CHAPTER - VI

A Concluding Analysis:
The Khurpui Experience in Perspective

The concluding chapter of this thesis focuses at an analytical understanding of the Khurpui experience, ethnic issues and perspective of Koms (Komrem) in Manipur. The analysis is primarily based on the data emerging from the lived experience understood here as 'the Khurpui experience'. Khurpui experience is the day-to-day experiences of Koms as viewed from the khurpui historical event of their common origin and culture. It is the foundation of their society itself. Their culture and identity is defined in this experience. Besides, it is opined that this experience is shaped by various context and processes in a period of history. The lived experience gave rise to political aspirations and community mobilization processes. Broadly understood, in this analysis the context covers ecological (the intricate relationship between ethnic societies and natural environment) that shapes culture, economy, society and politics of the region. In particular, the analysis constantly tries to understand the intricate relationship between lived experience of Koms, their culture (including polity, land, resources and livelihood) and emerging political aspirations (including their contemporary mobilization) within the state context.

1. The Overarching Framework

This study focuses on the ethnicity of the Koms (Komrem). Ethnicity is viewed as a total, lived experience not just as a reductionist cultural concept. The distinct ethnicity of the Koms, a minority tribal group in the neglected northeastern state of Manipur has a basis in a history, geopolitical ecology, agricultural livelihood patterns and the village territorial – governance unit. The tribe has distinct social structure comprising of clans, collective ownerships of lands and customary rights
and village as unit of governance under the tribal 'chief' and 'village authority'. The distinctiveness of their identity has been reinforced by popular, historical narratives; language; and cultural traditions. This ethnic identity was further shaped by education, religious changes and the contentious political relation with other dominant ethnicities, such as the Kukis, Nagas and Meiteis; and with the state processes of domination during the British and the independence periods. Ethnicity is thus seen as foundational, inclusive concept that defined one's methodological approach to the minority formation of the Koms as it negotiated a relatively independent space for self assertion within a multi-ethnic context under the hegemony of the state. Nationalism is thus seen as an on-going, contentious process of state formation, where tribes, both large and small, struggle to find a meaningful space.

The fieldwork process and observation spanned across one and half year (2009-2011). Considering the sparse and scattered coverage of the domain, a purposive sampling technique was used in identifying sources of data. The basic units of inquiry consisted of a village, social structure, cultural and historical experiences, and political processes that describe Komrem. The village community, chiefs, elders, Church leaders, politicians, youth and other educated persons were key sample units for arriving at understanding about the community. Taking into consideration the variations of narratives emerging across different villages in areas such as Sagang, Tonsen Tera-Mahou, Loktak Project (Keirap), Hmongtung, Nongmaiching, Moirang and Chandel, the study has included narratives, cultural and historical experiences of six Kom villages (including Purum) besides one Koireng village, one Kharam village, one Aimol village and one Chiru village as a case for reference to understand the composite group. Key educated persons (at each area site), who are known to have an in-depth experience and knowledge about Kom history and culture, and Komrem ethnicity processes, were identified across the villages. These informants became key persons for the researcher to enter villages and community life processes. A few of them were directly in touch with the researcher from the very beginning of the inception of the thesis. The researcher had a number of personal meetings with key informants regularly which provided a vital understanding about the community and its issues which was
finally reaffirmed through the local online publication of "Situating Koms (Komrem) Narrative in Manipur", a paper highlighting the political perspective of Koms (Komrem) (Kanglaonline dated 19th August, 2011 and Imphal Free Press dated 19th October, 2011). The specified objectives (restated to give emphasis) of the study are;

- To explore the history of Koms based on their perception and lived experience within and in relation to their cultural interaction with other kindred ethnic groups.
- To understand the social structure of Koms with a specific focus on the lineage and traditional governance systems, and its relationship with the kindred tribes.
- To understand cultural processes of Koms and its interface with religion and religious practices in relation to Komrem community.
- To understand the identity of Koms and its role in defining a Komrem political status as collective identity within the State.
- To understand the strategies of ethnic identity mobilization and challenges encountered in negotiating Komrem identity space in the context of the emerging external socio-political demands.

There are two broad understandings that are arrived at in this study which give direction to the analysis. Firstly, that there is an intricate relationship between ecology and the ethnic reality in the region. This lived reality is described by clan-based tribal societies with distinct political boundaries, culture and livelihood practices common to the hill region ecology. In the analysis, these societies have been referred to as 'culturo-political entities' to give emphasis to the cultural and political nature. Further, the valley region nurtures an ethnic society governed under the political system of feudal Monarchs. They are defined by settled agriculture as a livelihood pattern of the plain area. On the whole, it is understood that the inter tribe and inter ethnic social interaction in the pre-Christian era was mostly defined by political boundaries of chiefs and monarchs, hill and the valley. Data emerging from Kom's experience indicate that the hill area was marked by dynamic power relationships between chiefs, tribes and clans. They were
independent units strictly defined by the village territorial boundaries. Secondly, that the state (beginning with the British colonials) initiated the process of ethnic and territorial reorganization in the hill regions. In particular, this process gave rise to changes affecting indigenous tribal societies (referred to as heterogeneous in this thesis). They became conscious about the need to protect their culture, history, land and territory. This circumstance generated an experience leading to political awareness and mobilization. Culture and identity became one of the most important political resources for them to negotiate their space within the state as tribes. It created a circumstance of social interaction with mutual competition for accessing the services of the state which led to the dynamic reality of identity formation (self ascription, defining and redefining) processes. This reality was greatly influenced by the larger political mobilizations along the binary notions of Naga-Kuki, Meitei-tribe, Christian-Hindus, hill-valley, majority-minority, insider-outsider, and even state-nonstate. The former understanding is by and large defined by the lived reality of ethnic groups commonly described by the heterogeneous cultural identities. The latter experience is defined by a state process of building a common structure which includes a common policy and administrative structure, and an orientation towards a common political identity where citizenship (here understood as state identity) is the basic unit.

Within the framework of the above mentioned understanding, the analysis locates the emerging understanding of Khurpui experience, ethnic issues and perspective of Koms in Manipur spanning across three broadly categorised (identified) phases: a) Phase-I: Khurpui Experience: The Essence of Collective Identity, b) Phase-II: The Context and Processes: Situating the Khurpui Experience, c) Phase-III: Contemporary Khurpui Experience, Mobilization and Challenges. These phases are considered as interrelated to each other. The interrelatedness is roughly understood as integral parts within a holistic perspective. Besides, the analysis, being drawn from the experience of one of the earliest known indigenous communities of the state, provides a critical
understanding of the circumstances that define the dynamic reality of ethnicity in Manipur.

