Folktales.

C.A. Soppitt, Assistant Commissioner, Burma, late sub-divisional officer of the North Cachar hills of Assam wrote 'A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes' which was first published in 1893. Besides the usual accounts of a colonial administrator which includes the physical characteristics, habits and religion, marriage and inheritance, government and village, crimes and oaths, superstitions and legends and an outline of grammar at the end, he revealed the true intention of an administrator's account of a tribe. He wrote:

The various Kuki laws treating on marriage, rights of succession, &C., will, the writer trusts, prove of value to officials in frontier districts, who are called upon to decide cases in which the tribal customary procedure can be the only guide to a correct decision (Soppit, 1976).

The most quoted and critically acclaimed book written on the Thadou-Kukis is the book by William Shaw, 'Notes on the Thadou-Kukis,' written in 1929. He acknowledged the scattered nature of the Thadous as inhabiting parts of the North Cachar Hills, the Naga Hills, the Manipur State and spreading east into the Chin Hills and Somra Tract. William Shaw gave a description of the origins and genealogies, historical traditions, customs, rites and beliefs, village, occupations, language and folk tales. He was assisted by a native, Jamkithang, a Thado (Thadou) of the Sitlhou clan, second clerk of Tamenglong sub-division, Manipur State, Kopsat, Dongpu and many chiefs of the various clans in codification of the customs and beliefs. Therefore, as J.H. Hutton who wrote the

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5 This book was based on the author's seven years experience as a sub-divisional officer of the North West area of Manipur State amongst the Nagas and Thadou-Kukis.
introductory writings pointed out that it was bias towards the Sitlhou point of view.

5. Narrative, Territory and Identity

Different strands of narratives simultaneously existing in a society plays an important role in shaping the identity of a person or the community as a whole. Identities, “...are both imposed and self-made, produced through the interplay of names and social roles foisted on us by dominant narratives together with the particular choices families, communities, and individuals make over how to interpret, and resist, those impositions as well as how to grapple with their real historical experiences (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3).” Our interest is in the kind of narratives that determines the way land and identity diffused.

In some ways, the social order in the Thadou-Kuki society today has come to resemble an onion, each layer of which is a different age group. With the demise of the extended family, the segregation between generations has only gotten worse. The significance of the older populace in most tribal societies permeates beyond the boundaries of familial relations to a wider network of the society. They are important carriers or reservoirs of age-old traditions, reminders to our cultural heritage, and observers to a society in transition. These elders have been involuntarily, self-appointed recorders of the past since ancient times. It was only with the coming of the colonial missionaries, a century ago that the age-old and time-tested oral tradition found another medium of expression in the written word.

In a society like the Thadou-Kukis, which does not have a written literature before the advent of British Imperialist, oral tradition plays an important role in their understanding of their own history, social customs and social structure. Myth, stories, folktales, histories, gossips, informants’ account and legends are passed down by word of mouth. Thus, for a society with no written records, myth becomes history to form a probable or acceptable presumption of origin.
from which they can derive their identity and understand their origin and history.

Myth means a traditional story accepted as history, serves to explain the worldview of a people. According to Mircea Eliade in 'Myth and Reality,' 'myth' means a 'true story' and beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant (Eliade, 1964, p. 1). Today, that is, the word is employed in both the sense of "fiction" or "illusion" and in those families especially to ethnologists, sociologists and historians of religions, the sense of sacred tradition, primordial revelation, and exemplary model (ibid). Although the actors in myths are usually Gods and Supernatural beings, while those in tales are heroes or miraculous animals, all the actors share the common trait that they do not belong to the everyday world (ibid, pp. 10-11). The story narrated by the myth constitutes a "knowledge" which is esoteric, not only because it is secret and is handed on during the course of an initiation but also because the "knowledge" is accompanied by a magico-religious power. For knowing the origin of an object, an animat plant, and so on is equivalent to acquiring a magical power over them by which they can be controlled, multiplied, or reproduced at will (ibid, p. 15).

To understand the state of the society in the pre-colonial period, oral narratives are an important means of understanding the past. Jan Vansina (1985, p. xi) wrote, "Whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation". He continued, "Ancient things are today. Yes, oral traditions are documents of the present, because they are told in the present. Yet, they also embody a message from the past, so they are expressions of the past at the same time. They are the representation of the past in the present (ibid, p. xii)." Oral narratives can be treated as the collective voice of society, the voice of tradition (Chatterji, 1985, p. 269). "Originality of style and innovations in the means of expression are not considered important in the narrative in the same
manner as in modern fictional literature, where originality is a value in itself (ibid).”

“The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have conceptualised the process of the appropriation of land and its confiscation form those who have formerly worked it, with or without legal title, through the concepts of what they call ‘territorialization’ and ‘deterritorialization.’ A third moment of ‘reterritorialisation’ describes the violent dynamics of the colonial or imperial propagation of economic, cultural, and social transformation of the indigenous culture, at the same time as characterizing the successful process of resistance to deterritorialization through the anti-colonial movements. Other forms of resistance have developed in the postcolonial state: combative negotiation with the state (Young, 2003, p. 52).”

