CHAPTER – II
Identity, Tribe and Ethnicity:
Situating Perspectives and Concepts within the Context

Identity and ethnicity are dynamic and multifaceted concepts. As a term, identity has its root to the Latin word, *idem* which means 'what a thing is'. In its basic sense, it can be referred to the essence (inherent and resilient) of the ‘I’ or ‘myself’ or ‘ourself’ that differentiates from the ‘other’ or ‘others’. However, in its modern usage, the term refers to the ‘personhood/selfhood’ (Sollors, 1996: xi). The personhood or the self in simple sense can be referred to the overall dynamic component of the individuality within the social realm as explained in American context. Therefore, the personhood becomes the basis of existence for the individual and its relatedness to the social circumstances and reality (Erikson, 1950 in Sollors 1996: 232-265). As for the term ethnicity, it is related to the collective identity. It has its root in the Greek word, *ethnikos* which refers to ‘gentiles’ or ‘pagans’ (considered derogatory); people who are not Christians or Jews (Sollors, 1996: 2). However, the term in modern sense as used in social science today refers to ‘people’ or ‘nation’. ‘Ethnic’, therefore has a sense that describes “a group of people possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity who are, at least latently aware of having common origins and interests. So, ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people or a sector of population, but a self-conscious collection of people united, or closely related, by shared experiences” (Cashmore, 1984: 85). In the post war, during and after the post colonialism, identity and ethnicity have come to be understood within the larger frame of cultural identity (holistic), collective identity and people. In fact, since the post colonial era, ethnicity has come to be associated closely with political process for assertions and movements in the non-western context. Therefore, these concepts are multi layered and elude monolithic definitions and
categorization rendering them ambiguous and amorphous to a 'positivist' parameter. However, these concepts, used interchangeably (individual identity is subsumed in collective identity), have over the years become very important in understanding social realities: individuals and collectives in the colonial subcontinents in particular.

As a case for further academic engagement, the multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural reality embedded in the life world of Northeast region and/or Manipur provides a specific situation for discussion and understanding of the construct. In fact, in the recent times, these concepts have become an integral part of the ethnic reality that shapes a multiethnic worldview in the state and region (Biswas, 2005). The ethnic reality in this context is dynamic and complex, ever actively engaged in the ethnic identity constructions rendering a specific socio-political context and process in the subcontinent and in the region (also stated in Phadnis, 1990). In history, this ethnic reality found its first partial academic mention in the writings of Greek geographer Ptolemy as interpreted by Gemini in the circa 140AD (Majumdar, 1968 as cited by Kabui, 1991: 6 and Nag, 2002: 35). In fact, Indian historians who usually refer them as Kiratas consider that the establishment of the societies in the northern slopes of Himalayas would have taken place around first millennium before Christ (Kabui, 1991: 17). However, it came into the full view of the administrative and academic discussions and debates since the onset of British colonialism in the region (Kabui, 2008 and Nag, 2002). In the post independence period, this reality has further witnessed a substantial generation of a huge academic literature across universities. The ethnographic monographs have slowly widened its disciplinary approach with a far reaching impact on the emerging ethnic politics and the social reality of the region. In these discussions, it is possible to disaggregate (although diverse) the multi layered concepts, context, methods, perspective and the process vis-à-vis its impact on the society and the state. Tribe, ethnic identity, ethnicity have been key concepts frequently used to
describe the society, state and political situation in the region. It becomes therefore imperative to engage with the repository of literature to situate the basic theories, concepts, contexts, process and perspectives that define the methodology.

1. Theoretical Issues Relating to Tribes

Drawing conclusion from the repository of knowledge in the northeast, it can be inferred that ethnic reality is an intrinsic part of a historical process. The academic literature on identity and ethnicity as concepts describing the people and societies of the hill areas in the region is part of the process of formation and expansion of the colonial state. The British administrators and ethnographers began to write about the people as a basic strategy for the ethnic reorganization and establishment of political and administrative structure in the region. Writing about the people, documenting the military encounters and processes with particularly the people of the hill areas became a vital colonial engagement in the region. This engagement actually initiated the emergence of ethnohistories. However, it is important to situate this history in the larger context of knowledge building processes.

In general, there is a close linkage between colonial state processes and a conceptual engagement on understanding social and political reality. This engagement process has further got augmented with the emergence of the academic institutions of the state which today have become the main sources of knowledge. The proliferation of the academic literature on identity and ethnicity is one such product of this process. In fact, academic disciplines in the educational system of India show their close linkages with western science and thinking. As a matter of fact, in the study of people and society vis-à-vis the nation building process, sociology and anthropology (or social anthropology) soon occupied a prominent place across universities in the region (Oommen,
Therefore, it is important to locate the broad theoretical and epistemological underpinnings on the concept of tribe, identity and ethnicity as has been understood within the state building process.

The concept, 'tribe' as a social category has its root in the Anglo Saxon literature. Initially the concept, 'primitive tribes' (Evans-Pritchard, 1953) was in use in social anthropology as a unit of study of the 'colonies'. It was basically constructed within the functionalist approach of describing 'social facts' into a few essential characteristics, a social fact - 'a total, concrete and cohesive entity' - a basic 'German School' thinking (Pfeffer and Behera, 2002: 16). However, the concept 'primitive tribes' considered to be the basic unit of social anthropology has its root in the ontological and epistemological premise of the 'London School'. Here, the term is viewed from the basic understanding of the concept of 'civilization'. Civilization, here, is defined in terms of the western civilization and culture. Considered from this point, the small units of community are considered as 'others' who exist 'out-there' - outside of the civilization in reference. Based on this frame, the concept 'primitive tribe' is understood as an evolutionary stage - an evolutionist construct. This concept became important to describe the society of 'elsewhere context' – non-western; Africa, South America, Oceania, Middle East, Asia and South East Asia.

Thus, the concept tribe became an integral part of ethnographic monographs since the beginning of colonial encounters with the 'colonies'. These monographs were written based on participant observation fieldwork method and analysis. Therefore, participant observation as a method of ethnographic studies has its roots in the 'London School'. The works of Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobian Island is usually referred as a classic monograph written based on participant observation method field work. However, the personal diary of Malinowski, 1989 also reveals the issues
involved in participant observation – the challenges of a researcher who is an ‘outsider’.

The ethnographic monographs and the use of participant observation to study primitive tribes as a unit of inquiry gave rise to different perspectives and orientations to social science research and knowledge building process in the western context. This process has further got rationalized since the ‘Weberian critique’ to social science research methods. This critique is considered a major shift of paradigm in scientific method from positivism to post positivism. This paradigm shift brought in a focus to ‘meanings’ given by individuals in social science. It set the road map for the emergence of the emic perspective; nonwestern and collective in nature. In the recent times writers have proposed ‘epistemological community’ (Mohanty, 1993 and Nelson, 1993 as cited in Bhambra and Marghee, 2010: 61), where the importance of community and/or collective narrative as the epistemological premise to the reality under study takes precedence over individual narratives.

It is important to take a note at this juncture that the paradigm shift in the epistemological premise in the social anthropology came with the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard on the ‘African Political System’ (1940) in the context of Africa. In fact, this study generated an understanding of ‘segmentary political entities’ (The Nuers in 1940 as the reference point). This work should be read with the first classical monographs published in anthropology in 1870 in a textbook called “Notes and Queries on Anthropology”, written by the leading scholars assembled in A Committee of Royal Anthropology Institutions in Britain (Pfeffer and Behera, 2002: 12). The 1951 edition of this book defines tribes as “A tribe may be defined as a politically or socially coherent and autonomous group occupying or claiming a particular territory” (ibid: 66). This work is followed by a number of classical monographs such as ‘African Political Systems’ of 1940 (M. Fortes and Evans Pritchard edited), ‘Tribes without Rulers’ of 1958 (J.

The monographs at the time of the post colonial period were written keeping in mind the emergence of the nation-states. This changing political context is reflected in the discussion of tribes as the ‘tribes-in-transition’. The process generated academic debates along binary frame; ‘tradition versus modernity’, ‘old to new’, ‘colonies versus nations’ and ‘tribe to nation’. Such discussions are reflected in the monographs such as ‘From Tribe to Nations’ in Africa (R. Cohen and J. Middleton), and ‘The Passing of Tribal Man’ in Africa (Peter Gutkind) (ibid: 12). Here, an emphasis is made on the ‘demise of the ethnographic societies’ and the emergence of the broader society, nations and states.