2. Khurpui Experience: The Essence of Collective Identity

The Khurpui experience embodies the basic cultural ethos (guiding principle) and lived experience of Koms. It becomes a unit and boundary of interaction with the 'other': a basic framework for defining their identity. The 'others' in the context of Koms is broadly understood as the tribes within the hill region and the Meitei ethnic groups of the valley region. As observed among them, the process of self ascription and/or ascription by others operates at the zone of community boundary interaction within the framework of 'we' and the 'others': a cultural integrity within 'we' and a difference from 'others' (as described in chapter II). This occurs broadly at two levels: intra/inter tribe (among tribes) and ethnic group (tribes and Meitei/others). The social interaction and the self identification processes are related and constantly being negotiated in a context. They are shaped by the larger regional ecology, culture and politics. As for instance, the nature of social interaction processes between tribes and ethnic groups were shaped by the hill-valley context and monarch-chiefs political structures in the pre British period. During British colonialism and the post independence state era, state administrative policies and structures became a defining framework for social interaction and self identification. For example, ethnic reorganization, administration and territorial demarcation (referred to in chapter I) were major state activities within this period. As viewed from the experience of Koms, it is very evident that their immediate others were the tribes of the hills with whom they had cultural affinity. They are closely related culturally (language) to the Lushais and Hmars, in particular and in general, with the rest of the southern tribes. In such a context, the Khurpui experiences explain the political nature of the intra and inter tribe social interaction processes. For the Koms, this geographical boundary of social interaction and movement within Khurpui experience is predominantly confined within the
foothills of Manipur currently and historically spans across the hill region of southern China, Arunachal and Arakan (from north to south of the present Northeast region) (detailed description given in chapter IV). For example 'trichung' is associated with northern hills, 'sum' with the Chin Hills, 'cap' with the sea and river, 'doi' with Arakan hills and Serikh/Mithun within the whole region. As indicated in the data emerging from Koms, cultural differences and variations constitute basic units for identity definition-redefining as a political strategy. The culturo-political groups of the region have become distinct political entities over periods in time and space. It is understood that such trend is closely defined by two aspects in a historical context: a) a common origin, cultural practices, polity, land, resources and livelihood patterns, and b) lived experience, political aspiration and mobilization. The Khurpui song (experience) as restated below explains the historical context of Koms as a distinct culturo-political group:

Kan Hong sok e kanhong sok e (We emerged from the great cave: from the netherworld, beneath the surface of the earth)
Khurpui ja kanhong sok e (We emerged from the great cave; our origin, birth and a freedom day)
Kantak rong inkholei erro eja. (With our might we established village)
Kanhong sok e Kanhong sok e (We emerged from)
Khurpui ja Kanhong sok e (We emerged from the great cave)
Kanthe pon nin kholei erro eja. (Our shawl (ponthe) became protector of our village; national flag planted on the village)
Kanhong sok e Kanhong sok e (We emerged from)
Khurpui ja Kanhong sok e (We emerged from the great cave)
Kan Kom luin kho lei erro eja. (Our Kom turban adorned our village)
Kanhong sok e Kanhong sok e (We emerged from)
Khurpui ja Kanhong sok e (We came from the great cave)
Kan lengse in kholei erro eja (Our girdle girded our village)
As inferred from the above Khurpui song, Khurpui narrative and cultural practices (of people without written and archival history), binds them together as a people and ensures as closely as possible, that the future will remain faithful to the present and to the past: the principle of continuity and permanency. It becomes a structure that reproduces their 'way of life' (learned and shared narratives and cultural practices of the community which is also passed on from generation to generation) in space and time. The Khurpui narration provides the worldview and belief that shaped their life and understanding. It is the source of meaning. It also underlines the basic social structure of Koms; clan, kinship and lineage, the village (land, resources and livelihoods), polity and the basic cultural elements (external manifestations): cultural dresses, dances, musical instruments and festivals provide the foundation of understanding identity and ethnicity of Koms. The essential features of Khurpui experience, the basic unit of understanding and analysis of this study, are cultural structures that establish their identity. In this line of thinking, Koms as a society can be broadly understood in terms of four basic cultural features (detailed description in chapter IV) that constantly re-enforces their way of life;

Firstly, the Khurpui experience in the outset provides a worldview and belief of their understanding about life and existence: life below the earth, life on earth and life after death. The basic premise of this worldview is constructed on a belief in the existence of God, 'Pathen'. Pathen is an 'all knowing being' who is the creator of all things/beings. He is a God who holds life and death. Life on earth is referred to as 'rhingkho', literally meaning 'place (village) of the living'. Life after death is understood as 'kathikho'. It literally means 'place (village) of the dead', a concept commonly known as heaven in the present time and context. The understanding and belief about God, life and death are intrinsically linked together as seen in the cultural practices of the burial of the death, Lukasun ceremony and other life cycle rituals and celebrations. All the spirits, 'rhathla' of the dead depart to Kathiko and unite with ancestors (or persons) who have already died. The
ancestral worship among them draws its meaning and practice on this belief. Besides, it is believed that this world is inhabited by various spirits, both good and evil, a determining factor for human health and suffering. Their belief in 'Tiger-man god' and 'python-man god' is integral part of their worldview. In fact, the supernatural power called usually among them as doi-le-ai played a great role in their lives. Doi-le-ai and concept of a village priest, a healer and also one who leads in war, was very much part of the village polity. Thempu occupied a prominent place possessing power (doi) to identify spirits that cause sickness and to offer sacrifices for healing. There is also a belief in rebirth, not as a precondition but more of a need felt by the dead for love of a family and clan deserted. Here, it is believed that the dead returns to the clan through a new born child. As a society, a life cycle of birth, naming, marriage and death are important stages of life which are observed with due customary rites and ceremonies.

Secondly the Khurpui narrative explains the birth of the clans and culture. In general, there are primarily seven clans namely Karong (referred also as Shongthu and Puvom), Leivon, Serto, Mhangte, Telen/Thingpui, Khumdon and Mirem (also cited in Mhangpu, 1990, Thangneireng, 2007 and Boinu Serto, 2010). Besides, there are also various other sub clans usually observed in villages of Sagang region. In principle, the clan is an essential cultural element as well as a social structure. Every clan is associated with a totem. As for instance, tiger is a totem of Karong clan. It is believed that tiger and the Karongpa clan are friends. They will not harm each other. The tiger will refrained from killing Karongpa's descendents and Karongpa clan will also refrain from hunting and killing tigers. The clan covenant was strictly believed and observed among Koms.

As a practice, the family lineage and kinship is based on the clan structure. The family lineage is identified along father's line of decent. The children of a father's line are considered consanguineous siblings. The father is a head of the family. The family has two lines of relatives; daughter's line and a son's line. In
ideal sense, a son inherits the father's property. However, daughter is also a rightful member of the father's property. There is bride price given by husband to the wife's family and 'aunpot' (nuchen), a share of the mother (given by the father to the daughter after marriage). Daughter also has a great influence on a decision that pertains to the family. Besides, she brings with her a husband's line of family lineage. The daughters and sons-in-laws are called 'serjui' and 'sakamak'. They have great role to play in the affairs concerning father's family. Marriage is clan exogamous. In an ideal sense, marriage between a son of the sister and a daughter of the brother is considered appropriate. In fact, it is considered that such marriage is favourable to the sister, usually expressed as 'ani ajui'-following aunty and supporting her (an altruistic gesture from a family of the brother). In practice, there are three types of marriages; marriage through elopement, love marriage and even family arranged marriage. However, decision of children is usually binding.