Deterritorialisation is described by Deleuze and Guattari in myriads of ways: in Anti-Oedipus (1984), deterritorialisation is spoken of as ‘a coming undone whereas in ‘A Thousand Plateaus (1988),’ deterritorialisation constitutes the cutting edge of an assemblage (as cited in Parr, 2005, p. 66). “In their final collaboration—what is philosophy? (1994) —Deleuze and Guattari posit that “deterritorialisation” can be physical, mental or spiritual (ibid).” Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with overcoming the dualistic framework underpinning western philosophy (being/ non-being, original/ copy and so on). In this regard, the relationship “deterritorialisation” has to “reterritorialisation” must not be construed negatively or be considered as polar opposite of each other. The concept “deterritorialisation” is inherent in a territory as its transformative vector and is thereby tied to the very possibility of change immanent to a given territory (ibid).

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6 Territorialisation refers to any establishment of a set of relations between people and an environment of objects, spaces, etc. In a narrower sense, it refers to the imposition of categories on others, which are enforced through organisations of social and physical space.
Deleuze and Guattari discuss and use deterritorialisation in several different theoretical contexts. Some of which are art, music, literature, philosophy and politics. For example, in the western visual arts, faces and landscapes are deterritorialised (ibid). They cite an example from the life of composer Olivier Messiaen who, from around 1955 on, used bird song in his compositions (Parr, 2005, ibid, pp. 67-68):

In this work, he did not just imitate the songs of birds; rather he brought birdsong into relation with the piano in a manner that transformed the territory of the musical instrument (piano) and the birdsong itself (ibid, p. 68). Here the distinctive tone, timbre and tempo of birdsongs were fundamentally changed the moment these elements connected with musical organisation. Similarly, Messiaen’s compositional style also changed when it entered into a relation with birdsong, whereby these compositions could be described in terms of a becoming-bird (ibid).

The way in which the birds refrain is a territorial sign (ibid). Deleuze and Guattari address territoriality from the position of what is produced by the biological function of mating, hunting, eating and so forth, arguing that territoriality actually organises the functions’ and not the other way round (ibid).

Apart from biology, Deleuze and Guattari extend a political use to them. "Leaning upon Karl Marx, they posit that labour-power is deterritorialised the moment it is freed from the means of production. That selfsame labour-power can be described as being reterritorialised when it is then connected to another means of production (ibid, p. 69)." Deleuze and Guattari wrote:

During the early phases of industrialisation when capitalism was really gaining momentum, a system of deterritorialising flows prevailed: markets were expanding, social activities were undergoing radical changes, and populations moved from rural to urban environments. In one sense rural labour power was deterritorialised (peasant and landowner) but in another sense it was reterritorialised (factory worker and industrial capitalist). Commenting on capitalism, they insist that deterritorialised flows of code are reterritorialised into
the axiomatic of capitalism and it is this connection between the two processes that constitutes the capitalist social machine (ibid).

Liisa Malkki in her article, 'National Geographic: The Rootings of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,' while not denying the importance of place in the construction of identities, has posited that the two concept 'deterritorialization' and 'identity' are intimately linked (Malkki, 1992, p. 38). She re-examined the taken for granted assumption of people as deriving their identity only through their rootedness to a place and the need to rethink the question of roots in relation to identity and to the form of its territorialisation (ibid, p. 24). Malkki also brings out the relationship between the concept of culture and of nation. The concept of culture has many points of connection with that of the nation, and is likewise thought to be rooted in concrete localities. These botanical concepts of notions of rootedness in concrete localities reflect a metaphysical sedentarism in scholarly and other contexts (ibid, p. 34). The notions of nativeness and native place become more complex as people started identifying themselves in reference to deterritorialized 'homelands,' 'cultures,' and 'origins' (ibid, p. 24). There is also a tendency to inventing the notion of homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases—not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit (ibid). "Motherland and fatherland, aside from their other historical connotations, suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it. By implication, it is impossible to be a part of more than one tree. Such a tree evokes both temporal continuity of essence and territorial rootedness (ibid, p. 28)."

Malkki discussed the case of the contemporary category of refugees:

The naturalisation of the links between people and place leads to a vision of displacement as pathological, and this, too, is conceived in botanical terms, as uprootedness. Uprootedness comes to signal a loss of moral and, later, emotional bearings. Since both cultural and national identities are conceived in territorialised terms, uprootedness also threatens to denature and spoil these (Malkki, 1992,p.34).
Identity is therefore, "...always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera (ibid, p. 37)."

**Statement of the Problem**

One dictionary definition for "land" is "the people of a country," as in "the land rose in rebellion." Similarly, soil is often "national soil." Here, the territory itself is made more human (Malkki, 1992, p. 26). Like the nation, culture has for long been conceived as something existing in "soil", and an indicator would be that the term culture is derived from the Latin for cultivation (ibid, p. 29).

Discourses and interdependence between humankind and ecology, palpable in day-to-day habits of most tribal societies usually becomes ingrained in their customary practices. Amongst the Thadou-Kukis of Manipur, the primeval religion before the advent of the Christianity, mythologies and legends reflects their worldview and close sentiments towards nature in general. There are social institutions that are set up to mediate or handle land as a part of the ecological structure like the Chieftainship system and *Thempu* system (priestly role). Therefore, the research asked the question—how does the ecological relation influence the institutions in the society and how does the social structure in turn influence the conceptualization of the ecological relations?

