CHAPTER VI

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION
CHAPTER VI

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

I

Analysis of 'facts' relating to identity of tribes in Manipur had suggested to us the soundness to investigation of the processes of fission-fusion of identities to understand the process of flux of ethnic identities in the State.

(i) In the philosophy of science such approach is referred as the inductive method. The exercises involved in this are clear and precise. We began by observation of data and then proceed to classify it into appropriate categories. A variety of descriptive facts and series of conceptual generalizations help to consolidate the facts in a systematic manner.

(ii) The formalization of available theories is another approach. According to this, the available theories provide the
initial clue for investigation in terms of the concepts incorporated in them. In philosophy of science such an approach is referred to as the deductive method. As we have noted, we had the advantage of a number of 'theories' on ethnicity, and we could have based our investigation on one or combination of them. An exclusive reliance on such a method could have its limitations. This notwithstanding, the available theories did provide much insight in regard to the line of investigation.

(iii) The third approach is one with the combination of the above two, referred to as the retroductive method which works by a technique of successive approximations, the concepts and assumptions of theories are brought into closer alignment with relevant evidence while at the same time maintaining the logic of consistency required of deductive method. (cf. Schrag, 1967). This was the method which helped us most in formulating the analytical frame-work with the present study.

After a review of relevant literature in anthropology and related social science disciplines, it was realized, that the notion of "ethnicity" can be adopted as the dependent variable for the present study. To suit the purpose of the present study, and also in view of the prevailing ambiguity in regard to a precise definition of the term, we adopted an operational definition. To tide over the limitations of the objective base of ethnicity and the subjective definition, both of which in a
way referred to structural considerations, we tried to adopt a behavioural approach to the definition of the notion of ethnicity.

According to us ethnicity is one category of social phenomena which involves the behaviour of people as well as the structure of the society in regard to social distinctiveness which finds expression in varying situations. Hence, the phenomena of ethnicity involves the structural as well as behavioural considerations.

II

A close analysis of facts in regard to these which formed the source of data for the present study were:

1. The Purum Experience: We may recall some of the description given earlier. The process of identity reformulation as revealed by this community bring to attention two distinct features.

   (a) This is a community considered to be from the intermediate category, and referred as the Old Kuki in official records by the British, but in their recent process of redefinition of their identity they prefer to be identified as a Naga community.

   (b) There is the apprehension that this community has tried to adopt the identity of a larger community, the Chothe, in order to find a viable number and thus identity.
2. **The Zeliangrong Experience:** The Zemei, the Liangmei and the Rongmei tribes of the Naga group of tribes have tried to forge a common identity of the Zeliangrong. The history of this can be traced back to the early 30's of this century. The Zeliangrong movement is often referred to by its protagonists as an 'independence movement' against Naga and British dominations.

3. **The Thadou Experience:** The Thadou is one of the Kuki group of tribes. In terms of number, the total population of the Thadou is the highest of the 29 tribes inhabiting Manipur. This is also one of the most 'progressive' tribes of Manipur.

When the Bible was being first translated into the local tribal languages of Manipur, it was in Thadou language. Somehow, the early Western Evangelists who were involved in the Bible translation, they designated the Thadou version of the Bible as the Bible in Kuki. In course of time the other tribes of the Kuki group, specially the Gangte and Paite resented this. Such resentment became more pronounced after the Gangte and the Paite prepared their own language versions of the Bible.

The controversy among the Kuki group of tribes centered around naming of the Bible in the Thadou language. While the Thadou liked it to be referred as the Kuki Bible or the Thadou Kuki Bible, the other tribes of the Kuki group wanted the Bible to be referred to as the Thadou Bible rather than adding the Kuki appellation. They explained that any such name such as Thadou
Kuki gave the impression that the Thadou are the main representatives of the Kuki group of tribes.