Thirdly, the basic cultural elements (external cultural manifestation, as shown in the annexure) of Korns are represented by cultural attires, songs and dances. It is commonly referred to in Kom as 'punsi der kai', or 'lham-le-lda'. The 'punkokhao' and numhei pun (ladies wear) and 'puisepun' (men's shawl) are important cultural elements among Korns. Besides, there are also traditional musical cultural elements such as seraki (mithun horn), khung, sirangdar, sum-le-dar and rusem. As known in the available cultural documentations, Korns have several cultural dances and songs for important occasions. One such example is 'Lham Kut Lam' and 'Lham Kut Lha'. In fact, Kut festival has been recognised as 'Mizo-Chin-Kuki' linguistic group (A.R. Greirson categorization) in the state to which Korns have cultural affinity.

Fourthly, Korns have a village polity and customary practices unique to their culture. The Kom village is a distinct political territorial unit which has a strong sense of a village collective. The understanding of village embodies the concept of land, resources and livelihood practices of the people. Land and
territoriality is embedded within ecology and culture. It can be understood from their perspective, that society is a 'stretched of land' bounded by culture and village polity. Village is political entity where they live and prosper as a society and community. Besides, it is also a free/safe zone; a zone where they can resists various forms of external forceful assimilation/integration. Establishment of village therefore is an important political process where usually the priest and the village headman and elders play a vital role. The basic criterion of establishment of village is availability of resource (water, forest and community land for cultivation). The village polity is defined by headship of a village chief and his councils (village authority). The council is usually constituted through a direct democratic process. The chiefs are primarily selected/appointed based on clan and seniority. The village is governed based on customary practices, direct participation and collective ownership system of the village community land and resources. The chief and the village (as in Village Authority Act, 1956) have recourse to customary law and practice concerning settlement of disputes between individual, family and clan in the village.

3. Contexts and Processes: Locating the Khurpui Experience

The Khurpui experience also highlights the historical experiences of Koms. It locates their culture and identity in a history. The social structures as highlighted in the previous sections are understood here within their historical experiences. Culture and identity is thus described here not merely as cultural element or construct but a way of life embedded in the lived experience which is constantly influenced by the external context and processes. These circumstances create an environment where culture and identity also enter the realm of politics. Here, as viewed from the Kom's experience, politics (political) is understood as a way of life operationalised in a dynamic social interaction processes often shaped by structure of power relationship between chiefs, clans and tribes. It is broadly described as 'their lived experience', emerging 'political needs/ aspirations', the
collective identity consciousness and mobilization processes to actively respond to changing context in the state (as described in chapter V). Thus, identity and ethnicity (a detailed description in chapter II) of Koms understood viewed as 'we' different from the 'others' assumes a political strategy to negotiate a political space. In the Khurpui narration, it is vividly portrayed that the forefathers of Koms (Komrems) originated from 'Khurpui' (Khotuitphui). As a lived reality, Khurpui narrative is perceived as a critical historical event: marking an era of 'freedom from' and genesis of Kom culture and society. The narrative as a re-enactment of lived reality, vividly pictures a historical event of a common origin, culture and village settlement. It defines the culturo-political boundary of the Koms (Komrems) and forms the basic structure of self identification and interaction with others in a historical context. The changing dynamics that have shaped both the culture and politics of Koms can be understood by locating their lived experience in the larger historical context broadly spanning across pre-colonial, colonial and post independence (a connecting link between chapter I, II, IV and V):

a) Khothudpui Life-world (Pre Colonial)

The lived experience of Koms in the pre-colonial contexts (as drawn from chapter IV) was described by the independent village political boundaries predominantly concentrated in the southern foothills, Thangching hills of Moirang area. This region is closely related to their culture and politics. In fact, the region stands as a witness to their life in Manipur context. It could in fact be referred to as the first life stage of Koms after Khotuitpui, the event of the origin. They were one of the earliest tribes known to have come into contact with the Moirang people of the plain region. The community was vaguely organised around village units. Even today, the preponderance of the community in the area is significant. Some of the earliest known Kom villages at that time in the region were Khoirentak, Sempangjar, Sagang and Keirap. Generally, people were known by the names of the village they inhabited.
In their first contact with the people of Moirangs (latter Meiteis), culture and the valley monarch political power, they were broadly known as Koms (ascribed named), meaning 'people with cave origin'. In fact, 'kom' is a Meiteilon term for 'cave'. Kom also refers to basic cultural element that is, those 'people wearing turban'. The ascribed identity 'Kom' vis-a-vis the other ethnic groups in the region at his stage of their life was vaguely conceptualised based on their common origin theory and cultural practices. Among themselves, self ascription was based on village or clan. 'He is Saganpa' (pa for male and pi for female), meaning he is from Sagang Village or 'He is Karongpa', meaning he is a karong clan man.

The cultural and political space between the Meiteis and Koms was very critical in determining the lived experience of Koms. This space politically provided a mutual safe zone for the Koms and Moirangs. Koms were able to live as independent self governed villages having advantage of livelihood provided by the foothills (both plough and jhum cultivation). From the perspective of the Moirang King or later Meiteis this zone inhabited by Koms provided a 'defence zone' (sampan in Meiteilon) against the enemies (including evil spirits) that is believed to hound the valley region. This mutual space generated a circumstance of cultural interaction and influence between the two ethnic groups especially in the pre-Christian era. For example, the two world views: Moirangs and Koms co-existed and Koms were culturally influenced by Moirangs to a great extend. The belief in 'household god' (sanamahi or inroi especially in the pre-Christian period) and celebration of 'Ningon Chakkhouba' (giving feast to the sisters of the family) have become part of the cultural practices of Koms. Besides, the practice of settled agriculture among Koms is another indication of the influence of the valley's culture on them.

In the hill area, the experience of Koms indicates that there was a multilayered and complex inter tribe and inter clan social interaction process. It
was shaped by the political structures that existed between them in the form of a village polity (also described as self rule) under chieftaincy political system. The understanding of 'segmented societies' (as discussed in Chapter I), as different from the 'contract based societies', is a close description applicable to such a context. The village has a political head in the form of a chief. The nature of chieftaincy structure varies from democratic participation to an autocratic feudal system. As for the former, village chief is a custodian of people, land and resources. This system is defined by a clan based appointment of successive chiefs, collective ownership and customary governance practices. While in the latter system, village chief (often the first settler of the village) is usually hereditary in nature. He has more power and right over ownership of the village land and resources. Village governance and administrative structures are an integral part of the process of collective ownership and management of villages, cultural practices and resources. Among Koms, the chiefs of the larger tribes such as Kamhou, Thadou (Khongsai), Sokte and Tiddim Chin chiefs are known to have influenced them greatly and shaped their cultural and political experience.