Land, in the form of agricultural activities and festivals is highly ritualised. While Durkheim emphasizes the integrative functions of ritual through his concepts of 'collective representation,' and 'collective conscience,' (1965) Mary Douglas defined ritual as a form of communication (1970) and Victor Turner (1981) used the concept of 'social drama' to define rituals. Contextualising these theories to our universe of study, the research asked the questions: what is the sociological significance and role of these agricultural rituals in the Thadou-Kuki society? What kind of power relation and meanings does the social discourse between humans and spirits portray? What does it reflect about the man-land relationships, and therefore, land and identity relationships in the society?
Colonialism was an experience that brought about lasting changes in the society. The colonial intervention, especially in the form of religious ideologies and practise affected the Weltanschauung of the Thadou-Kuki society. What was local people's interpretation of the reason behind their customs and venerations? How has the discourse and interaction with colonialism affected the relationship between land and man in the society? How far are the colonial agencies responsible for the alteration of social relationships and to identity? Is it change in the social institution affecting nature culture relationship or vice-versa?

There is a need to study the local peoples' conception of space and the forms of territorialisation wrought on these systems by the period of colonial subjugation. In studying societies and changes, Robert Redfield, analysed change at two organisational levels. In a civilization, there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many (Redfield, 1969, p. 70). The two traditions are interdependent (ibid, p. 71). It is based on the evolutionary view that civilization or the structure of tradition (which consists of both cultural and social structures) grows in two stages: first, through orthogenetic or indigenous evolution, and second, through heterogeneity encounters or contacts with other cultures or civilisations (Chopra, 2009, p. 841-842). What is the nature of social change brought about by colonialism in the society under study? What are the form ideological and cultural reconstitutions it entails?

Colonial bureaucrats, Christianity, as put forward by the missionaries, and the tribal society in general had distinct and clearly defined identities and cultural contours. The interaction is comparable to the meeting of the 'little tradition' and 'great tradition' as given by Redfield. Hence, their encounter, interaction and resultant shapes taken by them formed both a promising and interesting field of study. What is the contribution of the colonial administrators and the missionary in restructuring the power structure and the re-ordering of space and society amongst the Hill tribes of Manipur, particularly the Thadou-Kukis?
The Concept of land and land rights for the Hill Tribes of Manipur started as a collective enterprises. The British were the first to ask the wrong question of, "who owns this land?", when they came to India, based on their understanding of European and Roman Land Laws. The British colonial administration formed land related laws created as a merger between the newly introduced British law and the traditional system. This trend of governance based on an alien mode of administration has continued in the postcolonial era in the Indian Government policies towards the hill tribes. Various Acts have been enacted such as the Manipur Hill People Administration Regulation Act, 1947, The Manipur Village Authorities in Hill Areas Act, 1956, The Manipur Hill Areas Acquisition of Chief's Rights Act, 1967, The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, and The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960 respectively. The research asked the question--What is the impact of the various acts on the villagers' relationship to land?

There is complexities in land relations as well as in the social life of the people due to the imposition of an administration, which do not really understand the existential reality of the ruled. Its irrelevance and insensitivity makes it undesirable to the local people. However, the fact that they are laws issued by a mightier authority makes it a dominant power. Therefore, the realities in most villages today are the side-by-side existence of traditional laws and government laws. Like most of the postcolonial societies, combative negotiation with the state as a form of resistance or the Saidian concept of 'voyage-in' is a common recurrences. The research asked the crucial questions--what is the concept of land rights according to the state? How has the two varied concept collide over the years? What impact do they have on the Thadou-Kukis concept of land rights?

For Durkheim and Mauss, the social organisation influences the functioning of the logical operations or the classification of things (Durkheim et al., 1975). Similarly, in the Thadou-Kuki society, the fight for rights to land sometime starts
within the clan, lineage or family where some sections are deprived of their rightful inheritance. Inequality in gender relations within the family is extended at the socio-political level. The feminist theorists like Ann Oakley (1974 & 1981) and Sherry Ortner (1974) supported the perspective that gender roles are product of culture rather than biology and that individuals are socialised into their respective male and female roles. The woman land rights in the Thadou-Kuki society is determined by the customary norms of the society. The question of gender relations within the family and women's role and position in the society and the issue of inheritance influence the matrix of the relationship between land and woman.

The feminist public-private debate stated that women sub-ordination and oppression would be solved if women are encouraged into the public sphere viz., in the public decision making fora. Bina Agarwal (1998, p. xv) positing the case of South Asia emphasised on the importance of individual ownership in promoting the wellbeing and empowerment of women. So, the research questions evolved around what hindered the women access to land? What are the institutions that directly or indirectly support the patriarchal hegemony over land and what is the affect of religion in the relationship between land and women in the society?

Another dimension of land and culture relationship that is problematic is the agrarian societies. The economy of the Thadou-Kukis was characterised by closely related bonds of kinship operative through families, clans and kindred governed production and distribution. Robert Redfield (1969, pp. 270-28 classifies between peasants and farmers, viz, between those who makes a living out of it and those who look at land as capital for business ventures. Another classical agrarian theoretician Alexander Chayanov's (Thorner et. al, 1987, p.xiii) gave a definition of pure family farm as one that employs no hired wage labour but is solely dependent on the work of the members of family. How relevant is this in the context of the Thadou-Kuki society? What is the degree of penetration of capitalist relations into agriculture? For Kautsky (Banaji, 1976, p.11), the
indicators of the capitalist character of modern agriculture were individual ownership of land, and the commodity character of its products. In positioning the tribal land tenure system within the wider context of the country, how different is it as compared to the agrarian societies under the caste system.