4. Very similar to this is the Bishnupriya experience. Bishnupriya is the name of a non-tribal community concentrated in the Bishnupur district of Manipur. Today the people of this community inhabit parts of the Cachar district of Assam and some parts of the Agartala district of Tripura. The distribution of the Bishnupriya to three states-Manipur, Assam and Tripura. This is due to some historical reasons dating back to about two hundred years ago. Today we find that a sharp controversy has developed around the identity of the Bishnupriya. Much of the controversy has its origin in the happenings outside Manipur but what concerns us in the present study is how the controversy involved with the identity of the Bishnupriya has shaped itself in Manipur.

The Bishnupriya inhabiting the Cachar districts of Assam and those in Tripura prefer to be designated as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri. The Meitei in Manipur strongly resent this. According to them the Bishnupriya should be referred to by the single word, Bishnupriya rather than add the suffix 'Manipuri'. Any such usage is likely to give the impression that the Bishnupriya represent a section of the Manipuri people, which in fact they do not. The Bishnupriya inhabited outside Manipur, in Assam and in Tripura, justify their use of the appellation 'Manipuri' as they
claim to be one of the original inhabitants of Manipur, and share many common cultural traits with the Meitei.

In sharp contrast to this, in Manipur, the Bishnupriya inhabiting in Manipur prefer to be identified as Manipuri Meitei, rather than as Bishnupriya. The Meitei however are not agreeable to this. They would like to distinguish the Bishnupriya people from the Manipuri.

The Bishnupriya-Manipuri and the Thadou-Kuki, analytically, represent many similarities, it is the second part in each of the two hyphenated names which introduce new issues of controversy. The history attached with each of the two names has brought in a sequence of factors and interpretations which have provided full stories of definition and redefinition of identities in each of the case. In each of the two cases, while the first part of the designation is the indigenous identity the second part of the designation is the name adopted (Nee, assigned) by the communities by the British. Questions like what does the generic designation of Manipuri or Kuki imply, when was it introduced and with what understanding, over what period of time (during the colonial period and after) and how have these been defined and re-defined surround each of the two experiences.

5. The Meitei Experience. The most popularly known and numerically the most dominant community inhabiting Manipur referred to as the Manipuri. They are locally known as the
Meitei. There is the general understanding that the Meitei are Hindu. This interpretation has now become a subject of controversy as the Meitei, long known to be Hindu, would like to be identified as Sanamahi, the name of indigenous religious faith. According to some analysts this represents a process of religious revivalism. On a close look we find that a complex set of political and cultural issues are involved, most of which have emerged during the post-colonial period.

6. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo Experience. Such a designation for a group of communities sharing common territorial affiliation, that is Manipur, represents a unique experience of how irredentism finds its socio-cultural-political manifestation. In the case of Manipur, while on the one hand there are efforts to re-inforce and maintain the Kuki identity, pronouncedly distinct from the Naga identity, on the other hand we also note that the Kuki group of people find the need to keep themselves divided into the Chin, the Kuki and the Mizo identity. In a way this appears to be a miniature exercise in "unity in diversity".

In the north east, the Kuki group of tribes show a widespread distribution, extending over the states of Assam, neighbouring Manipur and Tripura, and the State of Mizoram, and across the border, in neighbouring Burma and Bangladesh. In Manipur, the Kuki group of tribes comprises of officially recognized 8 scheduled tribes. In Manipur, they are spread in
territory which have borders with Mizoram and Burma. The Kuki group of tribes, inhabiting Manipur, which are located in territory bordering Mizoram, would like to retain their Kuki identity, but would like at the same time to represent that, in Manipur, they are an extension of the Mizo. This includes Zou, the Hmar and the Lushai. The Paite, Veiphei, and some other tribes of Kuki, in view of their location in territory bordering Burma and while retaining the Kuki designation, would also like to keep alive their Chin identity, with people of the same name residing across the border, in Burma.