The monographic endeavour for the establishment of elementist understanding of tribes by the functionalists is also influenced by the ‘evolutionist construct’ of tribe and tribal society. This construct positions tribe as one stage in the evolution of society towards ‘civilization’ (Morgan, 1977: 12-13 as cited in Pfeffer, 2002). The works of Lewis Henry Morgan and Emile Durkheim lay the basic seeds of the evolutionist construct of tribe as a concept and society. Morgan began his work among the Native Americans as an ethnologist. His work, Ancient Society (1877) is well known in which he proposes the theory of social evolution. This theory proposed that society progresses in a uni-linear evolutionary process from primitive to modern. According to this theory, there are three major stages of evolution; a) savagery, b) barbarism, and c) civilization. These stages are marked through a technological progress; from inventions of fire, bow, and potter in a savage era to domestication of animal, agriculture, and metalworking in barbarian era to alphabet and writing in the civilization era. In the words of Henry Summer Maine (Maine, 1866: 165), it is a movement from ‘status to contract society’ – the former referring to the oriental society (collective focus) and the latter is the
western society (individual focus). This theory got further clarified through the 'rank' based evaluation theory by Fried Morton (1967), considered to be a western ideology and his fellow evolutionists proposed an evolution stage from hunters, tribesmen, peasant and the state. However, Sahlins (1968) brought in an understanding of tribal society as organic and 'dynamic'. Here, 'tribesmen stage' is understood as a holistic segmentary society. In his words, tribe is a multiplex organization:

"It lacks an independent economic sector or a separate religious organization, let alone a special political mechanism. In a tribe, these are not so much different institutions as they are different functions of the same institutions" (Sahlins, 1968: 15 as cited in Pfeffer Behera, 2002: 15).

The evolutionary approach polarises tribe/culture and civilization at different ends. The former is related to the concepts of primitiveness, uncivilized, savage, profane, tradition, mechanical and unscientific and the latter is related to concepts of being cultured, educated, civilized, modern, organic, scientific and open society. This approach was widely used by the colonial ethnographers in the context of Australia, Pacific Islands and North America. However, this approach focusing on the successive stages of social evolution, has been found irrelevant in the context of India, China and Islamic countries where there is a reality of a multinational co-existence (Oommen, 1992). The tribes and civilization are co-existent.

Therefore, as a point of departure from the ethnographic monographs, Sahlins (1868) brings in a shift of understanding. Tribal society, since Sahlins (1968), has come to be more understood as a 'generalised structure' - holistic and dynamic. Here, within the broad framework of equilibrium and social order, focus has been made on the interactions, structures, rules, regulation, rituals and polity which define cultures and behaviours. This approach has been used
meaningfully to describe the tribal societies in the context of the emerging nations and states. The work of Frederick Barth and Edmund Leach are examples of such approach. In “Nomads of South Persia; The Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy”, 1961, Barth proposes a natural interaction frame for understanding tribe. According to him, the co-existence of ethnic groups and tribes is understood within a social interaction process described by “fortuitousness”, a natural phenomenon. There is always a ‘probability’ at work in this process paving a way towards the emergence of spaces of ethnic interrelation and relatedness. Simultaneously, Leach (1953) gives a structural description of ethnic reality. Here, the focus is on the basic common structure; rules, regulations, customs and rituals. This understanding is arrived at based on the study of the Kachin and the Shan political system in the then upper Burma. This work nullifies the elementalist approach of the earlier monographers and engages with the dynamic structural process of the people. Here, conflicts in society are seen as a ‘stresses and friction’ of history. In this structural location, culture is considered as an expression of the structure which may have different manifestations at different social locations. Leach is the first person who discussed about identity ‘oscillation’- shifting identity; from Kachin to Shan or vice versa. This is described through a concept called Gumsa, an emerging alternative political entity between the democratic republic Kachin society and the aristocratic chieftaincy of Shans. Besides, it is also important to mention that James Scott has also engaged consistently with the south Asian societies. In his latest work, “The Art of Not Being Government” (2005), Scott lucidly deals with the reality of the Jhumias a distinct political entity which is in constant process of tension with nation state. The concept, ‘non-state’ and ‘ungoverned’ are viewed as the dominant historical perspective. In this thesis, he argues for an alternative historical narrative (ethnohistory) of the Jhumias. This theoretical perspective takes a direct departure from the 19th century western based political ideologies of individualism and market. Archana Prasad’s “Against Ecological Romanticism” (2003) and Nandini Sunder’s “Subalterns and Sovereigns” (2007)
are also examples in this direction. Two major areas of understanding in the Indian context are further specified below.

a) The Emerging Trends in Tribal Studies

In India, scholars trace the beginning of the history of tribal studies to the formation of *Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1784 (Xaxa, 1999 and Patnaik in Sukant and Patnaik, 2008). Vidyarthi (1982) lucidly categorized tribal studies into three periods, a) Formative; 1874 to 1919, marked by the publication of “Notes and Queries on Anthropology, b) Constructive; 1920-49, and Analytical; 1950 onwards. The first period is the initial phase of anthropology in India and the latter two periods marked the movement of a discipline towards analytical or action-oriented approach studies. The Anthropological Survey and Tribal Research Institutes after Independence generated lots of ethnographic data of tribes in India (Xaxa, 1999). Drawing knowledge from the available literature, it is observed that sociology and social anthropology have moved along closely (refer Sharma and Oommen, 2000, reprinted in 2002 and Chacko, 2005) in tribal studies in India. The above cited works are publications of various papers of *Indian Sociological Society* focusing caste, class, gender, tribe, ethnicities and nationalities. However, the primary unit of study of anthropologists has been tribal communities. The earliest scholars who constituted mainly colonial administrators, visitors, travellers and missionaries initiated tribal studies within a colonial perspective. They were mainly interested in satisfying their need, either political or religious, in indulging with tribes of India. Therefore, the studies were not meant to contribute to tribes per se. They were mainly interested in travelling, administration and missionary activities. These studies basically generated baseline data for administration which were documented as descriptive monographs, inventory handbooks, gazetteers and travelogues (Sukant, 2008: 1). Ethnographic work in the context of the colonies such as “Argonuats of the Western Pacific” (1922) by Bronislaw Malinoski, “Coming of
Age in Samoa” (1928) by Margaret Mead, “The Nuer” (1940) by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, or “Naven” (1958) by Gregory Bateson are some important reference points for ethnographic methods used in tribal studies in India. The political and military wing of British India collaborated with ethnographers. Anthropology and administrators using ethnographic method documented the life and culture of the people and particularly the tribes mainly for political reasons.

However, an overview of the tribal studies in India indicates that since the early part of the 20th century, coinciding with the establishment of departments of anthropology and also sociology in the university education system in India, tribal studies have occupied a prominent place in academic discussion. This phase in the history of tribal studies witnessed the emergence of Indian ethnographers who did intensive fieldworks among tribal societies (Sukant and Patnaik, 2008). This era initiated contextualization of fieldwork method among tribes. S.C. Roy incidentally is recognized by Indian academia as one of the greatest ethnographers in India. The main emphasis in these studies lay in bringing local and tribal reality through incisive (personal concern for tribes) perspective and vivid description. In the recent survey (1988-2002) of the trend of the tribal studies conducted under ICSSR, it is observed that social and cultural elements of the tribal societies have found major discussion in the tribal studies (Srivasta and Chaudhury in Atal, 2009: 50-96). One of the distinguishing features observed in this period is the ‘tremendous increase in the number of tribal scholars and anthropologists carrying out studies on their ‘own societies’ initiating what is defined as ‘native anthropology’, ‘auto ethnography’, or ‘anthropology at home’.

b) State Approaches to Understanding Tribes

For the colonial anthropology, tribe refers to people who are outside ‘civilization’ or who have not received ‘civilization’. The basic frame of analysis
rests on understanding civilization as perceived by them. Therefore, tribe as culture became an ‘object’ of study. The study approached them in terms of the basic elements and attributes such as language, dress, culture, religion and territory. They became objectified units of culture without any interconnectedness and history. This approach polarised civilization and tribe and induced external change. It was operationalised through a discourse of ‘profane versus sacred’ and ‘traditional versus modernity’.