The study of land tenure inevitably resolves itself into a number of questions as to how land is used by the community and its members. It can reveal to us the customary or legal system of titles—that is of rights, privileges and responsibilities attached to the soil. What are the rights, privileges and responsibilities in relation to land in the Thadou-Kuki society? How dependent are they on land for livelihood and have this dependence on land changes over the years? Is the agrarian village landholding structure able to sustain livelihood of the people? For Karl Marx (Morrison, 1995, pp. 66-67), the products produced by labour in tribal society did not assume the form of commodities because their labour was produced by cooperation rather than isolated acts of labour. The agriculture system by tradition is a collective enterprise characterised by self-sufficiency and communal and family labour. How is the agrarian labour system organised in the society? What is the nature of agrarian transition in the hills?

The Locale: Encounter and Experiences

The Universe of Study is the Thadou-Kuki dominated areas of Manipur where the influence of British Colonialism was more prominent. The three areas selected for fieldwork are Tujang Vaichong7, Motbung and Kangpokpi. The three areas fall within the Sadar Hills Sub-division of the Senapati District of Manipur. Senapati District is one of the nine districts of Manipur and lies in the North West of the state. The hill areas of Manipur are not covered under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution, but under a state legislation, the Manipur Hill

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7 The Government records used the word, ‘Tujang Vaichong’ whereas the local inhabitants call themselves,‘Tujang Waichong.’
Source: http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/manipur/manipur.htm
State: MANIPUR
District: Senapati

Areas District Councils Act, 1971. This Act established six autonomous district councils in Manipur, covering five districts. Senapati district has two autonomous district council—Senapati ADC and Sadar Hills ADC. The three villages had been the mission stations in the colonial missionaries' days. Since the three villages that constitute my field are under three different types of authority system, the land system also slightly differs from one region to another, however the basic structure is the same for all Kuki dominated areas.

The first two villages, is a typical traditional Thadou-Kuki villages which is under chieftainship. The members of the village council assist the chief. Kangpokpi is not under chieftainship system but exist under the autonomy of a town committee called the Kangpokpi Urban Town Committee. This difference in the choice of leadership is an important marker of the rural urban differences. Choices of leadership in rural areas tends to be more on the basis of the known personal qualities of the individual than in urban areas, mainly because of far greater face-to-face contacts and more intimate face-to-face contacts and more intimate knowledge of individuals than is possible in urban areas (Chitambar, 1973, pp. 134-135). However, it is irrelevant to conceive societal types in pure dichotomy. With increasing interactions between all types of societies through modern means of transportation and communication, the frontiers of different cultures are breaking down (Oomen, 1984, p. 19). This is relevant to the society under study.

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8 Planning for the Sixth Schedule Areas, 2007 (September), Report of the Expert Committee, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, New Delhi

9 An autonomous area is an area of a country that has a degree of autonomy, or freedom from an external authority. Typically it is either geographically distinct from the rest of the country or populated by a national minority (Autonomous Area, Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_area, accessed date: 2nd July, 2011)
### Demographic Profile of the Field

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<th>Census of 2001 (No. of Population)</th>
<th>Local Records (No. of Househo ld) 2008</th>
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<td>Female-1572</td>
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<td>Female-1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangpokpi</td>
<td>Sadar-Hills West Sub-Div of Senapati Dist.</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>4584</td>
<td>1662</td>
<td>9092</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Female-2256</td>
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<td>Female-4600</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In defining the distribution of socio-spatial categories, Evans-Pritchard uses the term, “Structural Distance” that means the distance between groups of person in a social system, expressed in terms of values (Evans-Pritchard, 1969, pp. 120). Structural distance is the distance between groups of persons in social structure and is influenced in its political dimension by its ecological conditions (ibid, p. 109). The character of scattered habitation of the Thadou-Kuki tribe resembles

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11 Chief’s of Tujang Vaichong Record, 2008
12 Motbung Village Hill House Counting, Population Census 2008
13 The Ward wise hill house counting for the year 2008 by SDC Kangpokpi, Kangpokpi Urban Town Committee, Under Sadar Hills Autonomous District Council Administration, Kangpokpi
the Nuer tribe of the Nilotic people who lived in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and among whom Evans-Pritchard conduct his study. A Nuer village, he wrote may be equidistant from two other villages, but if one of these belongs to a different tribe and the other to the same tribe it may be said to be structurally more distant from the first than from the second. A Nuer tribe, which is separated by forty miles from another Nuer tribe, is structurally nearer to it than to a neighbouring Dinka tribe from which it is separated by only twenty miles (ibid, p. 120).