III

Analysis

The substantive part of any research effort, as expected is the presentation of the analysis and interpretation of the data. Any such presentation has to begin with two statements. They are needed as much for clarification as for ready reference. The statements referred to relate to:

1. The empirical feature in term of which the phenomena has been perceived.
2. The conceptual scheme in terms of which the analysis has been formulated.

The subjective view of ethnic identity and the objective base of such identity are two sets of perceptions very common in anthropological literature. We need not consider this as
opposite to each other, on the contrary they can be taken as complimentary orientations, the combination of which provides a realistic appraisal of the phenomena on ground. One of the possible approach to integrate these two perceptions is to view the situation in its historical context. We have attempted this in the present study.

We can divide the period of history in focus into two stages, the first stage covering the colonial period and that preceding it, while the other stage covering the post-colonial period. In Manipur those ethnic identities with tribals, which we consider today as ascribed, subjective perceptions, were away from this during the early years. The corporate identity of the Thadou, the three small tribal groups now combining to make the Zeliangrong identity, the Purum, and the different communities of the Kuki group, as carried by each of them today are of recent origin. Till the annexation of their territory by the British and the appearance of elements of British rule to their lands, each of these tribes held a very loosely knit corporate identity based on hazy notion of shared common language and myth of common origin. There are clear indications that with the land of the Thadou and that of the constituents of the Zeliangrong tribe coming under British administration, there appeared some elements which initiated a process of progressive consolidation of their corporate identities. Between the Thadou and the constituents of the Zeliangrong, the sequence of events were different, but the
end outcome was same. With the Thadou it was the appearance of Christianity and with it the translation of the Bible into a local language which provided the initial element which initiated sequence of situations towards emergence of corporate identity. The precipitate effect of this appeared much later with the fission of the Thadou identity from larger Kuki identity. With the Zeliangrong, the sequence of events took a different turn. The precipitate effect in course of time was the fusion of identities between the constituent groups of the Zeliangrong.

We proceeded to analyze the six experiences in terms of the process of fission-fusion of identities. Analysis of the data revealed two points, that within the recent history (the two stages referred above).

(i) The four of the experiences, those relating to the Thadou, the Purum, the Zeliangrong, and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes represented a full cycle of fission-fusion process of identities.

(ii) The remaining two experiences, those relating to the Bishnupriya and the Meitei, represented where efforts were initiated to re-organize and project a revised identity. While the Meitei were involved in the process of trying to redefine their cultural identity sans the social-religious elements of Vaishnavism, on the other hand, the Bishnupriya were engaged in the process of readjusting their ethnic identity by underplaying
the Vaishnav elements in their social-religious organization.

(iii) Such an analysis as above revealed another very significant point. We could note that while the tribal communities in Manipur were involved in the phenomena of ethnicity with reference to the micro-level context, i.e., between the communities inhabiting Manipur, on the other hand, the non-tribal communities, the Meitei and the Bishnupriya were involved with the phenomena of ethnicity with reference to a macro-level context, in the larger context of the Hindu system. Diagrammatically this can be represented as:

We proceeded with an analysis of each of the six experiences relating to definition-redefinition of identity as part of -
'The process among the ethnic groups situated to organize various political and economic associations in response to developments affecting the perception of competition for material resources'.

Such an enunciation helped us to identify three broad category of variables with reference to which the analysis could proceed. The three variable-cluster were -

(i) Political and economic association - their organization (Viability).
(ii) Response to development (Exposure).
(iii) Competition for material resources (Capacity).

We redesignated these variable-clusters as noted in bold letters along with each of the above three, Viability, Exposure, and Capacity.

Analysis of the six experiences in terms of (a) the processes of definition/redefinition and fission/fusion (b) the genesis, (c) the strategy and the nature of the groups involved (the actor group and the target groups), we noted depend on the above listed three broad category of factors; (a) Exposure; (b) Viability, and (c) Capacity.