In particular, self ascription and identification processes among tribes of the hill region take into consideration the political strategy for 'resistance' and maintenance of coexistence zone (referred to as 'shattered zone' in Scott, 2005). Land, territory and culture are very much defined and embedded in cultural survival/coexistence. Fleeing, migration and movement of villagers from one place to other was a political strategy for the maintenance of their coexistence. In the experience of Koms such realities was part of their daily life as drawn from the Khurpui experience. This historical process of the movement of Koms is contained and indicated in the Khurpui narrative. The sojourn usually understood among them roughly spans across the region. During this period, it is believed that assimilation of Kom villages by larger tribes had taken place, and their lands where sold of to the larger tribes as they moved away from conflict areas. For example, as described in the chapter V, the assimilation of Kom villages and clans among other
larger tribes such as Khongsai and Soktes is a social phenomenon not unknown to the people in the region. Adaptation and cultural alignment with larger friendly ethnic groups, variation in language and cultural practices were significant political strategies commonly practiced among them. Moreover, their worldview, khurpui common origin and cultural practices provided the principle for cultural continuity and political integrity as a tribe.

b) Encounter with the State (Colonial Context)

The colonial era provided a critical cultural and historical experience for Korns towards change. It marked the beginning of their encounter with the formal state structures. Prior to this, as mentioned in the previous section, Korns were generally left to fend for themselves within their own village set-up. The data emerging from their lived experience indicate that the British colonial era generated changes at two levels. Firstly, that the state initiated the formal identity ascription process as a necessary condition of the state project towards building a common state structure. It defined the political nature of culture and ascribed identity mainly based on the state construct of citizenship. Considering the lived reality of Korns at that time, the state was necessary external structure for community protection and survival. In fact, state became a very important structure for the realisation of their socio-political needs and aspirations as individuals and collective. Secondly, that like any other tribes and ethnic groups of the region, Korns also came under the influence of the state project which generated a complex socio-political process. For example, the British resettlement policy in 1840s as described in the background chapter had a deep impact on Korns. This event explains the movement and spread of Korns from the Thangjing hills ranges, their original habitat to other areas of the foothills. Besides, they were also deeply affected by the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19 during the First World War. The Kukis launched a resistance against the British recruitment of the Kuki men for the First World War (Lal Dena, 1991, pp.126-134). This resistance was dealt with
military power and force. Many of the Kom villages were affected by this rebellion (also mentioned in Joykumar, 2005). Besides, the Japan War (Second World War) also affected the Komrem areas (also mentioned in preface to TC Das, 1945 as cited in Gupta et al., 1985, p.4). Some major emerging external changes during the British period as observed in the study, that have had a deep impact on the lived experience of Koms in particular, and tribes of the region in general can be summarised (detailed description in chapter I) as:

- British policy and administration among tribes (empowerment of chiefs)
- State boundary demarcation and ethnic categorization based on binary notions of ethnic majority such as valley-hill, tribes-Meitei, Kuki-Chin, Naga-Kuki and Hindu-Christian
- Christianity, literacy, education and exposure to other cultures

i) British Policy and Administration: In general, British policy divided the state into two distinct political units: the valley (Monarchs) as a political centre and the hill areas, a political periphery. This had a deep impact on the lived experience of Koms. However the hill area was a contiguous part of the larger tribal area which was categorised as 'un-surveyed and un-administered areas' of the northeast. It was further re-categorised as 'backward areas' (Govt. of India Act, 1919) and as 'excluded areas and partially excluded areas' (Govt. of India Act, 1935). In general, the British practiced an 'indirect rule' policy in this region. This policy was defined by 'cultural non-interference' (autonomy of chiefs on management of internal affairs) and military intervention with conciliatory approach on issues concerning external affairs vis-a-vis their political relations with Burma and India. In principle, the Crown representative (Governor of Assam) was the head of these areas. The actual administration of the area was carried under the British military officers: Commissioners/deputy commissioners. In the case of Manipur, the area was under the British political agent. The general regulation used in the Lushai hills of aligning with chiefs was also adopted and implemented among tribes in
Manipur. However, direct regulations on fiscal (house tax) and ‘pothang’ (coolie, free labour service to the state) system were introduced to the hill people for the first time. As a policy, tribes in Manipur were also excluded from the general administration of the valley region. In practice, they were under a direct control of ‘Lambus’ (mainly Meitei bureaucrats) who were the sole autocratic agents of British administration in the hill areas.

ii) Survey and Territorial Demarcation: Survey was a crucial strategy for the establishment of British political power in the region. It laid down the foundation of state processes of mapping and demarcating territorial boundaries often without the consent and knowledge of the people of the hill region. It involved creation of artificial political boundaries on one hand and subsequent displacement of tribes along the borders on the other hand. This state process generated a problematic relationship within tribes where land (resources, livelihood and culture) and territory became contentious issues: the basis of ethnic politics based on my 'land' and 'territory'. It displaced people and led to intense conflict among tribes in the region as vividly seen in the eastern and south eastern hill ranges of Manipur. Besides, the administrative territorial units within the state in the hill region was aligned towards the larger ethnic groups such as Zeliangrong Nagas in the west, Thankhul Nagas in the east and Kuki-Chins in the south taking Manipur valley as a political centre.

iii) Ethnic Reorganization and Identity Ascription: British ethnic reorganization process was another important activity that had a deep impact on the Koms. In general, it is known that identification and categorisation of tribes was built on the colonial understanding of the 'other' (the colonized). Here referring to tribes as the 'other'. This 'other' is understood in relation to the British conception of civilization: tribes as uncivilized. In principle, language (mother tongue) was used as the actual criteria for categorizing a tribal community. However, the British, however, were confronted by a fluidity and
variation of languages in the region. The people in the region under such a framework were roughly divided into three groups: Tibeto-Burman, MonKhmer and Siamese Chinese (referred to in chapter I). With specific focus to the excluded hill regions of the northeast, the tribes were basically clubbed under two sub-linguistic groups of the Tibeto-Burman: Kuki-chin-Mizo (Lushai) and Kuki-Chin-Naga (A. R. Grierson).

The two linguistic groups were further reorganized into two ethnic political categories: (a) 'north common origin theory' and (b) 'south common origin theory': ethnic balancing principle. In reality, these people were of the same racial stock often referred in history under a wide category of Indo-Mongolians. In administration, the tribes in the northern region were categorised as Naga and the tribes in the southern region were generally named as Kuki. It is to be noted that both the ethnonyms such as 'Naga' and 'Kuki' are exonyms. Generally the term 'Naga' was derived from the Assamese word that refers to 'the people in the hills' and the term 'Kuki' is derived from the Bengali word referring to 'the people of the hill region'.

Besides, it is known that British ethnic policy in the southern region was based on territorial re-grouping of 'Kuki Chin Mizo' linguistic group (as conceptualized by A.R. Grierson). In the context of Manipur, the focus was on Kuki people and their resettlement. Koms came under this category. This policy generated the theoretical premise for the 'unity of origin theory' among the so called Kuki Chin Mizo group of people. It provided a political premise for cultural and political assimilation of smaller tribes into the larger tribes in the southern region. This conception got a profound reaffirmation in the work of J. Shakespear entitled "Kuki Lushai Clans" in 1912 where Koms, as a policy, were categorised as 'Old Kukis'. McCulloch, Brown, Hutson are also well known British ethnographers to have contributed to this ethnic categorization project.
Therefore, the operationalization of the British ethnic reorganisation policy in the context of Manipur had negative impact on the Koms. All tribes living in the region were clubbed within two extreme ethnic groups: Naga and Kuki. This categorisation provided a basic structure for ethnic balancing policy with the Valley Monarch as a centre of power. At times this policy is referred to as 'divide and rule' policy (McCulloch Policy, 1848) meant specifically to establish the power of British rule over hill regions. Kukis were made a 'buffer tribe' which acted as a strong 'political fence' of the Monarchy against attacks of Naga tribes (northerners). In fact, this strategy lies at the heart of the ethnic enmity between so called Kuki and Naga. The Koms, who were originally in the foothill regions, bore the brunt of this divide and rule policy of the British. It created a situation where they were forcefully dragged into being assimilated by the Kuki/Naga binary construct. Resistance provided by Koms to this assimilation process around this colonial construct became a contentious political issue affecting the lived experience of Koms.