Tujang Vaichong is the village in which the Colonial Missionaries built the first Kuki Church in 1916. The Kuki Baptist Convention continued to be the only Church in the village until today. Tour diaries of the political agent in Manipur for 1938-39 record the complaint of the people of this village to the colonial government on the begar or pothang system that they are made to carry more than their fair share to Kangpokpi. This document records the distance between Imphal and Tujang Vaichong to be 42 miles on July 21st 1938.¹⁴ Tujang Vaichong is a village with a household population of 156 as per the government census of 2001. The number of household as per the chief’s record in 2008 is 194 out of which 78 are non-Kuki. It is around 40 kms away from Kangpokpi, and Kangpokpi is around 50 km north of Imphal. There is a large-scale migration to Kangpokpi (the third field area), which have evolved into a full-fledged town. The push factor could be the lack of amenities, which are crucial for development like education system, electricity or power, proper transportation and communication system. A household survey was done in 65 houses. It still follows many of the traditional customary laws and practices. The chief still has a legitimate rule over the people. The chief is a resourceful woman in her eighties, acting on behalf of her son who is a government employee. Women have never been elected as members of the village authority to assist the chief. The chief still has a legitimate rule over the people.

¹⁴ Tour Dairies of Political Agent in Manipur for 1938-9, G.P. Stewart, Esqr., I.C.S, Political Agent for the month of April, 1938
Tujang Vaichong under Imphal-Tamenglong Road\textsuperscript{15} is under Kangpokpi Police Station. Tujang Vaichong is around 40 kms away from Kangpokpi, and Kangpokpi is around 50 km north of Imphal. It is in the borderline between Senapati and Tamenglong district. There are many villages between Kangpokpi and Tujang Vaichong village. The roads are extremely bad and transportation is very unreliable and uncomfortable. There is no electricity supply in the village and people use solar lamps to light up their houses at night. There was one movie/video hall in the whole village. It runs with the help of a generator, which is recharged in the nearest town. The village was partitioned into two main zones—\textit{Bazaar Veng} is on the National highway. It has all the government offices and main shops, schools, temple etc. The Nepalis, meaning the people who originated from Nepal, also reside in this area mostly. This zone lies in the periphery of the village. It lies in the plain area. The second section comprises of four neighbourhoods. They are—\textit{Toulpi veng}, \textit{Boljang veng}, \textit{Khoto veng (Lhanglang veng)} and \textit{Vengthah/Lhanghoi veng}. It is about 20 minutes walk up the steep hill to reach this place. The chief’s residence is located here.

Motbung is a semi-town where both modernization and traditional practices existed side by side. The pioneer church is still functioning with a different name. The village chief still exists in name but it is the village council who has the authority. Motbung village is located on the National Highway 39 in Manipur, which is about 26 kms from Imphal, the capital. Chieftainship system is still functional and the present chief is a postgraduate from the North Eastern Hill University. Motbung was the result of the union of many small villages who had come together at the initiation of the first chief Pu Lunneh in the 1930's.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Imphal-Tamenglong Road is popularly known as ‘IT road’ by the local inhabitants of Kangpokpi and Tujang Vaichong village. IT road is a road in Kangpokpi town in Senapati district that leads to Tamenglong district. Tujang Vaichong is a village in the border of the two districts.

\textsuperscript{16} A descendant of the old chief of one of the merged village narrates his displeasure over the merger that had happened in his father’s time. He narrates how his ancestor had been fooled into giving up their land rights. This was the same with the Phoipi chief.
The village council consists of 14 members, who are loosely elected by the community from the village itself. Women are not presented on this traditional council. As per 2001 census, the village had about 478 household, but as per the chief census of 2008, the household population was 609. The village was divided into ten small neighbourhoods. In order to get a proper representation of the population, 20 houses were selected out of each lane. The village had ten lanes. They were—

1. Aithuh Veng (neighbourhood)
2. Phoipi Veng (neighbourhood)
3. Forest Veng (neighbourhood)
4. Lhungjang Veng (neighbourhood)
5. Salem Veng (neighbourhood)
6. Nazereth Veng (neighbourhood)
7. Inpi Veng (neighbourhood)
8. Sharon Veng (neighbourhood)
9. Bethlehem Veng (neighbourhood)
10. Bethel Veng (neighbourhood)

Motbung had only about four different churches, which was quite surprising for a moderate size village. They were Motbung Baptist Church, Biblical Baptist Church, Immanuel Baptist Church, Gospel light Baptist Church, Judaism with MBC having the greater membership. Perhaps the fact that it is the oldest church and the chief is a member to it contributed to its growth. The Motbung Baptist Church was established on 1st January 1944 under the Chief ship of Mr. Lunneh.
All the church other than Judaism follows the Baptist doctrine so it is surprising as to why it is divided. The church plays an important role in the society too. Kangpokpi represents an altogether different entity. It is not under chieftainship system but under the Kangpokpi Urban Town Committee. It is under Sadar Hills Autonomous District Council Administration. The District Council conducted the general election. There are fifteen members in the committee and the term is for three years. There has never been a women member in the committee ever since its inception. However, the president and the secretary of the Kangpokpi Women Welfare Organisation (the prominent and only women organisation in Kangpokpi in the secular sphere) are invited to attend the meetings of the Kangpokpi Urban Town Committee over community issues. Chieftainship system has never existed in any form in Kangpokpi. The authority system that exists before was called ‘Bazar Board.’ The KUTC is a continuation of this bazar board. The number of house as per the 2008 census is 1662. The town is divided into fifteen wards. The appropriate term is hill-urban, which is purely under district council. The apex governing body is the district council. The local governance is based on the customary laws and traditions with certain amendments. A household survey was conducted of 40 houses of each of the 15 wards/ locality. The town has about 17 churches, 18 NGOs, 34 government offices, 2 Hindu temple, 14 schools and 3 colleges etc. The Kangpokpi Christian Church is the church with the largest population in the area.

