CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As has been observed, the present work is primarily a typological study of the kin terminological system of a Tibeto-Burman-speaking people, the Meitei. This interest of the work has necessarily a reference to the global four-fold taxonomy of kinship terminologies, popularly known as the Lowie-Kirchhoff four-fold typology that prevails in the current literature of kinship anthropology.

The first type of this classification is the Hawaiian type that reduces three genealogical kin-types F, FB and MB to a single term; M, MZ and FZ are similarly merged under a single term. The second type known as the Iroquois type (including Dravidian, Kariera of Australia and many other South-east Asian and Oceanic societies) merges FB to F, MZ to M (bifurcate merging) but distinguishes MB and FZ from F and FB, and M and Z, respectively. The third type, the Sudanese type distinguishes all the kin types in both groups from one another (bifurcate collateral). The fourth, the Eskimo type singles out F while classifying FB and MB together, and follows the same rule for the three kin types of opposite sex. The reciprocals of these kin types of both sexes in their children’s generation in all the four major types of human kinship systems (♂C, ♂BC and ♂ZC, and ♀C, ♀ZC and ♀BC) are correspondingly distinguished and classified in analogous fashion.

As shown in the following diagram, the Meitei terms for the three genealogical kin-types of both sexes are distinguished, and clubbed together, from and with one another along the pattern of the Seneca-Iroquois type.
The parallity of the terminological systems under the Iroquois type, however, ceases beyond this point. Under this type the Seneca-Iroquois system is singled out: in this system sons and daughters of FZS and MBS are a male ego’s sons and daughters while sons and daughters of FZD and MBD are his nephews and nieces; and, with the ego a female, the terminologically expressed kin relationships of the children of her male and female are reversed. In the Dravidian and Kariara systems, on the other hand, with the ego a male, sons and daughters of FZS and MBS are his nephews and nieces while sons and daughters of FZD and MBD are his sons and daughters, and with the ego a female, the relationship are reversed.

The above difference is certainly crucial for the present study. It helps us locate the place where the Meitei system stands. In the Meitei system $\varphi$FZSS and $\varphi$MBSS are ego’s mamak (nephews), and $\varphi$FZSD and $\varphi$MBSD are mamou (nieces); $\delta$FZDS and $\delta$MBDS are sons and $\delta$FZDD and $\delta$MBDD are daughters. And $\varphi$FZSS and $\varphi$MBSS are sons and $\varphi$FZSD and $\varphi$MBSD are daughters whereas $\varphi$FZDS and $\varphi$MBDS are maya (nephews) and $\varphi$FZDD and $\varphi$MBDD are mamou (nieces). Thus, the Meitei system falls on the side the Dravidian and Kariara system.
Again, whereas the Seneca-Iroquois do not and are not known to have had a rule of cross cousin marriage for which reason they have a separate affinal terminology, the Dravidian, Kariera and Meitei systems have kin terms for the three genealogical kin-types, that suggest the practice of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The following diagram aptly illustrates this fact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genealogical kin types</th>
<th>Terms used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kariera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB = FZD = EF</td>
<td>Kaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZ = MBW = EM</td>
<td>Toa, Yumani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBD = FZD = EZ</td>
<td>Nuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBS = FZS = EB</td>
<td>Kumbali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZSS = MBSS = DH = ZS</td>
<td>Kuling, Yaraija</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZSS = MBSD = SW = ZD</td>
<td>Bali, Ngarai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 6.2: Diagram showing genealogical kin types merged terminologically, all suggesting the practice of cross cousin marriage (the speaker is a male ego)

In contrast to the above common pattern of the terminological systems of the Dravidian, Kariera and Meitei, in the Seneca-Iroquois system MB (hoc- no- seh) is distinguished from FZH (hoc- no- ese), and both are also differentiated from WF (oc- na- hose) who thus stands as an affinal relative. Similarly, FZ (ah- ga- hue) is
distinguished from MBW (ah- ga- ni- ah), and both from WM (oc- na- hose). The single term ah-gare-seh merges MBD and FZD to each other, but both are distinguished from the affinal relative W (da- yake- ne) or WZ (ka- ya- o). Similarly, MBS and FZS are terminologically clubbed together under a single term ah- gare-seh, but both being distinguished from WB (ah- ge- ah- ne-o). In these ways the Dravidian, Kariera and Meitei systems part with the Seneca-Iroquois system. The common identity of the three systems, however, shatters hereafter.