However, as a social reality, India consists of varied societies. Therefore, as a state it is considered to be a vessel containing a diversity of cultures and structures, also referred as ‘nation of multinationals’ (Oommen, 1997). These diverse cultures can be broadly arranged within two social structures; the hierarchical Hindu social structure and the segmented society of tribes. The tribes who are considered to be the earliest settlers (Adivasis) have co-existed with the Hindu society since ages as mentioned in the Hindu mythologies. Eklavia is a case in point. The nature of co-existence of these societies in India in terms of its social structure formation and interaction between social groups has been a subject of discussion which spans across various perspectives such as Verrier Elwin, G. S. Ghurye and Nehru, ‘Panscheel’. However, in recent times the understanding of tribes in the context of the state has undergone various changes from being purely a ‘category in itself’ to a category also considered as a product of time, context and process. Simultaneously, the understanding of co-existence, interdependence and social relations between these social groups in this context has also changed. Some of such changes have been described in terms of ‘permeability of boundary’ (Barth, 1969 and also Beteille, 1986). This approach takes into consideration the emerging history, context and process of the state. However, the heterogeneous nature of Indian society vis-à-vis tribes is a reality that has been accepted within the structure of the modern state; ‘unity in diversity’. This diversity, though changing in time, has to also take into consideration the heterogeneous and autonomous social and political existence.
of the tribes themselves. Therefore, the heterogeneous nature of tribal autonomous social and political existence nullifies any common identity frame which is expressed in terms of the reality of disparate identity assertions and resistance as seen today.

The colonial administrators began the process of categorization of people in India for effective administration. Categorization process (Jenkins, 1997: 52) as process of labelling and identification of concrete social entities as different and separate from other groups was dominant process in identification of social groups. Religion, territory, language, and caste were the main criteria used for categorization. The main preoccupation of the administrators and intellectuals at the time of colonials in India was a decennial enumeration for effective administration (Appaduri, 1992; Cohn, 1970, 1987; Dirks, 1987; Inden, 1980 as cited in Xaxa, 2003: 1). Building upon the opinion of Beteille (1995) and Singh (1993) – that concept tribe did not exist in India before the British, Xaxa opines that tribe as social category was added in the process of decennial enumeration for administration. Xaxa re-iterated that the existence of this social group was encountered (like Santhals or the Nagas) prior to the British colonials. However, there was no one categorical term to refer to this group. Therefore, he concluded that ‘tribe’ is part of the modern consciousness brought into being by the colonial state (colonial construct) and confirmed by the state after Independence’

It is known from above discussion that British mainly preferred to construct tribe identity from civilization perspective. They also used the segmentary construct of tribe identity, identity as distinct from caste based Hindu identity. However for administrative purposes, caste and tribe were used as cognate in decennial administration in 1891 census. Tribe was referred to as ‘forest tribe’ under the category of agricultural and pastoral castes. Later definitions in census enumeration made closer attempts to categorize the tribe but the criteria of categorization has always remained ambiguous as ever which
has been further confused by electoral politics (Burman, 2009: 169). However, there are many tribal academicians and activists who consider that tribe was never considered cognate of caste by British colonizers. Inferring from the separate administrative structure placed in tribal areas – excluded and partially excluded areas, Xaxa concluded that British perceived caste and tribe as separate. Tribal areas administration was based on local systems. The British conceived the difference between caste and tribe more in terms of ethnicity than caste-tribe continuum (Xaxa, 2005 and Sharma, 2005).

Some Indian scholars also have made an attempt to construct tribe identity endogenously (Ray, 1972 as cited in Xaxa, 2003). Ray used the concept 'Jana' – referring to egalitarian society and segmental society as opposed to 'jati' hierarchical society. However, scholars have questioned the use of the term 'jana' for tribe as it is amorphous (Beteille, 1986; Roy-Burman, 1994; and Singh, 1993). 'Vanas;' – literally meaning ‘forest dwellers’, is another term used to designate tribes within Hindu worldview. Ironically this concept has been used in the latest ‘Tribal Policy, 2006’.

Nevertheless, it is important to indicate that the long drawn-out academic discussion on tribes is shaped by the perspective of the colonial and state. In fact, the recognition of scheduled tribes in India (article 342) inclusion of politico administrative structure (article 224), still governed by the basic colonial construct became the basic norm for the academic reference to tribes. The concepts such as 'backward' and 'primitive' are still in use today in policy and practice suggesting a neo-colonial understanding of the concept of tribes. Drawing conclusions from the preceding discussion, it is important to make a reference to some approaches which have influenced the identity and ethnicity of tribes.
Tribe as an Isolate Culture: The approach to tribes in India as an 'isolate' entity got its primary articulation from Verrier Elwin. He arrived at this conclusion based on the ethnographic study of the Baigas (The Baiga, 1969) of the present Chattisgarh and the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA, 1957). This approach is closely related to his formulation of a concept of 'museum' and a 'national park'. The focus of the approach was basically preservation and protection of the tribal culture. This approach due to its ethnographic romanticization of tribes and culture has received less attention since the time of independence (Prasad, 2005). However, 'tribes' in India, referred as Adivasis, or scheduled tribes, are the first sections of the society who came into direct confrontation with British India rule. The various resistances by the tribes across the Chotanagpur plateau and the northeast hill region indicate the historical reality of various tribal societies coexisting in India. Such societies are distinct culturo-political entities. The encounter between the British and the tribal societies over a period of time is reflected in the administrative responses discussed under the concept of 'backward areas', 'partially excluded and excluded area'. However, the state recognition of the tribal societies as distinct political entity came with Nehruvian Panchsheel. Since then, the isolationist approach is more understood within the frame of political autonomy as defined by the Constitution Article; 244 and 342.

Tribe-Caste Continuum: The assimilation approach to tribal studies was an alternate approach to the isolationist approach. The proponent of this approach, G.S. Ghurye, described Adivasis or tribes as 'Backward Hindus'. His work 'Caste and Race in India' and 'The Scheduled Tribes in India' provide the basic epistemological premise of assimilation approach. He was of the opinion that the tribes are part of Hindu Society. However, considering the reality of tribes especially of the northeast he
proposed two pronged strategies of assimilation; social assimilation for the tribes in the mainland of India and political integration for the tribes in the northeast (Oommen, 2011). Tribe-caste continuum discussion became the basis for assimilation to Hindu society, also propagated through ‘sanskritization’ (Srinivas, 1966) – also known as a ‘Hindu model’. However, it is observed that the diversity of tribe within the varied social, economic and political context has confused the tribal identity especially in areas where tribes have been made minorities through the delimitation process. In this process, tribe-caste continuum is also a reality. However, many still hold that change as conceptualized in a hierarchical social mobility is not applicable to the segmental society. Here, ‘hinduization’ rather than sanskritization has been preferred (Xaxa in Sukant and Patnaik, 2008). In fact, Bhandari further observes that the Mishing tribe in Assam have been Hinduised (became Gossain, local revival form of Hinduism in Assam) but they are not identified as a Hindu caste (Sukant and Patnaik, 2008).

**Political Integration:** Political integration is a secular and national, state approach to tribes in India. The nation-state as a larger political territory accommodates diversity; multi culture and linguistics. Burman is of the opinion that integration should be a ‘means and not an end’ (Burman in Chacko, 1995: 83-84). Here, tribe is categorised as scheduled tribe, a political administrative term with an embedded natural rights (Burman in Bhadra and Bhadra, 2007: 18). The prerogative of scheduling tribe or scheduling area lies with the state. This categorization lays a frame of administration and recognition of tribes and tribal areas taking into consideration cultures and customs of the tribes. It is a political strategy of including the tribal society within the Indian national boundary. This approach was defined and framed in the Constituent Assembly debates (Savvyasachi, 1998). The Nehruvian Pancsheel
became the guiding principle of integration strategy – ‘let the tribe join the Nation in their own way and time’.