iv) Christianity, Education, Exposure and Change: Christianity was an important agency of change in the context of Koms. It had tremendous impact on the social structure of the Koms in particular. They were one of the first tribes to be converted to Christianity. Christianity brought in the concept of a 'freedom from sin and slavery' which they could relate with the Khurpui experience and merged with their worldview and beliefs. The concept of God, Jesus as 'liberator', 'saviour' and 'protector' found meaning in their belief and lived experience. It brought in education, health facilities and changed the mindset of the people. It provided them an alternative understanding about 'doi-le-ai', spirits, health and cure. Besides, it also delinked the cultural connection with the Hindu worldview and beliefs of the Meiteis which had influence on Koms in the pre-Christian era.
With the coming of Christianity and education, the change process initiated along ethnic empowerment became well organized with the leadership of emerging local Christian educated leaders. This led to a more organized mobilization process. The idea of clubs (student conference), associations and unions among Komrem was born at this period. Looking at the experience of Koms during this period, three important changes emerging among tribal communities in the region are:

- There was an increased awareness and political mobilization processes to negotiate community needs and political space within state structures
- Ascribed identity, generic community identity and the processes of defining and redefining identity as a political strategy became common among tribes
- There was the emergence of Christian educated individuals providing leadership and direction for community development and change

c) Contemporary State, Tribes and Koms: Contentious Political Issues

Koms were an integral part of the circumstances leading to the emergence of the state of Manipur. In fact, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes), Order 1950 (56) came as an important agency of change and empowerment for the community. As one of the main tribes of the state, they were able to take full advantage of state welfare and development provisions provided for the tribal communities in the Constitution. Accessibility to state services such as education, health, employment and community development became defining factors of their political needs and aspirations. In the initial stage, they even could provide leadership to development for tribes in general in the state. Teba Karong (as described in chapter V) was one of the pioneer leaders who worked for the development of tribes as a whole in the area of education, religion and politics. In his own capacity, he engaged in contextualization of a common socio political platform for tribes in Manipur based
on A.R. Greirson’s theory of Tibeto-Burman origin and founded a political party called ‘Khul Union’. He also worked for the Komrem primer, the first ever written literature on Koms and other kindred Rem (pronounced as Rhem) tribes, which then was known under a community nomenclature ‘Komrem Primer’ (a booklet). The first edition of this Primer was published in 1926. This publication marked the beginning of written tradition among Koms. It introduced Roman script and propagated Hmongtung language (dialect) as common language of Koms. In the overall understanding of the thesis, there are three major political structures emerging in the post independence state that became major structures defining the ethnic processes in the state affecting Koms. They are:

- British policy and administration provided a common structure for the tribal communities of the hill region
- The scheduling of tribes project of the state generated newer political needs and aspiration giving rise to generic tribe organization and mobilization within the state welfare and development context
- As an extreme reaction to the state process, ethno-nationalism emerged among certain tribal groups. This stage also witnessed the emergence of armed struggle, insurgency movements in the region.

In general, scheduling tribe process marked the beginning of an active participation of Koms with the state and change processes. It generated political awareness among them. They began to feel the need for a common political platform. In practice, the idea of collective mobilization to negotiate a political space within the state context was realised among them. Culture and identity thus emerged as important political elements and mobilization along this element became a major emerging political trend. This trend established the beginning of a dynamic reality of identity formation processes. The mobilization processes among the tribes at this context can be broadly viewed at two levels: a) at the level of scheduled tribe unit and b) at the level of larger ethnic community unit. The former
case represents the reality of the recognised scheduled tribes, the political aspirations and their mobilization. The latter one represents the emerging reality of larger mobilization. However, both influence each other. The reorganization and mobilization of people along larger ethnic collective, naming and renaming of the tribes within larger community boundary is observed at this context. It marked the beginning stage of the formation of clubs, socio religious associations and unions as common political institutions for change and development among the tribes. Therefore, as seen in this context, the structure of state came to be negotiated along cultural (language) diversity.

In the experience of Koms, the state policy and administration often defined along binary lines (a neo colonial character): majority-minority, tribe-Meiteis and Nagas-Kukis, has deeply affected the tribes and their political aspirations. The state from the very inception propagated ethnic balancing policy along mainly three ethnic communities: Kukis, Meitei and Nagas. As a practice, the smaller tribes were often forced to be clubbed under these ethnic groups. For example, the reorganisation of districts administrative structures of the state was largely based on categories such as Nagas, Meiteis, and Kukis. In the present context, there are nine districts. The four valley based districts (Meitei dominated areas, approximately 60% of state population), is basically the erstwhile feudal king juridical domain. After independence this area, especially Imphal East and West (state capital), has become an urban centre having some degree of cosmopolitan character. The hill region (90% percent of state land area) is divided into five districts keeping in mind dominant ethnic groups of the hills. Ukhrul district is basically a Tangkhul tribe dominated area. Tamenglong district is predominantly inhabited by the Zelianrong tribes (collectively). Chandel and Senapati districts have greater degree of mixed ethnic demography. Churachandpur is mainly inhabited by various southern tribes (often tends to be categorised collectively as Kuki-Chin-Mizo).
However, Koms, being situated along the foothills, occupy a unique ethnic location within the state: a connecting link between the hill and valley, tribes and Meiteis. In fact, they are also a 'bridge tribe' between the ethnic groups of the hill region. Nevertheless, they are often pushed to an ethnic margin where they often do not have the power to negotiate their specific ethnic space. The political circumstance surrounding Koms in fact has become more complex with the increasing tendency of mutually exclusive identity formation and assertion tendencies. The political space of Koms (especially after 1990s) has come under the strong influence of a contentious political issues generated by Nagalim and Kukiland movements which are based on the mutually exclusive constructs of 'my land' and 'my homeland'. The former is a sovereignty movement focusing on 'integration of all Naga inhabited areas' of northeast including Manipur hills. The latter is a homeland movement (within state as well as within region) of Kukis who had also been one of the worst victims of state territorial processes. Lately, Zomis (another collective ethnic group in the southern side, an alternative to Kukis) have also started demanding a tribal state. Such movements are in direct conflict with the 'territorial integrity' of Manipur. Over and above, there is a self-determination movement of Manipur usually associated with the reclamation Manipur sovereignty from the Indian state. Koms (Komrems) are very much affected by such ethnic movements and conflicts as they are spread across four districts: Churachandpur, Chandel, Tamenglong and Senapati. Collectively they are a minority in all regions of the districts. Therefore, their political participation as ethnic group is weak. In fact, Koms had been one of the worst victims in the recent ethnic conflicts and violence of 1990s.

