CHAPTER IV

THE EXPERIENCE
- Purum experience
- Zeliangrong experience
- Meitei experience
- Bishnupriya experience
- Thadou experience
- Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience
In this chapter we relate six experiences which we find prominently represent the different variations in the process of ethnicity in Manipur. Each of the experience related here represent a full story of definition-redefinition of identity by the different communities inhabiting Manipur.

The experiences (six) related here can be classified on two basis:

1. Relating to tribal and non-tribal communities.

   **Tribal Communities**

   (i) Zeliangrong experience
   (ii) Thadou experience
   (iii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience
   (iv) Purum experience
Non-Tribal Communities
(i) Meitei experience
(ii) Bishnupriya experience
(2) Those experience which have a pre-Independence and post-Independence origin.

Pre-Independence Origin
(i) Purum experience
(ii) Zeliangrong experience
(iii) Meitei experience

Post-Independence Origin
(i) Bishnupriya experience
(ii) Thadou experience
(iii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo experience

In view of this, the presentations of the last three experiences, namely, those relating to the Bishnupriya, the Thadou, and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo do not have any reference of the pre-British experience.

I

PURUM EXPERIENCE

General Introduction

To the anthropologist the Purum is a very known name. This is the name of one of the tribes inhabiting Manipur. In Manipur, today there are 29 scheduled tribes. It was rather an unusual coincidence which brought a name for the tribe, among the
anthropologist. About six decades ago, 1931, the faculty of the Department of Anthropology in the university of Calcutta, in their usual characteristic style, started to concentrate for their 'annual ethnographic exercise' among the Purum, under the leadership of the late Mr. T.C. Das.

T.C. Das, the leader of the team, on basis of the intensive field work by 1945 brought out a detailed ethnographic account of the tribe which was nearly three hundred pages, stuffed with material. This work would have gone rather unnoticed but for the fact that some structural characteristic of the Purum society attracted the attention of some structural anthropologists. This formed basis for theoretical debate among the anthropologists. As Needham points, among the Purum all lineages are allied to all others, so that, from the viewpoint of ago's lineage the society is exhaustively categorized into two exclusive group, wife-givers and wife-takers, so that the only possible exceptional marriage would in fact be a special forbidden one.

But for the theoretical discussions that developed later on the Purum example, the Purum would not have acquired the name among the anthropologists in the world, as they have today. This was an example no different from that which brought fame to Morgan, the American anthropologists, Morgan's work on the history of family would have remained rather unnoticed had Karl Marx not adopted this for his classic theories.
When T.C. Das, in 1935, conducted his field work among the Purum, he noted, the total population of the tribe as 303 (according to the census of 1931). Four decades later, according to census of 1971, the population of Purum was NA (not available). Obviously, the Purum had not become extinct within these forty years. It is explained that the Purum have merged their identity with the cognate tribe, the Chothe.

LOCATION

The tribe at present comprises only 12 villages, having not more than 20 to 60 houses in each village. These villages are now most commonly found in the Tengnoupal district of Manipur, whereas only one village Chothe Lamlanghupi is situated near Bishnupur in the south district of Manipur.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Pre-British Period

The earliest reference we may find from the accounts of Muslim Chronicles who narrated the Kukis to have rendered various help to the rulers of Tripura in their struggle with the Muslim administrators during the Mughal rule. The family Chronicle of the Maharaja of Tripura also bears an account of the depredations of the Kukis and their gradual subjugation and employment in military service. It is, nevertheless, not known which of the Kuki groups represented the given accounts.
2. **During British Period**