**Tribe-Peasant Continuum:** The tribe-peasant approach is rooted in village studies which emerged after independence following a general focus of studying villages in social science disciplines. A village was initially studied as a social system which forms a larger part of the society. Robert Redfield’s framework (Redfield, 1941, 1955, 1956) of ‘little traditions and great traditions’ is a relevant example in the analysis of village studies. Redfield did not treat village as an ‘isolate’ but part of the wider civilization. However, this approach was useful only in understanding the peasant society and village studies in India and exclusively applicable to non-tribal villages. Usually tribal studies treat tribal village as ‘microcosm’ of tribal society and the village per se is not given special significance. The conceptual model of a tribe is that of an organic social category, self-sustaining society (Bhandari in Sukant and Patnaik, 2008: 44). Among others who talked about tribes and peasants, Bhandari, based on the study made on the Mishing tribe in Assam defines peasants to distinguish it from tribe. He said “thus, we can delineate the fundamental characteristics of the peasant society culturally and economically. Culturally, the peasants are associated with their own local traditions but are intrinsically bound with the great tradition of the elite of a wider society; economically they are land-based subsistence agriculturists, though they may not be self-sufficient. Peasants do claim physical and political protection from the wider society of which they are a part and on which they depend economically” (Bhandari in Sukant and Patnaik, 2008: 47).

**Co-existence approach:** The historical approach to understanding tribes focuses on the co-existence of societies, tribes and other societies.
Here, tribe is considered to be a product of history and not a stage in a unilinear evolution but a society within a history. The earliest observation in Indian society indicates the existence of tribe as distinct social section. Among others, this approach is articulated by Andre Beteille in saying that ‘where tribes and civilization co-exist, as in India and the Islamic world, being a tribe has been more a matter of remaining outside of state and civilization, whether by choice or necessity, than of attaining a definite stage in the evolutionary advance from the simple to complex’ (as cited in Xaxa, 1999). Based on his understanding of tribe within the perspective of co-existence, Beteille describes tribes within the understanding of ‘permeability of the boundary’. He cites the example of Bhumij and Bubla as on ‘borderlines’. They could be called either caste or tribe but Juang of Orissa is tribe and Vadama is a caste in Tanjore (Beteille in Sukant and Patnaik, 2008: 38).

2. Understanding Ethnicity: Context, Concept and Meaning

The term ‘ethnic’ is old but ‘ethnicity’ is relatively new and used possibly for the first by David Riesman in 1853 (Glazer and Moynihan, 1976: 1). The concept came as a practical imposition on the social reality after World War II, end of colonial order and emergence of the so called ‘Third World’ - anthropologist’s former ‘object societies’- in international politics. This awareness has resulted in a shift of a focus from understanding the concept as ‘fixed categories’ to dynamic concept embedded in context and processes in social science analysis.

Therefore, as an analytical concept, ethnicity has emerged as product of a long history spanning across various contexts and processes. It may be traced back to the writings of Park (1913) and contemporaries (Zehol, 1998: 19-21). Since the second war period, writings on ethnicity and race relations were given
new directions. Zehol cited that Gosnell in 1935 and Cox in 1948 brought volumes on race relations in America while Furnival in 1939 came with a volume on plural societies in Netherlands in India, the present Indonesia. In the current academic discussion, Max Weber definition of ethnicity - as ‘human collectivity’ from a holistic perspective is also considered an initial point for reference (Sollors, p.52-66). Burman (Bhadra and Bhadra, 2007: 13-14) mentioned that the term ethnicity was being applied in the context of plural society by Shibutani and Kwan (1965) where reference group becomes vital to the definition of other smaller ethnic groups. However, Glazer and Moynihan in 1963 used the concept to refer to the multicultural context of America. Here, co-existence of multicultural reality; the various ethnic groups, described within changes influenced by the circumstances; economic, socio-political and religion (‘Beyond the Melting Pot’).

Ethnicity as a concept has also been referred to a twin process of self identification (also referred as ascription) and identification by others (Jenkins, 1986). Unlike other sociological identification categories like age, sex etc., and ethnicity does not have a clearly defined boundary. Because of its ambiguity as a concept, the concept can be subjected to a manipulation of various perspectives. Self-identification is commonly based on attributes of common descent, homeland, common cultural traditions including language and religion, as well as memories of migration, colonization or conquest and identification by others is considered on physical, cultural and behavioural characteristics. This process is based on ‘difference’ as perceived by an identifier. Therefore, ethnicity in a simple sense refers to cultural and political collective identity as ascribed by a group of individuals or by others. A longing to be in a collective is an inherent part of every individual in the ethnic group.

In the initial stage, ethnic identity was considered as a ‘basic givens’ of an identity in academic discussions; that one is born into the ethnic group. He or
she inherits the attributes of the ethnic identity. Ethnicity becomes an essential element that constitutes the group and the individuals in the group in relation to the others. This element is organic, resilient and resists change. Such a perspective to understanding of ethnicity is considered to be a ‘primordial school of thought’, Geertz (1963) as a case in point. However, a major change to the concept of ethnicity came in anthropology and tribal studies with the theory of ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries’ by Frederik Barth (Barth, 1969 in Sollors, 1996: 294-324). This theory defines ethnicity as boundary, the vessel of the ethnic unit. It is considered to be a processorial product of interaction between different ethnic groups and people. Barth’s understanding of ethnicity makes a major shift of understanding from ‘cultural specific studies’ to a focus on ‘interaction of boundaries’. This shift of paradigm became a very influential paradigm in studies of non western studies that an era was established in the history of social science; ‘Before Barth’ and ‘After Barth’ - B.B and A.B (Sollors, p. xxi and Despres, 1975 as cited in Zehol, 1998). The theory of ‘ethnic groups and boundaries’ has become a crucial point of departure in understanding ethnic identity and ethnicity as a dynamic analytical concept to describe the social reality. One such conceptualization along this line after Barth came with Abner Cohen (Sollors, 1996: 370-384). Cohen considered that ethnicity is a dynamic reality which is located in socio-political process. He considered that ‘vessel’ approach is rigid and located the concept within the premise of political process; politicisation of ethnicity. Therefore, ethnicity as a concept has moved from being understood as ‘culture as given’ to ‘permeability of boundary’; ‘ethnic identity as idiosyncratic characteristic’ to ‘ethnicity as political processes’. In this line of thinking, ethnicity today is referred as an instrument, a means for political mobilization.

However, it is important at this juncture to point out that discussion of ethnicity as concept and reality has resulted into varied lines of analysis strongly influenced by the various western ideologies, perspectives methodologies such
as development, cultural pluralism, cultural stratification labour and Marxism (Desai, 1996: 11-17). These ideologies have a great bearing in the present understanding of ethnicity as an analytical concept and a reality in other contexts.

In the non-western context, as in South Asia, since 1990s the conceptual understanding of ethnicity has been viewed strongly from the reality of the emerging nations in the South Asian context as a specific political mobilization based on culture and identity. In this context, ethnic identity and ethnicity have been considered a crucial variable in the formation, re-formation and consolidation of state structures in South Asia (Phadnis, 1989). Phadnis, in a comparative appraisal of the dynamics of ethnic movements in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives arrives at a point that the South Asian region is marked by multi-cultural embedded communities which are referred to as 'multi national' or 'poly ethnic'. Ethnicity as a process of assertion, political mobilization, autonomy demand, self determination movements of politically, socially and economically dominated culturo-and political entities are considered the outcome of the complex state building processes. Phadnis defines ethnic group as:

"Thus ethnic group is broadly defined as social collectivity which possesses, and is aware of its distinctiveness by virtue of certain shared historical experiences as well as certain objective attributes such as race, tribe, language, religion, dress, diet, etc. – a combinations of some of which endows it with a differentiated character vis-à-vis other groups as they perceive it and it perceives them" (Phadnis, 1987: 29).

Further, Phadnis alludes that the structure of ethnicity is not rigid but flexible and changing and usually marked by basic attributes of ethnic group of distinct cultural identity and ethnic consciousness. She observes that:
"Ethnicity is the summation of ethnic consciousness for status and recognition as a distinct social entity. Ethnicity, thus, is not a static, predetermined category, but the manifestation of the assertion of the ethnic group in the political arena to defend and/or sustain economic, political and cultural interests and wrest more consciousness. In the process, it becomes a device as well as a focus for mobilizing the members of the group into social and political action". (Phadnis, 1987: 29)

Sharma (1988) agreeing with Phadnis, defined ethnicity as collectivity of a distinct nature in terms of its race, descent and culture. Brass, (1991) also has defined ‘ethnic group as a subjectively self-conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group. In addition, he considers ethnicity also involves a claim to status and recognition either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups’ (ibid: 19).