Besides, the present issues of governance and administrative structures pertaining to tribes in Manipur are also larger issues that confront the Koms as a scheduled tribe within the state. As known from their experience, the state is still in a process of negotiating a viable governance structure for hill areas along article 371 C and Autonomous District Council Act 1971 (amended 2008). However, this
process has become extremely complex considering the contested power relations within various ethnic groups of the state. On the one side, tribes of the hill region are constantly negotiating a governance structure along the lines of the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution and on the other hand, the state legislature where tribal representation is a mere twenty out of 60 representatives, is constantly moving towards a common overarching administrative structure that would dilute the constitutional sanctioned rights of the tribes. In the general opinion of tribes, the proposed extension of Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Acts, 1960 (MLR & LRA) to the hill areas of Manipur is a case in point. Of late the politics between the hills and the valley have taken a confrontationist turn with a very high tendency of ethnicization along the lines of Meiteis versus tribes, Hindus versus Christians. The basic structure of democratic representation within the legislature responsible for the decision making processes has also come into being contested by tribal groups. For instance, the Hill Area Committee (HAC) constituted by the state legislature based on constitution article 371 (C) which is in-charged of the affairs concerning tribes is being critiqued for being a minority committee that is politically ineffective. In fact, in the recent times, the chief minister has also taken the added role of Tribal Welfare Department (the first instance in which a non-tribal chief minister assumes the role of tribal welfare department in the legislative history of Manipur). Lately (2010), the political issue of amendment of the District Council Act, 1971 (amended, 2008) and the elections of council member after more than twenty years is a significant political event which was contested by many tribal groups. In fact as observed in general, there is growing sentiments among tribes that the state system is coercive and anti-tribe particularly when it comes to financial authority, tribal rights to land and resources and the customary laws that governs them. At present, the hill councils are functioning from Imphal (valley) district council centre office, due to a boycott by Naga civil society against the backdrop of a conflict between state and Nagas on a demand for 'separate administrative arrangement' in the Naga inhabited districts. The latest political development of the resurgence of mutually conflicting demands for districthood in
the state, influenced greatly by ethnic politics along Kuki-Naga-Zomi-Zeliangrong-Knagleipak identities has further complicated the politics of the state. The demands for up-gradation of Sadar Hills, Jeribam, Tennoupal, Phungyar and Tongjei Maril to full fledged revenue districts are currently the critical issues that confront the state and all tribal communities. Therefore, it is observed that there is resurgence of a complex political process due people’s demand for greater administrative and financial autonomy within the state. However, such internal dynamic often has a high tendency of being categorised as a ‘law and order’ problem leading to increasing involvement of insurgents on one side and the military approach of state (AFSPA for example) on the other.

4. Contemporary Khurpui Experience, Mobilization and Challenges

a) Koms (Komrem) Identity and Mobilization

Collective reorganization and mobilization process among Koms in the state context finds its common structure in Komrem. Komrem is the reformulated name of the community. It is a common ethnic platform established with a vision of building a greater ethnic collective of tribes who are believed to have similarity of Khurpui cultural and historical experiences. It stands as the contemporary collective identity of the community. In the initial periods, the composite community consisted of six kindred tribes namely Aimol, Kom, Kharam, Chiru, Purum and Koireng in Manipur. ‘Komrem’ as an endogenous ethnonym was formally adopted as the name of larger collective in the General Meeting in 1954, at Saikul village. Kom denotes ‘people with khurpui descent and cultural practice of wearing turban’. ‘Rem’ is an inclusive element of the Komrem. It refers to people belonging to the same history, culture and land. It is considered a name which includes the larger family of Koms. Therefore, they also called themselves as ‘Rems’. 
This collective is defined by shared worldview, beliefs and cultural practices. The cultural ethos as expressed and communicated from generation to generation through the Khurpui narrative (origin theory), language, puise pun (shawl for men), numhei pun (shawl for women), khoelha (songs), lenkhom (social gathering dance), customary laws and practices constitute the foundation of their ethnic cohesion. They understand each other as 'Ulenais' (family members). Besides, they have always lived in a contiguous geographical proximity and had similar historical experiences. The British ethnographers encountered the Korns as one of the earliest tribes living in the foothill region around the valley (Brown, 1874, pp.53-54 and McCulloch 1857, p.64). According to them, Korns are the only 'remaining Kuki tribes of importance' in the state. Shakespear, the political agent categorised them as 'old Kukis' (Shakespear, 1912: 149). 'Kuki' is the new category (exogenous) ascribed to them with the intent of resettling the Kukis along the foothills. However, the British categorization policy generated a contentious political issue of assimilating Korns into Kukis. In fact, Korns as understood from their lived experience have always suffered raids by the chiefs of the Kukis, a majority tribe of the southern region.

In pre-British periods, the people identified themselves more as Keirup (Keirap), Purum, Quireng (Koirengs), Mundung (Hmongtung), Chiru, Aimol, Karam and Laikot. McCulloch also mentioned Aimole, Kom, Koireng, Poorom, Muntuk and Karum as one people. The intra community (village) relationship did not have a common community structure. They were largely defined by varied lived experiences at the village level. Variations of cultural expressions were commonly seen among them. In fact, it was a political strategy that protected them from being assimilated to the larger tribes. Variation of language across villages is part of the lived experience (also identified in CIIL-India, Mysore, 2010, p.38-39). As a strategy they easily aligned with the larger groups. Korns and Purums, with the exception of Sagang area Koms, speak basically the Hmongtung area Kom dialect. The Aimols speak aimol dialect, Kharams speak kharam dialect, the Korens
speak koren dialect, and Chirus speak chiru dialect. However, with the exception of Chiru, language variation is very minimal as they can understand and communicate with each other in their own local dialects. Language variation (language) across such tribes constitutes the very foundation of their society. It is a characteristic feature of societies depending on oral culture. This variation is also observable among the Kom speaking group across areas as seen expressed in Hmangtung, Sangang, Moirang Mantak and Tonsen Tera-Mahou. In practice, a spoken variety of Kom language found in the Hmangtung (present Kangchup Ichum area) is usually taken as a common language for Koms. It has been officially recognised as an official tribal language of the state used for instruction and examination upto the secondary level of education system. However, Koms, Purums, Aimols, Chirus, Kharam and Koireng (Koren) are separately recognised as Scheduled Tribes of Manipur according to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes), Order of the Government of India. Kharam was the last tribe among them to enter the Scheduled Tribe List of the state in 2006. Otherwise, it was basically exercising its schedule tribe status as Kom tribe. In fact, in the post independence period, sub-tribe distinction between them got strengthened through the scheduling tribe process of the state. Therefore, in the event leading to state context, language emerged as an important cultural element. It became the main criteria for defining or redefining people's culture and identity.

