CHAPTER - III

PURUM OF 1988
A. Purum/Chothe Dilemma

The term 'Purum' has been interpreted in a number of connotations by different scholars. McCullock (1859) meant Purum as a tribe belonging to the Kookie stock; Brown (1873) said that it was a subdivision of the Kom tribe; Hodson (1911) looked it as an old Kuki village; Shakespeare (1912) had projected them as an old Kuki Clan; T.C. Das (1945) called them an old Kuki tribe; and Das Gupta (1985) defined 'Purum' as a land/territory having hills and forests.

Now in 1988, the people, 'Purum' themselves give their own interpretation of the term 'Purum'. According to Mr. P. Sani Chothe, the Hullak (Headman) of the Purum Tampak village, Mr. P.R. Rakungpu, a school teacher (Purum Tampak), P.R. Selhung, President, Chothe General Union, (Chothe Khunou) and Mr. Maipuk Yuhlung of Lum-langkhupi village, the term is a corrupted version of the word 'Pulum' which in Chothe dialect means 'termite'. With strong conviction and determination they said that they are all Chothe and they do not differentiate among the so called 'Purums' of the Eastern side and the Chothes of the Western side. Prof. T.C. Das did mention about a Chothe village in the Western side with whom the Purums had marriage alliance. They also said that during their
nomadic stage the section of the Purum had separated from the main section at Ahu-Lungsubung village (in present Churachandpur district) and settled down at the present Chandel district. Mr. P.R. Eakungpu claims that those who were strong enough to face the danger of wandering life could come along and settle down in an area where the Pulum (termite) were in abundance. In course of time, due to outside contacts they often referred themselves to their locality and identified themselves as Pulum to the outsiders. Gradually the term Pulum got corrupted into Purum and the neighbouring Meiteis still call them Purum. Thus the Purums were always Chothe to themselves and are still Chothe and it is only to the outsiders that they were Purum. E.W. Dunn (1886) in the Gazetteer of Manipur called the Purum-Chumbung village (one of the Chothe villages in Chandel district) as a Chothe village.

Note: Dr. H.Kamkenthang, Research Officer, Directorate for Development of Tribals and Backward Classes construes the Purum's claim to be Chothe and argues that even among the Payte the termite is known as 'Phulum' and it is of often occurrence that most of the tribes simply refer their identity to their habitat. He says that among the Payte, the people inhabiting on the lower and upper slope of a hill often call themselves as 'Vengkhangte' and 'Vengsakte' respectively. These two terms at times may look to others as two different communities but in reality they are Payte. Termite is also known among the Kom E, Koireng as Phurum and Phuilum respectively.
In the folk-tale of the Chothe it is said that the trib came out of a cave known as huipithorangya. The cave was covered by a flat rock and as commanded by God, it was opened by a wild buffalo by its horn. The place was called Lungleh E Waishu. Most of the men and women were eaten up by the Kamkeirangpa (tiger). Only a son Kachote and a daughter Thanidam were left unharmed because they were wearing shawls with designed resembling the tiger. Thus from the name Kachote the word Chothe emerged.¹

According to Maipak Yuhlung, the word Chothe means:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Choi} &= \text{hold} \\
\text{te} &= \text{boy} \\
\text{Chote} &= \text{Chote}
\end{align*}
\]

And Chote is the term derived from the original name Kachote which the God Pakhangba had directed to name the boy.

In the original history of Manipur there are references about the reign of Thangari Chothe, Thanwai, Pakhanba and Pakhanba-Soraren (God of heaven). The worship of Pu-Pakhangba and Pu-Soraren is till in practice among the Pegangs (non-Christian Chothes).

¹ Kankung, Abershing. The Original Custom and Culture of Chothe Tribe: Purum (Chothe), Revisited, ASI, Cal.
According to the census report, the population of Purum and Chothe were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Purum</th>
<th>Chothe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked as to what had happened to those Purum shown against 1951, 1961 Censuses, Mr. Maipak Yuhlung said that after the Japanese war there had been a general awareness among the 'Purums' that they should be known as Chothe and in 1975 CGU meeting (Chothe General Union) under the Presidentship of P.R. Shelhong, it was resolved that henceforth the tribe should be known by their old name Chothe. He also argued that while taking census, the enumerators who were mostly Manipuris, were somewhat biased to enroll the Chothes as 'Purum' because to them the Chothes of the eastern side were always 'Purum'. Even during T.C. Das' field work (1932-1936), they were introduced to him as Purum by the Manipuri interpreters that accompanied him.
B. Chote/Kuki/Naga Identity Question

Linguistically, Chote, Kuki, Naga E Meiki belong to the Tibeto-Burmese group and as such there is a close affinity to each other. The Chothe General Union had a student wing which was named as Chothe Naga Student's Union in 1948 and was affiliated to Naga Student's Federation. But the elder members of the CGU were against the idea of identifying themselves in the line of the Nagas and in 1974, the CGU took up the question of being a Naga and delineated the Naga identity. Linguistically they are more close to the Kuki group as 80 - 90% of the words in the dialect are similar to the Kuki group. For instance the words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chothe</th>
<th>Kom</th>
<th>Koireng</th>
<th>Meitei</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thumb finger</td>
<td>Khutpi</td>
<td>Kutpui</td>
<td>Kutpi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fore</td>
<td>Khutchai</td>
<td>Kutcha</td>
<td>Kutchal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Khutjai</td>
<td>Kutlai</td>
<td>Kutlaita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring</td>
<td>Khut-tem</td>
<td>Kut-teum</td>
<td>Kut-teniang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Khut-te</td>
<td>Kut-te</td>
<td>Kut-te</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This phenomenon can be judged in the line of a few similar incidence like those of the Adis E (known as Abor to the Assamese) and the Naga. The Abor is now changed to Adi but the term Naga has been widely accepted by the tribe.