Senapati District, one of the nine districts of Manipur is composed of six Sub-Divisions: Sadar Hills West Sub-division, Saitu Gamphazol Sub-division, Sadar Hills East-division, Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Sub-divisions respectively. As per the 2001 Census, 78.5 % of the population in Senapati District belongs to the Scheduled Tribe group of people and constituted 16.6 % of the total

17 The chief had a mastermind plan to bring all the church under one umbrella for further unification of its people. A divided church he thought would affect the unity of the people.
Scheduled Tribe population in Manipur.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the three areas that has been selected as field area, namely Tujang Vaichong village, Motbung Village and Kangpokpi Urban Town falls within two different sub-division of Senapati district. A map of the location of the sub-divisions and the Senapati District itself is attached at the end of the thesis.

The three areas are still dominantly an agricultural community and land still plays an important deciding factor in the cultural life of the people. They fall within the Sadar Hills division, where the local people have been demanding a full-fledged district for all Kukis of Manipur. Bandhs and strikes were frequent due to the government inability to fulfil their demand. During my fieldwork days in between August-December 2008, the Motbung village had organised an inter-village football tournament called the ‘Mangboi Trophy.’ Many villages and football team from the neighbouring villages had come to participate to win the coveted title. Moreover, the UPA government scheme for rural village or the National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes was being carried out. Each household had one member to work and they were promised 80 rupees per day for 100 days. The roads to the lanes were made bigger to enable even big vehicles to go inside. There were a lot of commotion and disputes regarding the carving out of bigger roads as this would go against the interest of the landowners whose land was taken. The village authorities were made to check on the workers and give direction to the work. This scheme is relevant to the tribal society as they are used to working in groups as a continuation of their ‘lom’\textsuperscript{19} system or organisational labour corps.

The thesis records another land-based agitation in the hills of Manipur. On 29\textsuperscript{th} July, 2010, a total bandh for 12 hours was called in the hills and tribal areas of

\textsuperscript{18} Census of India, 2001, Manipur (Data Highlights: The Scheduled Tribes), Office of the Registrar General, India, \url{http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_manipur.pdf}, accessed date 12\textsuperscript{th} may, 2011

\textsuperscript{19} Lom is the organisational set-up for the purpose of agricultural activity. It is a form of social arrangement of labour. The topic is discussed more elaborately in chapter 6 of the thesis.
Churachandpur, Chandel, Tamenglong and Sadar Hills in Senapati Districts of Manipur by the COPTAM (Committee on Protection of Tribal Areas) and supported by CDSU (Churachandpur District Student Union) and TPFM (Tribal's People Forum Manipur). Overlapping Census Operation, 2011, Redrawing of district boundaries, improper maintenance of tribal land records and dual taxation of the hill-tribes were the main reason for discontentment. Of the five hill districts of Manipur, namely—Senapati (Senapati and Sadar Hills), Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Chandel, according to the map redrawn by the Manipur Remote Sensing Application Centre (MARSAC), many tribal villages in close proximity are merged with the valley districts. For instance out of 14 villages within the revenue jurisdiction of Imphal west under Lamshang sub-division, 10 were also found included in the Sadar Hills (Kangpokpi) as per Hill house Tax Payment records of the Hill Department. The Committee of Protection of Tribal Areas Manipur (COPTAM) is also demanding rectification of overlapping district boundaries in the census operation. The body demands de-linking of revenue collection from the Census operation and district boundary demarcation, and an immediate conduct of Census in the overlapping villages to be carried out by concerned hill districts as was done till 2001 Census. They are also demanding maintaining of land records in the respective hill districts and collection of land revenues thereof by the concerned hill districts and initiation of constitutional protection of Manipur tribal areas as was done in all tribal areas of North-East India. Subsequently, bandhs and strikes were frequent as a part of land rights assertion of the hill tribes.

**Methods and Techniques of Research**

The research proposes to use the ethnographic method, which would include observation and both structured and unstructured interviews. It will also be

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inductive and exploratory\textsuperscript{21} in nature. It made use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes the official writings like government reports, Census, military or topographical reports, gazetteers, administrative reports, and archival materials, ethnographic and academic monographs written by colonial administrators. Missionary literature in the form of field reports, socio-cultural life of the tribes in their fields, Christian literature, autobiographies and the proceedings and discussions in various conventions held by the mission society, etc. Secondary texts includes the written texts of sociologists, historians, anthropologists, local writers' accounts, scholarly interpretation and analysis of colonial ethnographies in the form of research works and published books as secondary materials and political scientists who have done various empirical and theoretical studies in the region. T.K. Oommen lists down two characteristics of academic anthropology: (1) anthropology flowered during the colonial period and (2) the essence of the anthropological perspective is to study the Other, because it enables a better understanding of one's own society (Oommen, 2010, p. 304). The thesis used the comparative method to draw parallels with the writings on other tribal societies like the Indian central tribal belts and African tribal societies.