In the present context, the intra tribe social relationship is maintained by boundaries of village polity, clan structure and schedule tribe status differentiation. As observed among them, village constitutes a basic political unit among them. It can be described as a republic, independent and self sustained. The village is governed by the appointed chief and his council through customary law and practices. The customary practices are defined by collective ownership of land and resources, and the right to govern themselves according to their own tradition (recognised under Village Authority Act, 1956). The village chief with his council is the supreme authority of the village. Besides, youth club, village school, tribe
union and church associations have emerged as the contemporary institutions of the community. They are the present overarching larger local bodies of the community. As for instance, the church association is the apex body with village church as the basic unit and tribe union (including student union) is the apex body with village as basic unit. Therefore, intra-tribe relationship with matters to politics, religion and culture are managed at the level of Tribe Union, Church Association and Student Union. During the ethnic conflicts of 1990s, the Komrem Union, the Komrem Baptist Association and Komrem Student Union played great role. The Chief Union, women association and development organizations which are found among some larger tribe are still not prominent among Koms (Komrem).

b) An Agency of Change

The collective mobilization under Komrem has its own historical phases which in the study have been broadly identified into three phases; a) initial growth of consciousness and mobilization processes during the colonial periods, b) establishment and being an active agency of change during the post independence period upto late 1980s, and c) recent period of critical change and reflection after 1990s. Each of these periods is described by the new challenges of the emerging context and processes affecting their lived experience. In particular, the emergence of people's consciousness and community mobilization among Koms within Komrem has to be read as a collective response to the circumstance that affected their lived experience. On the whole, the need for a common institution among Koms emerged during the British contact. The khurpui experience, as inferred from their narratives, was constantly under the influence of the larger tribes. It became more intense with the state process of ethnic and territorial reorganization. Such a circumstance, initiated the process of reorganization along identities: an inevitable strategy for survival in the state context. People became aware of their political need and aspiration. In fact, their contact with the state gave them strength and idea to negotiate their political space. Their common experience, culture and history
provided the foundation of their common identity and cohesion. Culture and identity became important political means for political mobilization. This growing political trend marked the beginning of Komrem and their collective political space within the state as tribes of Manipur.

On the whole, this thesis arrives at an understanding that Komrem mobilization process is predominantly inspired by Christianity. Christianity provided ideology and strategy. It became one of the most important factors for cultural and political cohesion among them. It enabled the varied village bounded lived experiences across tribes to come upon a common larger ethnic framework. The pioneers of the organization were Christian missionary educated youth who became politically conscious of the need to assert their identity as a strategy to negotiate with the emerging state structures. The people's consciousness and mobilization process formally got established as 'student conference' (1927) through the leadership of the educated young people. The conference was aimed at bringing about building strong collective as respond to the state context. Community cohesion, religious and cultural change, education, socio political and economic development of the community were considered important goals for the collective mobilization. Therefore, missionary work, education and cultural mobilization processes went hand-in-hand. Towards this direction, the establishment of Komrem Baptist Association, Komrem Union and Komrem Student Union is unique historical event in the lived experience of Korns. Under these institutions, Korns for the first time, found a common institutional foundation and support.

Therefore, the most important event of the Komrem mobilization is marked by the establishment of Komrem Baptist Church Association (KRBCA) and Komrem Union (KRUM) in 1957. In particular, KRBCA was recognised as the apex church association of Komrem under Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC) and
Council of Baptist Churches of Northeast India (CBCNI) Guwahati. These institutions became defining factors for the lived experience of people.

On religious front, KRBCA provided a framework for change processes. A massive cultural change came among people as more and more (villages) became Christians and also got educated. In a sense, the whole society was Christianised leading to a binary cultural structure reorganization along traditional and Christianised and/or modern in which the latter became a defining factor for their culture and identity. Traditional worldview, beliefs and even cultural practices were soon substituted and/or Christianised from a Christian theological and doctrinal approach. The earlier beliefs on spirits, sacrifices and the role of Thempu (village priest) went out of the society as a 'pagan' (profane) practice. The age old practice of 'lukasun' and 'use of wine' as a ceremonial (sacrificial) element were dropped. 'Tea' became a substitute to 'wine' (rice bear) in the society especially in cultural festivals and ceremonies. Shift from 'Jlhamse' (boy taking wine to girl family in marriage proposal) to 'cha chai' (taking tea) in marriage negotiation. As observed, an all out effort was made by missionary educated leaders to bring changes in traditional system and reorganize the society along the new belief and practices. It was a radical change which got some initial resistance from older generation but soon change made total inroads among young generation. Introduction of Christian literature, Roman script, hymns, and cultural process were very effective for bringing about a desired change of the collective. Cultural practices were adapted to Christian way of life. For instance, 'lhenkhom' (traditional social gathering practice) became widely used in the Christian celebrations, while traditional religious practices receded to a traditional. Efforts were made to unify people on common language, common Bible and hymn book within the organization. Village churches were established and attached to the association with a defined administrative structure. Christian services, annual congress, Sunday worship and Christian festivals became integral part of villages and people. Thus, Christianity
provided a common structural framework for the Komrem across villages constituting the composite group.

On political front, Komrem Union, together with the Komrem Student Union also became very active political institutions of the community. All political issues of the community is handled through the Unions. The union became an active secular culturo political organization, apex body, with its own constitution, organization structure and governance system. The villages are directly connected to this organization. The union deals with political aspects of the community conscientization and mobilization processes and works for community in areas concerning inter-tribe and inter-village issue, welfare, development and political participation in the state. It acts as a pressure group in the state politics. It does not take part in electoral politics but definitely influences the community decision to vote.

In short, it is understood in the study that Komrem collective identity and mobilization has strengthened the Koms and the kindred tribes. It has effectively responded to the challenges thrown to the community in the event of the change process of the state. It is an important community institution of conflict and change management. In fact, in the present socio political context, Komrem (as collective) is an alternative ethnic group to a three-pronged mainstream ethnic social reorganization structure in the state: Naga, Kuki, or Meitei (deeply rooted in colonial construct of 'divide and rule policy').

c) Recent Change Context and Challenges

There are various challenges and issues that have sprung up over the years within the collective in the light of larger external change processes in the state and region. Some of them befit mention at this juncture. At the larger level, changes taking place within the collective are also directly related to external structures of
ethnic politics emerging in the state. In particular, after 1990s, ethnic dynamics in the region has become more complex and challenging. The state process has definitely empowered people but also contributed in shaping ethnic politics along binary frame of minority-majority and Naga-Kuki. This is also further augmented by a general growth of political consciousness among people as a direct result of changes initiated through process of Christianization, education and exposure to change. In such an environment, it is observed that ethnic politics has emerged as one of the main tool for bargaining empowerment and development for people. But simultaneously, it has also given rise to dominant ethnic politics often backed by armed groups so called 'insurgents'. Ethnic politics played along Nagalim, Kukiland and Zomi state in particular are cases in point. In such an emerging political scenario, smaller tribes such as Komrems have often been marginalised. In such a situation, the process of identity shifts, change and re-enforcement and assertion became a common phenomenon observable especially among smaller tribes as experienced by Komrems. Thus, Komrem as a generic tribe collective and mobilization process was faced with various external changes. These changes have exerted pressure on the community to innovate itself. The dwindling composition of the Komrem collective in this perspective is directly related to this larger structures and processes.

As it stands today, Komrem has changed in terms of its composite character of a collective in Church association and to some degree in the Union. It has redefined itself predominantly for Korns and Purums. Koireng, Aimol, Chiru and Kharam have initiated their own specific Tribe Unions and Church Associations. However, as people with common culture and historical experiences, the worldview, cultural elements and history still find common chord in the lived experience of the people in the village. They still consider themselves as 'ulenai', brothers and sisters commonly expressed in the social interaction process among them even today. In fact, in the perspective of the present Kom leaders the change that has taken place is considered positive.
However, the change processes has thrown open basic questions on the structure of the social organization: its ability to anchor the tribes collectively at the present context of ethnic tensions. Therefore, the collective is in a further process of defining and redefining to respond effectively to the changing context. For instance Komrem, being defined primarily by Christian ideology, has its own boundary and limitation when it comes to a holistic understanding of culture and politics vis-a-vis religious diversity. In particular, an issue arises when it comes to recognition of KRBCA as an apex body of the community. In fact in recent times, there has been a critique by leaders on the nature of KRBCA. Komrem Union and Student Union are also linked to the religious ideology of KRBCA and draws it strengthen from religious mobilization. In fact, as a simultaneous reaction along this direction, in recent times, Kom Union (exclusive of Kom tribe) has emerged as an alternative union for Koms in specific. In fact, Kom Union (with its department of Kom literature Society) has been instrumental in the realization of Kom language as one of the official state languages. Thus, Kom literature as a subject has been included as a syllabus in Higher Board of Secondary Education of Manipur. Besides, Kom Programme has been also included in Churachandpur district All India Radio station. However, KRBCA and Komrem Union have critiqued Kom Union and other such unions and associations as divisive and non-progressive. Nevertheless, change processes at the level of the organization as well as the community are an inevitable factor observed in the present time.