Exposure is one of the most crucial element in the ethnic phenomena of Manipur, for obvious reasons. As other parts of this region, Manipur is characterized by seclusion from the rest of the country. The entry of the British to this part of the
country reduced the element of seclusion. The process of exposure was enhanced, with rapid speed and through diverse forms, after Independence. This appeared as one of the key elements to initiate processes of ethnicity in Manipur. Each of the six experiences represent different patterns of exposure, and through it, different trends in the expression of ethnicity. In academic terminology, the element of exposure has been referred to as a dimension of the process of modernization.

Viability is an important element as it involves and determines forms of fission and fusion of identities. In real life operation, it involves various process of group mobilization and organization.

Capacity is an element which is both an end result as well as a process. It relates directly to the aspirations as well as the actual experience of the ethnic group in regard to its control over the available resources.

We may present an analysis of the six experiences with reference to each of these.

On the basis of genesis and the dominant factor involved with each of the six experiences, we can divide them into three broad categories, as follows:

(i) **Capacity - factor oriented experience:** The Zeliangrong and the Meitei Experiences.
(ii) **Exposure - factor oriented experiences**: The Thadou and the Bishnupriya experiences.

(iii) **Viability - factor oriented experiences**: The Purum and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo experiences.

We may examine each of the six experiences individually.

1. **Zelianrong Experience**: The genesis is from realization of relative deprivation with reference to the Kuki. The immediate strategy is redefinition of identity, by Zemei, the Liangmei and the Rongmei groups, to obtain a viable group, the Zelianrong. The understanding is that this will give the capacity, to contest and claim needed access to the resources.

2. **The Meitei Experience**: The genesis here also is from the increasing realization of relative deprivation vis-a-vis the other ethnic group in the State. Through experience the Meitei have realized that they will need to enhance their capacity, and this is possible through a redefinition of their identity as a 'tribal community' as different from the current identity of a non-tribal community.

3. **Thadou Experience**: The Thadou, and the Bishnupriya experiences have many similar features, and thus can be put as belonging to one category. In each of these two experiences, exposure has been the main precipitating factor (genesis). In the Thadou experience it can be traced to the translation of the Bible in the Thadou language (dialect). This in course of time,
through a sequence of experience, initiated processes of definition and redefinition of the Thadou identity vis-a-vis the broad Kuki identity.

4. The Bishnupriya Experience: Like the Thadou experience, find themselves in an ambivalent situation requiring them to redefine their identity. The situation requiring them to redefine their identity. The situation is ambivalent for them as living in Manipur and outside find themselves in two different opposite situations. The Bishnupriya living in Manipur find it advisable to merge their identity with the Meitei, while those living outside Manipur, as in the Cachar districts of Assam, and in Tripura, identify themselves as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri, distinct from the Meitei. The genesis of this can be traced to the exposure, culture-contact with other ethnic groups.

5 & 6. The Purum and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo Experience: In each of these two experiences, the viability factor is predominant. The Purum and so also the Kuki group of tribes find it contingent for them to adopt/maintain a broad ethnic identity in the Manipur context. We note that in the Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience, the capacity factor acquires a dominant significance in the total sequence of the processes.

IV

The appearance of the exposure-viability-capacity cluster of elements with the fission-fusion phenomena of ethnicity of
Manipur provided the analytical framework for the interpretation of the six experiences. This framework can be taken as a helpful tool to proceed with wider and more deeper comparative analysis. We have tried to venture an empirical designation to the nature of experiences examined in the study. We find that -

(i) The phenomena of ethnicity in Manipur is a process where subjective perceptions of identity are interlocked with projecting of objective bases. This involves the process of fission-fusion.

(ii) In each of the six experiences the genesis and outcome represent the same cycle, with difference in the sequence and degree of the interaction of the three key elements, exposure-viability-capacity. When the genesis and outcome of a series of processes reveal some uniformity we can refer to such a process as "syndrome".

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 mix of the factors of exposure-viability-capacity.