One of the earliest references of the Purum (Pooroom) is found in the "Account of the valley of Munnipore and the Hills Tribes with comparative vocabulary of the Munnipore and other Languages" published by Major W. McCulloch, a political agent, in 1859. According to him, the hills around the Manipur valley were inhabited by a large number of tribes including the Purum and their cognate the Chothe, who were much more numerous than what they were when the author studied them (1859 : 41-42). Though our knowledge about the reasons for their decline in numerical strength remains inadequate, McCulloch found them to have been able to retain all their special customs. He considered both the Purum and Chothe along with several other tribes to be "evidently only varieties of the Kookie stock" (1959 : 64). Since in physical features they appeared to him more or less alike and he found no striking difference in their customs and other attributes, McCulloch put rather an extra emphasis on their common heritage. What is important to note here is that although the Purum and Chothe closely resembled one another in physical appearance, rituals, and customs, McCulloch was still in favour of assigning independent tribal identities to them under the broad Kuki genera.

R. Brown, another Political Agent of Manipur, made a reference to the Purum only once in his "Statistical Account of
the Native state of Manipur and the Hill Territory under its Rule (1873). According to him, they were a sub-division of the Kom tribe along with the Kairup, Chiru, Aimol, Quoireng, Karam, Mundung and Laikot (1873 : 53).

T.C. Hodson while describing the Naga tribes of Manipur, made somewhat a passing reference to the Purum. With regard to their succession of authority, Hodson writes:

As a variant upon the custom of primogeniture we find at Purum, the old Kuki village in the SW, a custom by which the occupants of the village offices moves up in regular succession. This custom provides a succession of experienced persons ..... (1911 : 102)

From the given quotation it becomes fairly evident that by Purum, Hodson did not mean to signify a tribe or any other population. He was rather categorical to refer to an old Kuki village.

Shakespear assigned altogether a different identity to the Purum. In his treaties on the Lushai-Kuki clans, Shakespear devoted a whole chapter to describe the old Kuki clans among whom Purum and Chawte constituted parts. According to him, the Purum are an endogamous clan divided into a number of exogamous families (1912 : 153). It thus, becomes obvious that Shakespear while ascribing the status of clan to the Purum, did not follow the usual definition of the same. He instead, conceived clan as a division of race - a proposition, which Shakespear neither adequately substantiated nor illustrated in accordance with the
usual scientific procedure. Nevertheless, we thus see that Purum as a conscious form has so far been variously conceived by different authors as a tribe, as a sub-tribe of Kom, as an old Kuki village in the South West Manipur and also as a clan.

Post British Period

The Purum were brought to sharp attention by the monograph published by T.C. Das in 1945, which in itself was based on his field work from 1931-1936. From 1931 to 1936, T.C. Das along with the students of the University of Calcutta made four excursions into the interior of Manipur Hills and studies the Purum for a total period of about five months. Although he submitted the manuscript to the University in 1941, it could not be instantly printed due to shortage of paper during the war years. T.C. Das had close familiarity with the accounts of McCulloch (1859), Brown (1873), Hodson (1911), as well as Shakespear (1912). He evaluated the various view points of the earlier authors on the subject quite carefully and exercised himself fairly extensively before he described the Purum as an old Kuki tribe of Manipur. To elucidate the point, we may refer to T.C. Das¹ 'very specific statement regarding Hodson's position in foot note No. 7 of the introduction of Das' The Purums : An old Kuki tribe of Manipur:

102
The situation of the Purum village in south-west ("S.W") seems to be a mistake. The Purum village are all now found in the South-east and had been so at the time of Hodson. There is a Chothe village in the south-west which Mr. Hodson knew. He does not mean by Purum this Chothe village (which he calls Chawte) though the Chothes are a branch of the Purums (1945:7)

From the given excerpt it becomes abundantly clear that T.C. Das had examined the question whether the Purum is a tribe or a village fairly comprehensively and did not ascribe the independent tribal identity to the people without sufficient scrutiny. He also examined the issues of treating the Purum as a clan as suggested by Shakespear (1912) or a sub-tribe as suggested by Brown (1973) in a reasonably elaborate manner before he drew the conclusion that the Purum satisfied all the conditions to be treated as a tribe. It may be pointed out in this connection that right from the title as such, throughout his treaties, Shakespear considered the people as a clan. The only exception in this respect appears at page 8 of the book Lushai-Kuki-clans where the author referred to various people as tribes. Since T.C. Das had already examined the question of ethnic status and identity of the Purum in extensive detail (1945:106-108), normally there should not have been any confusion regarding the issue. Incidentally, the matter of identity of the people came to the surface all over again on a different count altogether.