Ethnicity studies today consider that modernization along with nation-state has stimulated ethnic consciousness across sections of societies. The process of power dynamics in the present scenario has conditioned the sharpening of ethnic consciousness. This process has given ‘ethnic consciousness’ a dynamic meaning; from ‘ethnicity-in-itself’ to ‘ethnicity-for-itself’ (Sharma, 1992: 2; also cited in Sharma and Oommen, 2000). Many authors also have also described tribe and ethnicity within class frame such as Pathy (1988) and Doshi (1990).
3. Understanding Ethnicity: Approaches and Perspectives in the Northeast Context

a) The Colonial Construct

A cursory picture of the literature on tribe, ethnic identity and nationality reveals that the British first introduced the concept of identity and ethnicity to describe the people in the region. In their effort to subdue and administer, all the areas in the northeast both and the hill and valleys, they had to identify and classify the varied groups of the people in the hills and valleys. 'Tribe' as an ethnographic category became an analytical concept for the colonial administrators and ethnographers to identify and describe the people in the region.

In fact, in 1903, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, made an official ethnographic project in the then Assam Province (Lyall, 1906). This project with a preconceived methodology initiated fieldwork and publications of a series of ethnographic monographs on tribes in the Assam province. These monographs usually dealt with myths of origins and genealogies, laws and customs, religious system, folklore, language within a general description of the appearance, racial characteristics and geographical distribution of the people. However, the intention of the official ethnographic project – to revisit and document the dying social entity – became a theoretical premise for romanticization of the tribal reality. Romanticization, as a process of colonial and post colonial projects, initiated marginalization of culture within a 'culture versus civilization' dichotomy. Some of these classical monographs may be referred.

The work, "The Khasis" (1906) by Maj. P.R.T. Gurdon was the first volume to be completed under the scheme of the official ethnography of the
north-east. Gurdon was the Superintendent of the Ethnographic Project in Assam who was well acquainted with the Khasi language. In Manipur and the Naga Hill areas, T.C. Hodson produced two monographs, “The Meiteis of Manipur” (1908), on the plain inhabitant ethnic group and “The Naga tribes of Manipur” (1911). In the northern Brahmaputra hill regions, Sir Charles Lyall wrote on “The Mikirs” (1908) which was followed by a monograph on “The Kacaris” (1911) in the southern Brahmaputra foothill region by Rev. Sidney Endle. After a year of the first monographic publication, Major A. Playfair also published “The Garos” (1909), on the hill tribes of the Garo hill areas. On the Naga Hills, “The Angami Nagas and The Sema Nagas” (1921a, 1921b) by J.H. Hutton and on “The Lhota Nagas and the Ao Nagas” by J.P. Mills (1922, 1926) became classic monographs. In the southern hill regions, the monograph, “The Lushai-Kuki Clan” (1912) by Lt. John Shakespeare became very important publications. There is also a monograph, “Notes on the Thadou Kukis” (1912) authored by William Shaw. The last two monographs on the southern region became very controversial monographs generating specific inter ethnic politics among the tribes in the southern region of the northeast. In the context of Manipur, “The Valley of Manipur” (1800) by William McCulloh and “Statistical Account of Manipur” (1873) by R. Brown are well referred colonial ethnohistorical documents. These writings have become today the basic epistemological premise for classification or identification of scheduled tribes.

b) The Post Colonial Construct

As referred earlier, there has been a phenomenal growth of academic literature as a simultaneous outcome of the national building process in the context of Northeast region since the formation of the states in the region. Such literature has covered various specific themes, context and processes such as development, national security, human security, human right and national integration on one side and tribal culture, ethnic worldview, pan tribal ethnic
process, generic ethnic political movements including autonomy, self
determination and sovereignty. These studies have generated intense academic
methodological discussions with regard to perspectives, orientations, disciplines,
‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ closely linked to the issue of ‘scientific objectivity’ and
‘social responsibility’ (Pakem in Agrawal, 1996, pp.11-20, and also Morton,
1972 in Sollors, 1996: 325-369). Therefore, one can observe emergence of
alternative methodology in terms of the social and political location of the
author. In this line of thinking, ‘epistemological community’ of Mohanty in
Bhambra and Margree, 2010, p.61 is very relevant for ethnohistory. Therefore, it
is clear that literature has an increasing influence on the politics of the nation
building process and multi ethnic reality within the state premise (Bhadra and
Bhadra, 2007).

Drawing conclusions from the repository of literature in this context, it is
observed that the colonial epistemological tradition as passed on to the emerging
Indian academicians (initially sociologists and social anthropologists) has today
enlarged its approach extending to history, political science and even political
economy in the recent times primarily located within the national integration
approach. Therefore, it is seen that academicians and academic literature is an
integral part of policy formulation and practice. However, in this process, there
has been a constant tension between understanding and defining the tribes as a
‘politico-administrative’ category (as scheduled in the Constitution) and
‘culturo-political’ entity. Frequently used concepts such as ‘primitive tribes’,
‘backward areas’, ‘scheduled tribes’ and ‘scheduled areas’, ‘partially excluded’
and ‘excluded areas’ reflect tensions between ‘one political national identity’ and
‘cultural identity’ of tribes as citizens of the state with cultural and customary
prerogative within the federal state system. The concept of autonomy, self rule,
self determination, homeland and subnationalism are vehemently used
simultaneously to articulate the organic ethnic process in this region. Some even
considered the concepts of proto national and infra nationalism to refer to the
emerging process of ethnicity (Burman in Kabui, 1985). These discussions over a period of time have evolved certain boundary elements between the cultural identity and political identity, the former referring to the specific culture (as tribe or ethnic group) or regional identity and the latter referring to the Indian national identity. But the fact is that the people of these areas are a subject of multifaceted identity; as a tribe, a village, state, linguistic, culture and an Indian. This socio-political situation expressed in various political assertions and resistance got initiated with the formation of Naga Club as seen in the literature (Nag, 2002 and Joykumar, 2005). This historical process has generated academic ethnohistory as a natural multiethnic response to the emerging political situation of the state (Shimray, 2007 and Lal Dena, 1990 as examples of such an approach).

Therefore, it is noted here that there is a diversity of literature with various approaches such as integration, assimilation, isolation and historical coexistence. Each of these approaches has its own concepts such as tribe (scheduled tribe/non scheduled tribe), ethnic group, nationality or nation. Tribe and ethnicity are state concepts while nationalities and nations refer to the proto nations claiming indigenous character within or outside the state. The concept of indigeneity is defined by the territorial and historical precedence. Therefore, one is able to indicate the social and political location of the author based on the concepts applied. A larger majority of researchers and social activists, being located within the nation state premise, take the nation state perspectives on understanding the people of the northeast. Mukhim (2010) is a case in point. This article takes a firm stand on the recent political issue of Thuingaleng Muivah (Leader of NSCN) proposed visit to Somdal, the Naga Blockage in Manipur, February 2010 as an ‘old saga’. A similar view is also articulated in Phanjoupham (2010). However, interestingly, Haksar (2010) approached this issue as ‘A Constitutional Crisis’ vis-à-vis political Naga political solution and Bhatia (2010) approached it as a ‘Justice Denied to Tribes in the Hill Districts of
Manipur'. The latter two articles, though non-local, invited varied discussions across the ethnic groups and academicians in Manipur highlighting the intensity of ethnic discourse in the region. In the subsequent discussions, JJ Roy Burman (2010) as rejoinder to Bhatia vividly approaches it as an issue of 'Constitutional Representation' of tribes in the state of Manipur and Laldena (2010), a local historian, further highlights the need for greater autonomy and tribal right of land.

As an overlarging methodological discussion in the northeast context, Sanjib Buruah's 'Against Constructionism' (2003) argues against an ethnonationalism movement and constructivist premise of ethnic reality. Buruah (2003) is an affirmation of the integrationist methodological premise which has its root in the Constituent Assembly. In the recent past Sajal Nag, a historian, has also come up as a strong supporter of integration methodological approach in his well known historical works; “India and North-East; Mind, Politics and the Process of Integration 1946-1950” (1998) and “Contesting Marginality; Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India” (2002). This perspective perceives ethnic assertion and resistance as a historical struggle for inclusive history. Besides, Bhaumik (2009), as a recent trend, has lucidly given an analytical description of the political tension between the state and society in the region positioned from the perspective of a 'troubled periphery'.