The collective leadership in the present context is in reflective mode. It is in process of rethinking and redefining to respond effectively to the changing dynamics within the collective. Towards such direction, a debate on the nomenclature of the organization in fact has emerged strongly since late 1980s. Komrem as a nomenclature has come to be critiqued by other composite kindred groups who feel that it is Kom centric. Of late, 'Rem' as a new nomenclature has come up. There has been a proposal towards making the collective more federal
along Komrem Council. The Council is envisioned to be the larger common structure. Common language has also come up as an internal structural issue. In fact, KRBCA propagates Hmongtung region language (Kom) as lingua franca of the community. Bible, hymn and prayer books are published in Hmongtung Kom language. However, it is observed that a multi linguistic frame has been worked out by including Manipuri (state language), Hindi and English a medium of interaction besides specific dialects at the organization. Besides, of late, some leaders have started rethinking about collective restructuring within a federal paradigm in terms of larger inter tribe and inter denominational religious conference. Komrem Union has also already initiated process of Komrem Union constitutional amendment to respond to changing reality. Thus it is assumed that in the coming years, the role of leaders of the community will be very vital to change process coming within the community.

d) Political Perspective of Koms (Komrem)

As observed in the present context, emerging socio political reality in the state is very much part of a persisting existence of mutually conflicting identity and ethnicity assertions. This politics is greatly influenced by identity politics especially played along colonial construct of Naga versus Kukis, tribes versus Meiteis (of late) representing mostly a political perspective of dominant ethnic groups. As experienced, this political reality has a high tendency of hostility and ethnic violence which many times indicates failure of state. The impact of this politics is felt much more by numerically fewer communities who are also geographically sparsely populated and spread out across the districts. However, as observed among Koms, although numerically small but culturally and structurally strong enough to remain resilient and manage change process even in an extreme context where larger cultural political identity process becomes not only a mere pro-active self identification but a forceful categorization, or co-option by larger identity politics. There is a constant political assertion and resistance in this
direction (as observed in Kabui, 1985 and Kamkhenthang, 1988). In such a situation, 'Komrem' as a cultural identity has also been a strategy of cultural and political resistance against politics of coercive categorization and assertion. As a collective, Koms repose faith on the ability of the state.

The community rejects cultural assimilation into the larger ethnic group and propagates a dignified cultural co-existence in the state. Within this principle in mind, it is considered that existence and co-existence of every collective identity requires mutual understanding and respect of spatial needs, human security and social development of entwined communities within a socio-legal democratic set up. All are equally important as units of society. Thus, state and constitutional frame should anchor a multi ethnic social structure. It is an issue of grave concern that status of 'invisibility' of culturally indigenous tribes who are numerically fewer in number, are often 'notionally non-existent' within the realm of consciousness of both state and dominant ethnic politics. A democratic system that facilitates, provides and promote a responsive public space for a respectful articulation and inclusion of narratives of the 'invisibles' within state political sphere is considered imperative from a Komrem perspective. As observed in the lived experience, some recent crucial political stance taken as a collective in the state is worth mentioning at this juncture;

- The first formal articulation of Komrem community political perspective on ethnic violence based on Naga-Kuki binary frame was made at Saikul Kom village collective (general) assembly in 1989. It was declared that Koms or Komrems are 'Neutral tribe'. Here, being neutral was understood as being non-party to ethnic violence, Non-Naga or Non-Kuki tribes (colonial construct) of Manipur. This political position has been repeatedly reaffirmed in subsequent ethnic violence that broke out in 1990s.
• Komrems proactively position themselves as 'tribes of Manipur' and uphold integrity of the state. In the 2001 outbreak of a territorial integrity issue of Manipur, Koms stood for the state.

• In principle, Komrems resists cultural hegemony especially propagated and institutionalised through colonial ethnic exclusivist politics of Nagas versus Kukis or tribe versus Meiteis. It strongly nurtures and propagates a dignified cultural pluralism, co-existence and peaceful living in the state. It contests secessionist’s ideologies. To them state is the only structure in the present context that can provide a political space. As individuals and communities belonging to the state they strive towards toward progressive society with the motto of belief in God, hard work and education.

• Besides, it strongly articulates a tribe centric governance frame within the state. It holds on to governance structure based on supremacy of village authority, chief and village community within a given constitutional frame of tribal right to land, and resources and customary laws and practices.

Conclusion

Therefore, in this study, ethnicity is closely related to the context and processes in history. It is defined by a dynamic lived reality experienced in a multicultural state context. The context and process, a defining feature of culturo political entities and related emerging political processes, is an inherent part of ethnic identity construct among tribes of Manipur, in particular and tribes of northeast, in general. In fact, ethnicity in this context has a high tendency of being described as an exclusive local 'national theory' (anti-state) from nation-state perspective. However, as viewed from lived experiences embedded in the multi
ethnic realities, ethnicity becomes an integral part of a collective response. It is an agency, an organic synergy and social construct that drives the communities in the change processes of the state context. The state process creates a mutual interaction and competition among different individuals and groups. The 'stresses and frictions' of the interaction is seen observed as a natural outcome of this circumstance. Therefore, this phenomenon is too dynamic to be understood purely from the viewpoint of an exogenous ideological constructs of an unrelated context. As for instance, ethnicity as expressed in such a context of Southeast Asian region, India and northeast in particular constitutes an integral part of the embedded ethnic life-world which is a social reality slowly but significantly finding its common space in modern state. Therefore, it is important to situate the emerging complexity of identity assertions among tribes in the state within the multi ethnic reality. As observed in reality, India is a state which is defined by the existence of multi religion, multi ethnic, multi cultural and multi linguistic. The concept of 'nation-state' is usually understood as multi nation state (Oommen, 1997), a reality commonly found in continental regions such as Africa, Middle East and south Asian regions. Thus, India in principle stands for 'unity in diversity' and not 'unity of diversity'. This lived reality finds its space in the Constitutional frame of the state through the provision of an asymmetrical governance system for the tribal areas expressed in Constitutional provisions such as Fifth and Sixth Schedules and tribal councils (in Manipur context article 371C). Therefore, ethnicity as much as is an essential cultural element of the lived experience, is also a socio political construct in process which is defined by a state circumstance. It is in ethnicity that the worldview and culture in multi ethnic contexts gets expressed as a socially lived reality. Thus, it can be described as a dynamic cultural realm ranging between subjective lived experiences and shared objective reality which shapes political aspirations of people in a state.