T.C. Das expressed a sense of apprehension whether the Purum have been able to survive the wrath of war. What impact the war
had on the life and culture of the Purum could not yet be known as no serious study in this context has been taken up so far. But noticeable decline in population strength of the Purum during successive census years made the Purum case a matter of general concern. The 303 strong Purum population (when studied by T.C. Das in 1936) had no representative left as per census return of 1971, although in 1951 and 1961 their population strength were recorded to be 43 and 82 respectively.

**POPULATION DISTRIBUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Purum Population</th>
<th>Total Chothe Population</th>
</tr>
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<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>NA</td>
<td>1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This suggests that inspite of extraordinary loss of their population strengths during the interim decades at least a small proportion of the Purum population survived the ravages of war. Nevertheless, whether this extraordinary decline in Purum
population is at all due to the impact of war could not be exactly ascertained. Therefore, the obvious question that remains unresolved is to what extend the phenomenon of war can account for this reduction in population strength and how far other factors were responsible in this matter.

In the year 1975, the Anthropological Survey of India sent a team to Manipur in order to investigate the Purum case. Since no definite information was available to indicate whether the world war II had anything to do with the sharp changes in the population distribution, Das Gupta (1985 : 53) assumed that by 1971 all the Purum decided to call themselves Chothe. Since this does not fully explain the nature of variation in population distribution of the Purum and Chothe. Das Gupta was rather quick to observe that the whole paradox of Purum and Chothe had been due to the lack of awareness of the system of naming a people as was in vogue in Manipur valley.

It is important to take into account the fact that in older days the Purum chief traditionally had his headquarters at Purum Khullen. This gave the village a special status among Purum villages which used to have special scarf. Das Gupta reports that the villages earlier located on the hill top from where the people used to practice slash and burn method of cultivation have now, due to denudation of forests, gradually moved downwards and taken to wet cultivation (1985 : 64). This change in the location of the villages has exposed the people to the forces of modern
market economy through their cultivation of cash crops. It is also noted that the traditional authority structure of the Purum apparently organised on hierarchical principle has undergone change with the adoption of a new supra-local body - the Chote General Union. This suggests the existence of simultaneous pressure of the dual process of transformation on the Purum society from an old form of authority structure to a new one and the tendency of loss of Purum identity in favour of the Chothe. Of late, the people have started aspiring for even a wider identity which gets reflected through the activities of the Chothe Naga students' Union, an affiliated body of the Naga Student Union.

The Purum issue, we find has engaged the attention of the anthropologists in two directions, at two different points of time. Initially, 1945 onwards, the Purum kept the attention of the anthropologists through the structural principles contained by their society. Within the next three decades, we can note, the Purum become a centre of attention among the anthropologists for a different issue. "The 303 strong Purum population (when studied by Prof. T.C. Das in 1936) had no representative left as per census return of 1971, although in 1951 and 1961 their population strengths were recorded to be 43 and 82 respectively".

Such decline in the population of the Purum raised a number of issues. According to Das Gupta:
In Manipur valley, people are often called by the village they inhabit. As such a Loi of Phayeng and Andro may simply be referred as "he is a Phaying" or "he is an Andro". Since villages in Manipur are usually homogeneous, i.e., uni-ethnic, Andro would naturally mean a Loi only, because Lois are to be seen in Andro; and similarly Phayeng would naturally mean a Loi of Phayeng the Purum case, we know that all the Purum villages have the prefix Purum because Purum is the type of land in which they inhabit though the villagers call themselves as Chote. To the Meitei or to any village group, Chote of Purum Tampak may be known as only Purum and this might have resulted to the confusion for others (1985: 53).