Ethno history tries to understand culture on its own terms and according to its own cultural code. It differs from other historically related methodologies in that it embraces emic perspectives as tools of analysis. To understand reality according to the subject of study, fieldwork is conducted in three selected areas of Manipur chosen after a one-month pilot survey. Prior to the proper execution of field studies, observation mostly non-participation was done in the selected area. It begins as a systematic observation and a daily field note was maintained

\textsuperscript{21} In the explanation of Russell K. Schutt,s, 'Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research', exploratory research seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concerns them. The methodology can also be referred to as 'grounded theory' approach to 'qualitative research' or 'interpretative research' and is an attempt to 'unearth' a theory from the data itself rather than from a pre-disposed hypothesis.
in which the significant events of each day were recorded along with informants' interpretations. Initial observations would focus on general, open-ended data gathering derived from learning the most basic cultural rules, testing out whether my research objectives were meaningful and practical in the local situation as also to gain rapport with the key-informants. Observation of ritual performance, activities in agricultural fields, hierarchical categories in the village, the meeting of the village council, land distribution, land use, land settlement, land tenure, church and women's role and contribution in the village. As for the land rituals, except for the Kut festival, there being no ritual performed in it, I had to be content with the narration of the aged population.

In the early experiences in the field, one is constantly grappling with the intangible with the reality all around. After the initial orientation or entry period, which took one month then a more systematic program of formal interviews, was done. Aside from written observation and records, collection of ethnographic representations in other forms is made, such as collected artefacts, photographs, tape recordings of the life histories or personal narratives. My experience as a fieldworker is the study of people who belongs to the same tribe and speaks a similar language as I do but is in a setting far removed from my own. So, their classification of 'social reality' which provide the 'inside view' was something that I learned gradually as the experience and elements which I had taken for granted slowly takes unexpected turns.22

For Clifford Geertz culture is public because meaning is (Geertz, 1973, p. 12). It is actually a product or a construct of social situation and transmitted through communication. Culture is not power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context,

22 If one studies one's own society, one starts with some understanding of the system under observation. Insofar as one knows the values and ideologies underlying actions in a society, observation need only be undertaken to locate the gap between the ideal and the actual. (Oomen, 1984, p. 63)
something within which they can be intelligibly—that is thickly—described (ibid, p. 14). Understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity. (ibid) I support Malinowski’s third commandment of fieldwork, which posits the need to find out the typical ways of thinking and feeling, corresponding to the institutions and culture of a given community (Malinowski, 1972, p. 23). He opines that there is a series of phenomena of great importance, which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning, or computing documents but have to be observed in their full actuality. He called them the “imponderabilia of actual life (ibid, p. 18).” ‘Finding our feet’ is a term used in ethnographic research on personal experience in trying to formulate the basis in which one imagines (Geertz, 1973, p. 13). To find one’s feet, one does not start (or ought not) intellectually empty-handed. Theoretical ideas are not created wholly anew in each study; they are adopted from other related studies and refined in the process applied to new interpretative problems (Geertz, 1973, p. 27). Here I agree with Max Weber the difficulty in drawing a sharp empirical line between meaningful action and merely reactive behaviour to which no subjective meaning is attached (Weber, 1978, p. 4). Therefore, the question was aimed at extracting information regarding what they feel and think qua members of a given community. Here, there is a problem of differentiating the views of the respondents whether it represents the ideal and the actual.

There were certain local specific term, categories and ways of life that one needs to understand in order to comprehend an area. All the three areas of my field are still a society governed by complex ties of kinship and clanship. For instance, the most common references to time frame is the world war II called ‘Japan War’ or ‘Japan Gal.’ Kailal Lhouvum23 says that wet rice cultivation must have been started after the war. Before that, the settlement was confined to the hill slopes. Most of the customary objects like the metals used in ornaments or certain auspicious materials used in the rituals like ‘dahkang’ originated besides a river in

23 Kailal Lhouvum, Cultural Specialist, Motbung Village, Interviewed on 12th October, 2008
Burma. One thing that clearly marked out village life from those of town or city is the obligation they feel towards guests. Even in areas that were under chieftainship system, elements that were once the hallmark of the institution were slowing undergoing changes. One indicator is traditional practice of giving 'changseo' or a basketful of paddy to the chief at the time of harvesting. The Chief of Tujang Vaichong, an old woman of about 80 years narrates how the villagers in her village no longer pay this customary tribute. However, in the second village Motbung, the villagers still pay the tribute, sometimes in monetary form.

To understand the demography and details of each area, household survey is taken in one-third of the population of each area. The idea behind the utilisation of the household survey method is to understand in quantitative terms such as the magnitude and mobility of villages, individual mobility, social composition of villages, and numerical analysis of village and Census data. This survey also helps to established rapport with one's respondent to inquire about every realities as well as sensitive issues. Scheduled questionnaires on farm related questions were given to the respondents in the household surveys who were directly involved in farming.

<table>
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<th>Name of Village</th>
<th>Household Population</th>
<th>No. of respondent for Household survey</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tujang Vaichong</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motbung</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangpokpi</td>
<td>1662</td>
<td>560</td>
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The sociologists T.K. Oomen suggested a technique to counter the problem of observer or interviewer bias or informant bias. In order to counter this problem we need to select a representative sample of informants or respondents from different strata or segments of society and try to understand their viewpoints. (Oomen, 1984, p. 66)
The anthropologists Victor Turner concept of, "exegesis", would be a relevant tool in our mode of analysis of the field. The exegetical meaning is obtained from questioning indigenous informants about observed ritual behaviour, so that a symbol's manifest sense (of which the ritual subjects are fully aware) can be revealed. The informants may be ritual specialists or laymen. Exegesis can also be derived through the analysis of myths, through the fragmentary interpretations of separate rituals or ritual stages, and through written or verbally uttered doctrines and dogmas. In the context of our selected field of study, viz the Thadou society, not everyone remembers the old rituals and cultural practices. So, the older populace would make better informants than others because they had firsthand experience of encountering the pioneer colonial rulers and have been participant observant themselves on many changes that have affected the society. The narrative of the older populace have been utilised as the material source for the chapter on social ecology. Accordingly, un-structured interview was done on them.