Therefore, the line of discussion and analysis in the context of the northeast reveal that ethnicity, as a construct and reality, has been more used to refer to specific cultural and political social groups. ‘Ethnicity’ both as cultural specifics and political process and action is increasingly applied in social science in northeast. T.K. Oommen (Sharma and Oommen, 2000) prefers to use the word ‘ethnies’ to refer to the cultural and political distinctive communities, like the tribes in northeast. However, his definition of ethnicity as ‘disintegration of culture and territory’ has limited application in the context of northeast who hold
territory and homeland concept very closely. However, as a general trend the concepts 'nationality' or 'nation' are used elaborately. For instance, B.K. Roy Burman preferred to use the concept of nation of national identity and nation society qualifying adivasis' political expressions (process of identity expansion) as 'infra' and 'proto-nationalism (Burman, 1983B: 1174). However, considering the emerging use of the concept ethnicity as analytical concept in northeast, Burman considered that in Northeast India, in agreement with Glazer and Moynihan, ethnic groups are a hereditary group with shared values, style of symbol of identity and consciousness of a kind (Burman in Bhadra and Bhadra, 2007:10-23). Here, he defines ethnicity from functional structuralist perspective locating its root to Dahrendorf (1968) -- the premise of conviviality as a basic driving force (similarity with Barthian approach).

As an emerging understanding from the repository of literature, below are some of the perspectives with specific focus to northeast region;

**Embedded Ethnic Life World, Peoplehood and Culture;** ethnicity is embedded in the life world of the social realities, a totality of culture that constitutes the life style of the people. Biswas (2005) is one such work in this approach. However, this approach should be differentiated from the earlier monographs. In this perspective ethnicity becomes an objective reality; a reality in the process of 'being' and 'becoming', the element of essential attributes in the state of flux in time and place. Thus, the worldview becomes the epistemological premise of reading the meaning of the world; life on this earth and after death (Burman, 1994: 4-8). The objectivity of the reality is confirmed through its ability to exert influence in the mind of the individual persons who ascribed to it in the context of the state and other ethnic groups and individuals. Closely related to the objective reality are consciousness, feeling and bonding attached to the collective individuals. Consciousness is the subjective reality of the
individual in the condition of its response to the objective reality, the
ascribed ethnic identity. It is usually expressed in what one 'says', and
'does' in the cultural context.

**Nation and Nationalities:** an articulation of the ethnic groups also
described as proto nations having history and culture occupying a
specific territory. Among tribes, the articulation of Naga Nationhood,
dating back to pre independence is one such among this perspective. This
articulation is based on the concept of nation and nationality. Nation in
simple sense understood as people with specific history and culture who
have been here before the coming of the state. Ethnicity in this context is
closely related to the assertion for recognition of history, culture and
territory, a homeland. Therefore, such ethnicity processes are based on
autonomy, self determination and even sovereignty. However, it should
be noted that there are various other similar such articulations which have
come with the coming of the state in the region. There is an emergence of
academic literature along this perspective such as Vashum (2000) and
Shimray (2007).

**State Premise:** ethnicity is considered in terms of a politico-
administrative and legal entity; scheduled tribes or tribal areas. India as a
principle recognises 'unity in diversity', a multicultural perspective. The
inclusion of various legal and administrative systems with regard to the
scheduled tribes can be understood as the broad frame of the state on
ethnicity (Sixth scheduled and article 371A, 371C included). This
perspective is also seen in the state reorganization process (Syiemlieh in
Datta Ray and Agrawal, 1994: 24-36), and also the district delimitation.
It considers the basic reality of the ethnicity in the northeast and Indian
social and political structure. In recent times, there have been lots of
academic articulations within this perspective with specific focus on the
inability of the state structure such as Sudir Bhawmick, (2010) and Sajal Nag (1990). The question of the compatibility between ethnicity and state is a rigorous academic discussion emerging in the northeast.

Modernization and Development: ethnicity as a ‘hindrance to development’ (Thomas et al, 2001). Ethnicity is considered as ‘primordial’, ‘residuals’, ‘old saga’ that would eventually disappear with the process of development. This approach is similar to colonial perception of ethnicity as non-western political phenomenon - negative, primitive, communal, anti-change, and anti modernization from development perspective (Pye, 1958: 469 and Geertz, 1963 as quoted in Oommen, 1997). Along this line of thinking, there are also authors who consider ‘constructionism’ or ‘ethnotionalism’ as the root cause of the problem in the northeast region. “Confronting Constructionism; Ending India’s Naga War” (2003) by Sanjib Baruah is one such work.

4. Ethnic Reorganization in Manipur: Emerging Understanding and Conceptualization

a) Ethnic Reorganization Process (Colonial Period)

The first colonial impression about the people in the region was influenced by the perceptions and concepts of the dominant communities of the plain region. The plain area people were referred by the hill people as ‘Vais’. They were considered weaklings on war fronts. According to the people of the plain regions (referring to Bengalis), the hills regions were considered as a habitat of strong and ferocious tribes with strong chiefs who would resist any feudal power process of plain region. According to the British they are usually referred as occasional raiders of the plain region.
Taking the Bengali dominated plain people’s perception (identity construct) of the hill people, the British considered the whole southern region as Kukis, Kukis as people dwelling in the hill region. The northern area people are simultaneously considered as Nagas, Nagas as an Assamese ascription of the people in the hill region. As terms both referred to ‘highlanders’ (hill people). The various tribes referred as Nagas at that times too were strong political entities who would resist any feudal power of the plain region. Therefore, one is able to draw a conclusion that the hill area and the plains area were distinct political units. The plain regions such as Assam, Tripura and Manipur were under the feudal Kings while the hills regions were occupied by various segmentary tribal political units. The first impression about the British on tribes was one of ‘tribal warlords’, who would constantly raid the plain areas. Therefore, it became a political necessity to conquer these areas and people and administer them through a process of reorganization along ethnic lines within the state frame of ‘one state, one people’. Therefore, the British initiated the process of assimilation of segmentary co-existence of tribes into a generic concept such as Nagas and Kuki within the framework of the British civilizing project.

As written in the colonial accounts, one of the first circumstances where a mention of Kukis as an ethnic group, is made, is in 1777. ‘The Chief of Chittagong’, British officer of the British East India Company in his report about the people of southern area to the General Governor, Warren Hastings referred to the ethnic groups called Kukis who inhabited the hill region. Again similar mention is also found in the “Notes of Cachar” in 1855 by Lieutenant Stewart (as cited in Shakespear, 1912). Stewart used the ascription Kukis within the frame of the Bengali construct ‘purana’ and ‘naia’, old and new. Hence, the ethnonym such as Old Kukis, Kukis or New Kukis was widely used among the British ethnographers. This concept has never found acceptance among many of the people referring to themselves. However, the feeling of cultural and
historical closeness among these distinct groups, village based or tribe based, is an accepted reality. Moreover, based on research surveys conducted on linguistic premise, A.R. Grierson categorised these areas and people living in this area as people of Kuki-chin linguistic subgroup within the larger ethnic linguistic group of Tibeto-Burman.

One of the earliest surveys (1870s) of the land and people undertaken by the British in the Northeast east which today is quoted in the academic circle is Mackenzie (1884). The work which formerly was meant exclusively for British administration was later retitled to focus on the relationship between the hills and British administration. Interestingly, Mackenzie has made a mention of many tribes including Kom in this region based on Capt. Yule's description of the account of Hannah, Bayfield, Wilcox, Pemberton and Griffith (Mackenzie, 1884: 78). According to this account, some of the earliest tribes encountered in the region viewed from Sagaing (south) to Mekong (north) valley are Khyens, wild Khyens, Looshai, Kom Naga, Kutcha Naga, Angami, Naga tribes, Kakhyens, Singphos, Khamtis and Shans (ibid: 81).