Danda feels that "Das Gupta's argument seems quite valid provided it explains the sharp variations in the distribution of populations. Since contrary information are also found.

1. The Purum stands for a territory or a type of land having special characteristics of hills and forests.

2. There was perhaps no ethnic group ever having the name Purum. The people inhabiting the area known as Purum might have been referred to as the Purum.

3. T.C. Das (1945) was perhaps not aware of the subtle distinction between Chote and Purum.

4. The ethnic group Chote was referred to by the Meitei or any other people of the valley as Purum.

Das Gupta observed in this context:

"In Manipur, our experience shows that territorial identity is not equal to cultural identity. Purums have been able to check large scale absorption. Younger people are in favour of independent status (for the groups), a separate identity". (1986: 86)
ZELIANGRONG EXPERIENCE

General Introduction

The name of Rani Gaidinliu and the Zeliangrong movement is prominently known. This is a movement about the redefinition of identity of three small tribes inhabiting Manipur, Nagaland and Assam.

The three sub-tribes namely the Zemei, Liangmei and the Rongmei have more or less similar customary laws, traditional customs, folk songs, folk dances, folk lores etc. The only difference of these three sub-tribes is that they have distinctive dialect of their own and habitat scattered in contiguous areas. It is believed that in the earliest days, they spoke only one common dialect that is most probably the present Liangmei Naga dialect. There are certain facts for saying that the Liangmei Naga dialect might be the common dialect of the Zeliangrong Naga tribe in the older days until they imigrated to the present areas. First, until recently the other two sub-tribe (Zemei and Rongmei) used to speak in Liangmai dialect whenever they performed religious rituals. Second, most of the religious languages, folk songs etc. were composed in Liangmei Naga. Third, all names of their great grandfathers were names in Liangmei and also all names and the titles of the folk tales, legends etc. were given in Liangmei Naga dialect.
LOCATION

The Zeliangrong Naga tribes comprises of the three sub-tribes, namely the Zemei, Liangmei and the Rongmei who are scattered in contiguous areas of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. This tribes covers a compact area of nearly 4600 sq. miles which are distributed as follows: Manipur (i) Manipur west district; (ii) Sadar Hills (West) Sub-division; (iii) 11 Zeliangrong villages of Mao west of North district, Manipur; (iv) 17 villages of Honglop sub-division of Manipur south district; (v) Jiribam sub-division : Nagaland; (vi) Paren sub-division; Assam (vii) To Mauzas of north Kachar hills inhabited by Zemei; (viii) some areas on the west bank of Jiri river in Cachar district.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Pre-British Period

By the 17th century the Kachari kingdom had established in Dimapur. Between the 17th and the 18th century, these Kachari were engaged in expanding their kingdom. In the process of expanding their kingdom, they were making excursions upto Manipur, crossing over the Naga Hills. These Kachari often intruded into the lands of the Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei which were resisted.

Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei also resisted the expansion of the Meitei kingdom in the southern part of their country.
However, the appearance of the British on the scene of the region after the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) in the wake of expansion of Burmese imperialism brought to an end all the conquest designs of the Kachari, Meitei and even those of the Assamese.

Still Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei Naga were utterly disunited setting against each other, like any other Naga tribes living freely in their villages. They were not subscribing to any idea of establishment of common state although the respective chiefs of villages had commanding authorities over their subjects.