The perfect functioning of the Kariera system of kinship and marriage has been sufficiently elaborated in the Introduction Chapter of the work, with the practice of direct exchange of sisters, resulting in bilateral marriage of first cross-cousins, real or classificatory, in a setting where what is called double unilineal exogamy regulates marriage relationships of two – by – two intersections of two pairs of exogamous matrimoiety and patrimoiety, a system popularly known in anthropology as the four-section system. Certainly, crucial to the functioning of the Kariera terminological system is the law of double unilineal exogamy working therein. The theory of double unilineal exogamy holds that bilateral cross-cousin marriage is consequent upon the exogamy of both patrilineal and matrilineal kin. According to this law, a man can not marry his father’s brother’s daughter to whom he is patrilineally related through exclusively male linking relatives; nor can he marry his mother’s sister’s daughter to whom he is matrilineally related through exclusively female linking relatives; and nor a sister to whom he is related in both ways at once. Under these prohibitions the marriageable class of women that fall outside that class of opposite sex parallel-cousins comprises opposite sex cross-cousins.

The excellent working of double unilineal exogamy in the Kariera kinship system, through the intersections of four marriage classes Burung, Banaka, Karimera and Palyeri (Burung and Karimera forming one patrimoiety, and Banaka and Palyeri the other; and Burung and Palyeri forming one matrimoiety, and Karimera and
Banaka forming the other), must have been seen in the Introduction Chapter. The theory of double unilineal exogamy is not, however, immediately applicable to the Dravidian case; Thomas R. Trautman (1981) has exposed threadbare the problems involved in its application thereto. The present work observes limitations in readily applying the theory also to the case of the Meitei kinship and marriage (in Chapter III). Now, we turn to some of the significant structural problems arising in the practice of cross-cousin marriage in the context of the system under study.

It has been observed that Fig 6.2 of the current Chapter bear strong indications of the practice of bilateral cross-cousin marriage in Meitei society. Terminological equations between FZS, MBS and WB (ibai or isen, as the case may be), and FZD, MBD and WZ (iieima or inaonupi) in ego’s generation; MB, FZH and WF (iku/mama), and FZ, MBW and WM(ine/inembok) in ego’s parental generation; and φFZSS, φMBSS and φDH (imak), and φFZSD, φMBSD and SW (imou), and also between φFZDS, φMBDS and φDH (iya) as well as φFZDD, φMBDD and SW (imou) all in ego’s children’s generation, are all logically the results of the practice of bilateral cross cousin marriage as in the case of the Kariera system. Unlike, on the other hand, the cases of the Seneca-Iroquois system affinal terms i.e., terms for ego’s relatives through his or her marriage, are not separated. But, the inconsistency is that in actual practice patrilateral cross-cousin marriage i.e., marriage with the first real FZD is strictly prohibited. The other type of cross-cousin marriage i.e., matrilateral cross cousin marriage (marriage with first real MBD) is permissible by tradition, but even its actual practice is indeed very few and far between, and those also are reported from remote social periphery.

Now, the pertinent question is as to how this formal non-congruity between terminology and reality of the system is to be explained. The situation calls for historical explanations. Here, a point already pronounced at the beginning of this work may be recalled: reality of a kinship system changes faster than its more
conservative terminologies. In what follows is presented a modest attempt to highlight the probable historical variables that worked behind the matter at issue.