Shakespear, a British officer, though aware of the non acceptance of the ethnonyms such as Kuki and Chin among the people, came with a clan based theoretical frame to describe the tribes inhabited in this region. According to him, these people in the region are of one clan so called 'Lushai-Kuki clan'. This conclusion was arrived at based on the ethnographic monographs on Lushai hill, or the Lushei clan. Although, the ethnographic context of the work can hardly be exaggerated, clan theory has been rejected by the tribes themselves. Taking the racial nature into consideration this theory is considered inorganic and as such supports the hierarchical clan theory with the ultimate political purpose of creating a situation of melting pot within certain dominant ethnic groups.
According to this classification, Old Kuki is assumed to be one of the earliest tribes who existed in the region. The Old Kukis consisted of Kindred tribes such as Bete and Rangkhol in the Cachar area and Koms, Anal and Purum in the Manipur region. Although, this classification has been rejected by the people referred to, some academicians belonging to certain political perspective and/or ignorant, still use this term for their political agenda.

Shakespear observed that Old Kukis have similar cultural affinity very close to the Lushai people now called Mizos. These people are supposedly the inhabitants of Aizwal, present Mizoram hills who were pushed out by the Lushais and Thados towards Tripura, and the north Cachar hills. They are known there as ‘purana’ kukis (Mackenzie, 1884: 83). Shakespear in his further movement towards the Manipur foothill found similar tribes and he called them categorically as Old Kukis. They include Kom, Aimol, Chiru, Koireng, Purum etc. He arrived at this conclusion basically on the observation made by the Bengali clerk. Based on this work, the Old Kukis would have come to Manipur in the 16th centuries. Shakespear makes a specific reference that Chiru and Anal might have come to Manipur in 1545AD (1909: 373). The Aimol and Vaiphai appearance in Manipur coincides with the incursion of Old Kukis into Cachar in 1800. Shakespear mentions that Aimol appeared in Manipur in 1723 (pp.149-50). However, it is clearly indicated that Chiru, Kom, Kawhring, Purum and Tikhup settled in Manipur for ‘a very long time’ (1909: 373). It is also to be noted that the work of Shakespear resounds with an influence of the other ethnographic monographs such as “Valley of Manipur” by W. McCulloch (1857) and “Statistical Account of Manipur” by R. Brown (1874). The latter were the political agents of Manipur. During McCulloch’s political agency in Manipur, the Khongsais (1848), who were pushed out from the northern Lushai hills and Chin hills were settled in Manipur. This group is usually referred as new Kukis by the British administration in Manipur. Since this time, the term Kuki became very political in the region. The term was politicised in relation to the Nagas and
the politics of the conflict of ethnic groups along homeland and territory became very active as viewed within Nagas and Kukis ethnonationalism. The new (naia in Bengali) Kuki settlement is usually considered as strategy of the British to enhance administrative hold with valley as a political centre.

b) Ethnic Reorganization (Post Colonial Period)

In the recent studies, attempts have been made to understand ethnic structure in the state context. Such literature indicates the dynamic nature of tribal identity, ethnic identity and ethnicity. As a case in reference, the work of R.K. Ranjit, entitled ‘Emergent Ethnic Processes in Manipur’ (Sanajaoba, 1988: 82-96) made a mention about ‘forty odd ethnic categories’ in Manipur referred by the linguistic cultural identity, religious affiliation, political identification or the place of names where they are settled. Taking an evolutionist approach, the author describes the multi ethnic society of Manipur as evolving from social groups of the distant past who live independent lives in village defined by organic polity, customary law, common language and culture. He observed that ‘the social groups speaking a language and possessing a cultural tradition tend to develop a close association more quickly’ leading to a consequential consciousness of a common identity. There has been also effort towards arriving at a common frame of understanding ethnicity in Zehol (1998). This study, based on structural analysis of six ethnic experiences, arrives at a framework of ethnicity in the context of Manipur. This frame is defined as an ‘ethnicity syndrome’ stated as;

“We have tried to designate the phenomena of ethnicity in Manipur as representing an ‘ethnicity syndrome’ where the genesis and outcome are towards definition-redefinition of identities, and in the intervening process there are different mixtures of the factors of exposure-viability-capacity”, (p. 122).
The three broad categories of variables—viability, exposure, and capacity—are suggested as frame on which ethnicity could be understood in the context of Manipur. Here ‘viability’ is considered as the political and economic association—their organization, a response to development process of the state is referred to as the ‘exposure’ and competition for material resources is referred as the ‘capacity’, (p.120)

It is also observed that there is an effort to situate identity and ethnicity within the historical and political aspiration of the people. Such efforts have discussed the process of ‘oscillation of identity’ (shifting identity) — showing similarity with Leach (1953) in the context of ‘frontier tribes’ — those smaller ethnic group inhabiting between the Nagas, Kukis and Meitei in the state and also situated at the international border regions (transborder) such as the Anal tribe and Paite (Kabui, 1985 and Kamkhenthang, 1988). The former indicates the increasing influence of Naga ethnic mobilization along political lines while the latter initiates a historical narrative of Zomi tribe mobilization. However, it is clearly observed that the tribe in the southern part of Manipur though culturally and linguistically nearer are very diverse politically (also indicated in Gangte, 2010). The autocratic chieftaincy system among the so called Kukis is cited as a direct structural departure from Nagas chieftaincy system which is more democratic. Therefore, Anals, as a case in point, have become politically Naga even though they are closer to the southern tribe linguistically and culturally.

It is also important to note that the above mentioned studies made a shift from monographic, linguistic approach to structural perspective as argued in Leach (1953). Further, these studies have challenged the clan based theory of ‘Kuki-Lushai Clan’ (1912) in real life politics. This theoretical premise paves the way for the emergence of specific narrative of tribe and ethnicity outside of the proposed two alternatives—Naga and Kuki. This process is explained in Lal...
Dena’s ‘In Search of Identity: Hmars of North-east India’ (2008). In this book, the author has tried to construct the identity and ethnicity from the reality of the Zomis.

The academic classification and debates about the ethnic group and tribes in the state also reflected the ethnic political upheaval in 1990s in Manipur. In 1992-7 there was Kuki-Naga and Paite-Kuki clash operationalised by the insurgent wings of the ethnic group movements who stand on the principle of self determination, resistance or demand for homeland, territory and sovereignty. The upheaval took another dimension in 2001 when the plain inhabited ethnic groups resisted the territorial integration of ‘Naga inhabited areas’ as against Manipur state territorial integrity. In this context, various literatures on exclusivist ethnic politics found space in leading articles and books from various political locations. It is important to take note that at this time of Kamei’s work, “Ethnicity and Social Change: An Anthology of Essays” (2008) got published. This makes an attempt to reaffirm and describe the ethnic reality in Manipur. The book, standing firmly on history and multi ethnic reality makes a move towards understanding ethnicity within the state premise of federal structure, development and human right.

c) Emerging Perspectives and Contestations

Locating the trend of literature within the specific situation of Manipur, it is also observed that tribe and ethnohistory documentation and studies is a critical part of the formation of the state. In fact today, ethnographic study of state has become imperative to understand the state situated within a multi tribe and multi ethnic context. It is in this context that one has to understand the basic academic documents and discussions that have been incorporated in the state process. As a common trend, it is observed that the Royal narrative (as given in Parrat, 2005) has become a vital historical perspective and document that bridges
the prehistoric, the colonial monographs and the modern history of the state. In this same line of thought, it is noted that ‘History of Manipur’ (Vol. I and II) written by Gangmumei Kabui and ‘Manipur; Past and Present’ (Vol. I, II, III and IV) edited by Naorem Sanajaoba and ‘History of Modern Manipur’ (1826-1946) edited by Lal Dena (1990) constitute crucial historical documents.