The Kuki under their autocratic chiefs swept down upon the well permanently settled villages of the Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei, Mao-Maram Naga if conditions proved advantageous. The Kuki tried to gain access and control. Most often they found themselves a comfortable place to live in even whatsoever a nomadic life might expect.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Meitei began to contact the more civilised Aryan and Dravidian Hindus from Bengal through Cachar than the Burmese who become their traditional enemies owing to frequent wars. The contacts had resulted in an extensive impact of the rising tide of the Vaishnavite Hinduism preached by Chaitanya (1486-1553). Ultimately it proved to be an event of great historical importance because it completely
changed animistic Meitei life. King Pamheiba known as Gharib Niwas decreed Hinduism as the state religion in the 18th century and the principal features of Hinduism penetrated virtually into the whole of the Meitei society. Meitei Laipak (Meitei land) was changed into Manipur, the place of jewel, and Meitei, Manipuri. The Hindunised Manipuri observed themselves in different sense the rules of the Hindu casteism and considered the Naga and Kuki as rude and degraded, and later on particularly during the reign of Chandra Kirti as the "untouchables". Sometimes, the Naga and Kuki also were accepted to the ranks of the Manipuri if they were converted into Hinduism according to the Hindu rites which comprised of ceremonial ablution, impression of the tilak, and investiture with the sacred thread, all accompanied by recitation of mantras (YONUO).

The history of Manipur was one of series of invasions from the Naga when the Manipuri tried to exercise their authority over them. The moment the resistance of the Naga failed, the Manipur imposed on them the duties such as exacting tribute, providing soldiers, porters and menials. For these purposes, they arranged a broad survey of the Naga village states and called them Manipuri names without any attempt to administer them with their own people. On the Assamese side, the Naga village-states were divided into different districts in their maps and given different names arbitrarily, unknown to the Naga, for the
convenience of exaction of tribute from the Naga whenever they were strong enough.

These sorts of relations were borne among the Naga, Meitei, Kuki and Assamese before the emergence of the British. Not surprisingly, conflicts as well as harmonies were bound to crop up in the intercourse among these Mongolian people since they were strange to one another, though they all belonged to the same race.

2. **During British Period**

After the end of the First Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) the British to enhance their interest accentuated the processes of Kuki influx from South to North i.e. the Lushai Hills, Cachar and Tripura to Manipur.

Some Kuki were also brought to Imphal by the Manipur Government and were given better settlement there in order to open communication through them with the warlike Lushai and Naga tribes.

In 1828-29, the Raja of Cachar Govind made use of the Kuki in his feud with the Raja Tularam Senapati of the North Cachar Hills.

A large number of Kuki migrated following the attacks of Lushai in the North Cachar Hills, Naga village and Manipur. They were given settlement on defence and humanitarian grounds in
Manipur by the British authorities in consultation with the Manipur king in early 1940's. And used advantageously against the Naga and Lushai.

The British managed to keep on the antagonism between the Naga and Kuki as a good instrument to suppress any movement started by either of them for assertion of their independence.

But at this time, the British Company Government except protecting their subjects from the raids of the Naga and Lushai maintained stern policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the tribes and decided not to conquer or add the barren hills inhabited by the Naga, Lushai and other tribes into the British Empire.

After India was taken over in 1858 by the British Government from the East India Company in the wake of the sepoy mutiny or war to regain the Indian freedom in May 1857, the British authorities in Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tripura determined to extend their dominion whenever it could penetrate and thereafter framed a forward policy coupled with divide and rule in India as a whole. Accordingly, in the eastern Bengal, the Kuki were found as a good element to go against the martial tribes.

Between 1879-80, the British conquered the Naga in battles at Khonoma and other villages with the active help of the Manipuri and Kuki and subsequently ruled them.
But during the British military operations in 1881-82 against the freedom movement of the Kacharis. The Kuki militia villages whose services were expected to be utilised by the British authorities had not rendered much help in giving information of the Kacharis' uprising and in hunting down the fugitives or collecting evidences against them because of the realisation of the fact that they were mainly purposed to go against any freedom movement setting against the British interest, and for which their conscious refused to submit every call of the British Goverment. As a result, they were disbanded by the orders of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1882 though they were still used as hill porters on dangerous expeditions and were able to defend themselves against the Angamis.