Similar changes are seen among the Lushais to Mizo; Mikir to Karbi and Miri to Mishing.
According to Mr. Maipak Yuhlung of Lumlang-Khupi village, there cannot be any reason for the Chote to be included in the Naga sections. The two groups show a wide gamut of differences in cultural traditions and in regard to their origin, custom, manners, dress, laws, and traditional organization etc.

There are references of Chothe in the pre-historical accounts of Manipur, such as Cheitharol Kumbuba saying that there is a wide difference between the Naga and the Chothe.

C. Chothe Clans and their Marriage Alliances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clans</th>
<th>Sub-clans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Marim</td>
<td>1. Rimkung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Rim Kelek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Rimpunchong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Pilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clans</td>
<td>Sub-clans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Makan</td>
<td>1. Kan Kung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Makan-te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Khiyang</td>
<td>1. Lungkang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Aihung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Impi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Ingte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Thao</td>
<td>1. Thao-Kung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Thao-run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Teyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Rangshai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Yuhlung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Rungkung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Parpa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. An Yuhlung boy can marry with girls from:
   (a) Rimkelek
   (b) Thao
   (c) Rangshai

2. Khiyang boy can marry with girls from:
   (a) Parpa
   (b) Thao
   (c) Makante
3. A Makan boy can marry with girls from:
   (a) Tranglin
   (b) Parpa
   (c) Hulpu
   (d) Rimkung

   Makante boy can marry with girls from:
   (a) Trangrim
   (b) Hulpu
   (c) Pilin
   (d) Rimkung

4. Among the Sub-clans of the Marim, they marry with:
   (a) Rimkung:  
      (i) Yuhlung
      (ii) Trangin
      (iii) Thao
      (iv) Hulpu

   (b) Rimke-lik:  
      (i) Thao
      (ii) Makan
      (iii) Tranglin
      (iv) Hulpu
(c) Rimphouchong:  (i)  Kanbung
(ii)  Yuhlung
(iii) Tranglin
(iv)  Hulpu, and
(v)  Thao

(d) Pilin:  (i)  Thao
(ii)  Yuhlung
(iii) Tranglin
(iv)  Hulpu
(v)  Thao

5. A Thao boy can marry with girls from:
   (a) Parpa
   (b) Makan

6. A Rangshai can marry a girl from:
   (a) Rangshai:  (i)  Hulpu
                 (ii) Rimkung
   (b) Teyu:     (i)  Makan
                 (ii) Parpa

7. A Parpa boy can marry from:
   (a) Marimlin
   (b) Yuhlunglin
   (c) Rangshai
D. Prescriptive or Preferential Rule of Marriage

The Chothes practise matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and as such they marry their mother's brother's daughter (MBD) or with a classificatory MBD (a woman of the mother's brother's clan).

For instance,

Fig. 5.

![Diagram of Chothe marriage system]

When a Parpa MBD is not available, he can marry anybody from a Parpa clan which is then taken as classificatory MBD or he can marry a Makan girl.
Here a Thao is prescribed to marry his MBD. In the absence of MBD he has choice to marry a classificatory MBD or he can marry a girl from the clan he is allowed to marry. Now, apparently he has three 'preferences' say:

\[
\text{Thao} = \text{Parpa MBD} \\
\text{Parpa classificatory MBD, and} \\
\text{Makan.}
\]

But in practice these preferences were fixed and thus are prescribed. He, in any case, cannot marry outside the prescribed "choice". Thus in this sense the Chothe follows a prescriptive marriage alliance.

Any deviation from the prescribed law is duly punished. Even in the case of an elopement if the girl, in spite of being from the prescribed clan, belongs to another village, the boy is fined by the village council or the Hloukal of the girl's village. Khuntangram is the compensation paid to the Hloukal of the bride's village. But if the girl is from the same village and she is from the prescribed clan, no fine is to be paid.

It is interesting that though majority of the Purums have been converted to Christianity they continue to follow the prescriptive law for their marriages.
Although the Purum debate has abated to some extent there are several issues which have defied clear understanding. Some of the issues have come to light after Basu et al. (1985) paid a visit to the Purum area, my visit too added a few more issues. These issues would need a detailed study of the Purum. I will try to summarise them as follows.

The issues for further study

(a) Although the Purum are a small tribe, they are still very much there. The question is why the Purum now prefer to be identified as Chothe? This matter is not all that straight as Basu et al. have tried to make out.

(b) Of late, there are frequent marriages outside the Purum. If this trend continues, then how they will be able to hold on their Purum (Chothe) identity.

(c) Violation of the prescriptive marriage rule within the group is strictly dealt with by the Purum; while marriages outside the group are somehow tolerated. Why is it so?

(d) Matrilateral prescriptive marriage is the axis of the Purum social structure. By marrying
outside the group, apparently the Purum are skipping over a structural arrangement. Is it so? If it is so, then the change is of great theoretical importance.

(e) Institutions like Ruishang (village council) and maksa are no more functional. The issue then is how the present interpersonal relationships fit into the Purum (Chothe) social system?

(f) The role of sib-priest 'Pipa' under the new religion is a vestigeal one. Likewise, most of the traditional rituals have become a part of folk-tale to the new generation. Where does the new generation stand under the banner of the Purum?