With regard to the historical narratives of tribes, the colonial monographs play a crucial role in the historical construction. This construction, of late, has become a trend in which historical narratives of tribes find academic articulation. Many local authors (some writing about their own tribe or ethnic group or some writing about the other tribe/other ethnic group) have emerged paving a way for emic perspective studies. The ethno-historical literature during this period is prominently constructed at two levels; a) ethnography of specific tribe and b) a historical construction of a generic tribe, ethnic group. Among the local authors, Gangmumei Kamei (Kabui), belonging to Zaliangrong Naga ethnic group has done a commendable work on the tribal historical element in the history of Manipur. His latest work Kamei (2008) is one of the referred works on ethnicity. His works of “Anals; Transborder Tribe of Manipur” (1985) is a sample of ethnohistorical construction. There are also various other Naga local scholars who write on Nagas integration and history such as Shimray (2007) and Vashum (2000). These works rely basically on ethnic conceptual frame of colonial monograph. Simultaneously, there are also the ethnohistorical constructions of generic ethnic tribe such as Gangte’s ‘The Kukis of Manipur’ (reprinted 2010) and the Zomi historical narratives as seen in Kamkhenthang (1988) and Laldena (2008). It is important to note that the generic Naga ethnohistorical construction has used the frame of colonial monographs as a consensus base. However, the clan based theory of colonial monographs became a base of convergence as well as divergence.
At this juncture, it is also important to read the historical constructions of the tribes in relation to the overarching historical narratives of the Meiteis, Bishnipriyas, Panghans and the state. In recent times, there has been a strong historical reference to the Manipur state as the primary modern political domain. In such a perspective the generic tribe narratives and national movement especially Nagalim are considered as the product of colonial remains of 'divide and rule' policy (Sanajaoba, 2003). In fact, in recent times there is a strong consciousness among the valley local authors of the need to articulate within the perspective of Manipur state. In fact, a conceptualization of thesis along this perspective is a trend in academic institutions. Such perspectives have constantly proposed the Manipuri identity and Manipur Nation. The issue of territorial integrity of Manipur is located within this context.

As viewed from a historiography of the tribal people in the region, the modern history of Manipur has not moved very far from the Chronicles and the British monographs. These perspectives have still a far reaching consequence on the life of the people. As such, they have generated a constructionist premise to history in which the narrative of the smaller have been often given non space in history or rather, their historical narratives have been marginalised as non scientific, lacking historical evidence which ultimately has generated a process of historical assimilation into the so called mainstream. Therefore, history has become a critical aspect of the ethnic process in Manipur. In such a situation the emerging historical construct within the academics is very critical to the multi ethnic reality of the state. As a case in point, it is important to make a reference to examples where historical data of the tribes gets constructed. According to Kamei, Hmars and Koms came to Manipur in 14th Century (Kamei, 2008: 147). Anals, Moyon, Monsang and Lamkang came to Manipur in 1st century AD while, Tarao, Aimol, Chiru and Chothes came to Manipur in the 12th century and Kharam and Koireng in 14th century (ibid: 34).
Such a constructivist approach to history is based on the epistemological premise of Royal Chronicles with a political perspective of the ‘north theory origin’ versus the ‘south theory origin’. It is usually constructed that the north origin is supported by the Naga homeland and nationhood perspective tribe who come under the national movement. According to this theory the southern origin theory are migrants within the strategy of McCulloch on settlement policy in 1840s. In these debates of the history, the smaller tribes are subjected to multilayered process and constructs. The smaller tribe who are basically linked closely with the Manipur valley people become buffer tribes as construct. They are situated between the Kukis and the Nagas and also between the Meiteis and Nagas. They have no power and skill to articulate in the larger forum. There has been a growing sense of the awareness of the historical articulations of tribes in the emerging politics.

It should be clarified that the prehistoric dates are a matter of assumption. What is clear about the history of the people is their narratives. These narratives are conceptual and constructual drawn out of the lived experiences which constitute a part of the reality. It is important to look at the process of the assumptions of historical dates as a mere constructivist approach to identity constructs, culture and the social relations within the larger cultural and ecological perspective.

d) Koms and Ethnic Reorganization: A Historical Perspective

The realization of research and documentation on the Kom (Kom Rhem) culture and identity was felt among the educated leaders since 1912. As a case in point Mr. Teba Karong made the first initiative in documenting Kom culture. He published the first Kom rhem primer called ‘Kom Rhem Reader’ (Karong, 1926: 1). Based on his analysis of the memories of the elders among Kom Rhems he
arrived at this conclusion that Kom Rhems were one of the earliest tribes who co-existed with Meiteis.

Teba was influenced by the constructs of nationalism during the nation-state process in the west. He was part of the troupe sent to France during the First World War. He positioned Kom tribe (Kom Rhem tribes) as a Tibeto-Burman group who have existed for a 'very long time' (similarity with Shakespear) in Manipur. Within this circumstance, the Student Union Conference was born in 1929 which became an important institution for Koms and its kindred tribes. Along this same line, in 1950s the need for writing the history of the community became more vivid as an immediate impact of the coming of Christianity and education among the tribes. In fact, Teba Karong and Longkhobel were one of the first converts to American Baptist Church at Ukhrul under Mr. William Pettigrew in 1894. Since this event, the Kom had been a forerunner in matters of Christianity. Today the community has become fully Christian and they are an active part of the Church mission in Manipur and elsewhere.

Along with the publications for religious purpose, the researchers in the community began to document the ethnohistorical narratives of the Koms drawn from Khovel lha, custom dance, cultural symbols, stories found in oral form. Oral narratives of the community particularly the elders and the cultural practices became the basic epistemological premise for building the ethnohistory of the Koms. This methodological premise in fact found a common practice among the tribes particularly the small tribes who became conscious of building their history in the emerging context of the state.

Based on the oral narratives, local records and documents, it is seen that the history of Kom begins in the prehistoric times. This history locates the Kom tribes as one people in the earliest tribal groups as mentioned in Ptolemy (around
This history is still part of the lived experience of the people expressed in khovel Lha and Lham which have become the mechanism of reproduction of identity construct within the community. Based on this accounts, it is said that the Koms belong to the Mongolian race who migrated from the western China. This journey in the narrative is accounted through various names and events of importance to the community. The lived experience of the community recalls that they crossed the snow capped mountains, passed through several rivers and mountains. The Arunachal hill is referred as tiger hill where the community came across several dangerous rivers. It is recalled that the Thrichung, the necklace of Kom woman has its roots in this hill. Approximately, in the year between 200BC to 100BC, they entered the Upper Burma and the Chin hills. The community further narrate that they move upto the northern Arakan and reached the sea which is usually given evidence by a ‘cap’, one part of the thrichung worn by woman. Cap is a seashell, an indication of people exposed to the sea. The history of the narration moved towards the west reaching Tripura, commonly known as Rengpuiram even today. From there, they moved further towards Mahoibung, present Lushai hills, and finally entered and settled in Manipur around the Thangjing hills since 700AD. In 1973, Pu Lhungkho Leivonpa, an elder, well versed in the origin of the Kom community said that the Koms had been living with the territory of Manipur for the last 1273 years (as interviewed by Mangpu Karong). A detail picture of the prehistoric history of Kom tribe is indicated below (as cited in Mangpu, 1990: 5);

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khothudpui</td>
<td>- 4000BC: Monglol/Western China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khojepui</td>
<td>- 2000BC:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kholedamar</td>
<td>- 1000BC:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khovandar</td>
<td>- 500BC : Tiger Hill/ Arunachal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khosekho</td>
<td>- 400BC :</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khobekho</td>
<td>- 300BC :</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khehlai Masor</td>
<td>- 200BC :</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

It is inferred here that knowledge production, academic literature, politics and the society are closely intertwined. This situation has been vividly described in the foregoing review of the literature. Knowledge production in terms of the academic literature reflects as well as influences the multi ethnic reality within the state boundaries. Its conceptualization is rooted on the context and processes of state and constantly feeds on to the state building process. However, at the specific micro level, knowledge production is centred on the educated class who has the scientific method and theory with a firm foot on its own social and political reality. Therefore, one could see a close relation between the level of education of the community and the academic articulation of their ethnohistory. In fact, this phenomenon has given rise to an awareness of structure of power and authority; the question of who should write and what is the basic methodological premise. In this context, there is a growing consciousness among every tribe that their history, culture and narratives are vital part of their existence and political participation in the state.

In this active interface between the knowledge building, state process and ethnic reality, the reality of the 'smaller tribe' and/or ethnic group comes under multilayered structural processes rending them politically complex. Their narrative is often fragmented and weakened in its interface with multiple exogenous categorization processes; Nation-state, Naga, Kuki and Meitei. This situation locates the numerically small ethnic groups, who have culturally occupied a
distinct territorial political space, in a critical political space of negotiation or conflict. The 'Komrem' (Kom Tribe) people ethnic mobilization is a specific case in point. Therefore, it becomes very crucial in the present day context to reposition the articulation of people to understand the socio-political processes of the state from a multi-ethnic, eco-existence frame.