Here, again, we need a moment’s recapitulation of the much promising view of an authority, namely N. J. Allen on the history of kinship systems, particularly that of change from symmetric form to asymmetric one, a view that has been referred to in the Introduction Chapter of this work. The view in point is: Tibeto-Burman kinship systems are the effects of an exploded original symmetric prescriptive system. The further view of positing a symmetric prescriptive starting point for Chinese kinship terminology has also been taken care of there. Now, in the light of these views the issue of Meitei kinship system having its present asymmetric form with its basis on marriage with first MBD at least in principle vis-à-vis kin terms of symmetric form can be resolved; juxtaposition of the two is an historical stage of change of the system from its earlier purer form of symmetry to the present asymmetrical one. Thus, the case of the Meitei kinship system in its history tends to corroborate Allen’s view.

A local evidence to substantiate the one-time prevalence of direct exchange of sisters the Meitei society must have historically experienced can be drawn from the dynastic marriages between the Angom and Ningthouja/ Mangang ruling families of the Meitei (vide Fig: 4.12) so recorded as remarkable historic practices in the people’s sacred books of history. Admittedly, the exchange involved in the said recorded practices was a case of delayed direct exchange i.e., exchange between the two groups in alternate generations as a matter of alternating-status game with each other. It may again be submitted that this form of exchange restricted to the two ruling dynasties was preserved as a legacy of the past purer form of direct exchange of women when the Meitei kinship system became an asymmetrical system with the continuity the matrilateral side of the earlier bilateral cross-cousin marriage whereas its other side, i.e., patrilateral cross-cousin marriage became banned for the mass of the Meitei populace other than the two ruling houses.
It is further submitted that the strong possibility of the existence of an earlier purer form of bilateral cross-cousin marriage in the history of the Meitei people, a form of marriage which, as has been observed in the case of the Kariera kinship and marriage system, which worked on the law of double unilineal exogamy, is suggested by the several elements of matrilineal descent organization that still linger on in the Meitei society as some of the vestiges of the past. Among these elements special mention may be made of law of exogamy prohibiting marriage among the members of a matrilineal descent group. Six such exogamous matrilineal descent groups are recorded in a few sacred books of the people, that are named after six primeval ancestresses (supra pp. 170-172). The exogamous relationships within such a group are recorded in the said sacred texts under the expression Leinung Pendinnaba. The lineages covered by each of the six groups are also recorded in the said texts. Now the point is that the record of these matrilineal descent groups presupposes the co-existence and, what is more, simultaneous working of both these matrilineal descent groups and certain number of patrilineal descent groups in certain stage of the history of the people. It would not be an illogical surmise to posit that when both the two kinds of descent groups functioned together equally efficiently at that stage of history of the people, the operation of the law of double unilineal exogamy was in force. But, the present Meitei society follows patrilineal system having patrilineal descent groups. Again, in case of marital matters, the patrilineal exogamous relations specially sairuk tinnaba (supra pp. 164-167) are taken more important.

Dating of the historical process of change from symmetry to asymmetry as in the cases of the other Tibeto–Burman societies is really a difficult task in the present state of our knowledge. The Meitei kinship system passed through another significant change at a later stage, a change that emerged most believably by and large, as an impact of Hinduization of the Meitei society that was attested in the 18th century A.D. The change in question was that of gradual popular dislike for matrilateral cross
cousin marriage. Whatsoever may have been the mover of the change, it is certainly a consequence of this historical change that though the positive rule of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage stands till date when the actual practice of the same becomes obsolete in the core Meitei society while cases, few and far between are reported sporadically at the frontiers of the greater Meitei society. The fact is that in the Indo-Aryan kin terminologies cross-cousins are not distinguished from siblings and parallel-cousins. The Brahmins of Manipur brought in this Indo-Aryan terminological system. Till today there local Brahmins follow it. Influence of this Brahminic culture trait is most palpable among some descendants of the historical ruling families who were exposed to a greater degree to the local process of Sanskritisation during the last three centuries.