Structured Interview carried out with the women leaders, village chief, village authority leaders and town committee members. There was a different set of scheduled question for the areas governed by chieftainship system (Motbung and Tujang Vaichong) and the one by Urban Town Committee (Kangpokpi). The interviews and responses were mainly in the Thadou dialect besides Manipuri. In the three field areas, there were two types of women leadership in the village. One is the religious groupings within the church the “Women Society” and the other is the more secular yet welfare related association called the “Women Union.” A study was done on the women organisations functioning in Tujang Vaichong Village, Motbung Village and Kangpokpi hill urban. In areas that had

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25 Narratives from the older populace reflects historical affinities between scattered societies—the Chang-nungah ritual, the Daiphu ritual, Lom system, the ritual for building a new village—all these practices transcends across man-made boundaries to all the Kuki inhabited places of Burma, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam.
more than one church the most populated church's women wing along with the most effective women organisation at the societal level was studied. The aim is to understand the role of women in setting up parallel institutional structures to village councils. They were asked question on the issues of inheritance of land as immovable property, role of women in the church and in the society and the scope of women in the political domain of the village structure.

The scene outside the chief's house in Tujang Vaichong was betraying. It seems to picture the village as an egalitarian society. There was a big open space where the villagers were conducting a sports-meet for the youth. The girls were playing football. However, in the history of the election of the village council that assists the chief, there has never been a woman candidate. Moreover, there were certain gender conventions that come in the way of procuring data during interviews. Some of the women, when interviewed allowed the man, their husband, father or elder brother to speak on their behalf. However, when approached when they were left on their own, were open to discussion on the most sensitive gender issues. The proceedings of customary court of the three areas in land related matter was recorded. Outside my field area, interview was done with the leaders of the land-based movement, the Sadar Hills Autonomous District Demand Committee and the intellectuals who specialised in land issues of the Kuki society in particular and Manipur in general.

Outline of the Study

The study comprises of five main chapters besides an introductory and a conclusion chapter. The introduction presents the theoretical and methodological arguments of the study and a descriptive outline of the people and locale in which the study has been conducted. The first chapter is a continuation of the introduction, which is a description of the social profile and land system of the Thadou-Kukis.

26 Kangpokpi has 17 churches; Motbung has 4 main churches whereas Vaichong has only one.
Chapter two examines the relationship between land and identity by studying the social ecology of the Thadou-Kukis of Manipur. It reflects the important place of land in the worldview and cosmology of the society. Their attitude and reverence for land is reflected in the sacred space and institution it occupies in the society and the various rituals attributed to it. It brings out how the ecological relations influence the institutions in the society and how the social structure in turn influence the conceptualization of the ecological relations. The change brought about by the colonial missionary widened the gap between land and man as they interpret the relationship through their own lens, made stipulations accordingly and gradually reduce land to an alien entity.

Chapter three studies the varied ramifications of colonialism in the Hills of Manipur with particular reference to the Thadou-Kuki society. It studies both the administrators and missionaries as colonial agencies and tries to trace the varied instruments of colonialism that changed the traditional land structure and impede the principality that governs the Thadou-Kuki society. The chapter analysed the imprint of colonialism and policies of the British towards the hill tribes; the interplay between indigenous leadership and colonial power, sociological implications of the various land-based conflicts and the contribution of colonial encounter in re-ordering of space and society.

Chapter four examines the various land rights discourses in the hills of Manipur. The various discourses are categories under two groups—legitimising and oppositional rights discourses against the colonial and Indian State’s economic and social policies. It will study the various Acts that is enacted and the impact of the various acts on the people’s relationship to land. It would attempt to highlight the complexities in land relations as well as in the social life of the people due to the dual existence of both customary laws and the government laws besides the imposition of an administration that does not understand the tribal ethos. Lastly, it will bring out the conflict in land rights and land laws and stress on the need for the participation of the local people for whom the laws were made and the formulation of appropriate laws to suit them.
Chapter five tries to understand the issues of women’s land rights in the Thadou-Kuki society; what hindered their access to land, what are the institutions that directly or indirectly support the patriarchal hegemony over land and what is the role of religion in the relationship between land and woman in the society? The debate centres on ancestral land in which there is still restriction for women’s ownership by the customary laws. The study discussed the possibilities of ownership of land by women, roles of women in agricultural production, roles played by women’s organisation in the society and church, the level of influence the women’s organisation has on the overall administration and inheritance issues in contemporary Thadou-Kuki society.

Chapter six is about the agrarian transition in the hills from a stage in which agricultural technology was dominated by customs and traditions. It studies land as a livelihood system and as a productive resources for the people and how this has changed over the years, due to the degree of capitalism that has seeped in, due to the influence of globalisation and development projects of the Indian Nation-state. It will highlight how the political-legal-economic measures have affected the micro-level social institutions, the units of the social system primarily the nature of agrarian transition in the hills.