The affairs of the Naga and Kuki since the installation of the boy, Churachan Singh on the throne as a result of the war of Manipur independence in 1890 were dealt on behalf of the Maharaja by the British. The British remained quite indifferent to the internal affairs of the tribes and did not do anything worthy to put down oppressing measures of the Kuki on Zeliangrong, Tangkhul, Kom and Anal Nagas. In other words, the Government of Manipur did not give any sufficient protection against the Kuki raids when asked for help inspite of the fact that they offered their loyalty to the British. The two of the five battalions of the Assam Rifles posted at Kohima in the Naga Hills, and at Imphal in Manipur, each was reserved for the use of rare
unavoidable occasions to control the turbulent tribal warfare or any other serious disturbances for a show of British presence and power in their lands were not prepared enough to go to different inaccessible places of Manipur.

The Zeliangrong people aroused their resentment and disobedience to the British authorities as they failed in interfere in the oppressive inroads by the Kuki into their country. Subsequently, the Zeliangrong refused to pay house taxes for four years after the British-Manipuri War in 1890. In order to exert the British power, the Assistant Political Agent of Manipur, P.L. Crawfurd collected the house tax by show of force in February and March 1894.

No doubt, taking the stories of the tortures of the Naga by the Kuki, playing in the intense bitterness of their feelings against the Kuki and the British and realising the seriousness of the threat to their independence and animism, Jadonang (a young Rongmei NAGA) incited the Naga particularly Zeliangrong into a great unity and awareness.

In course of time the movement took different forms beginning from a religious revivalistic movement in reaction to spreading Christianity around them, and then taking the shape of a nationalist freedom movement.
According to those who have written history of this movement (Yonuo), 'in shaping his political destination, Mahatma Gandhi was a great symbol and ideal to Jadonang'. The British could not tolerate for long the nationalistic movement started by Jadonang. After a few incidents of confrontation, and the incident of the killing of the four Manipuri traders in a Zeliangrong village. This and other similar incidents compelled the British administration to arrest him on February 19, 1931. After a trial, he was awarded death sentence, to be hanged on August 29, 1931. Jadonang was hanged in 1931.

After his death, the leadership of the movement went with his cousin, Gaidinliu. Rani Gaidinliu became a legendary figure through her heroic participation and leadership of this movement. It was with great difficulty that the British could capture her, after which she was imprisoned for life, to be released only after the end of the British rule. Gaidinlui was so influential among her people, that even in 1949 the Government of Assam was hesitant in ordering her unconditional release. It was only with the personal intervention of Jawaharlal Nehru only that she was released.

The popular interpretation is that Rani Gaidinlui had launched a movement of religious revivalism. On a close look, we find differently.
Following the elimination of Jadonang and imprisonment of Gaidinlui, the British Government in Manipur and Assam had banned the Jadonang movement, and many other organisation or meeting could not be started or held without the prior permission and approval of the Government functioning in the Zeliangrong areas. But when Zeliangrong particularly Rongmei who were loyal to the British government expressed their desire to preserve their Animistic customs, culture, traditions etc. the Manipur state government headed nominally by the Maharaja of Manipur, Sir Churachand Singh allowed them to form Rongmei (Kabui) Samiti in 1931 with an object of assisting the government on the customary laws and rules. In this regard, the Samiti was the highest body on the religious issues of the Kabui, nevertheless the Samiti was restricted to take up any political problems other than religious matters without the knowledge of the government.

Just after the second world war, the Zeliangrong realised the urgent need of an organisation to enhance their political inspiration. The idea to form one political party still was met with a hindrance from the government of Manipur. As such, only Rongmei (Kabui) formed the Kabui Naga Association for the consolidation and warfare of the Rongmei in Manipur.

The Kabui Naga Association was not enough. Now, the leaders of Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei people came together to form an organisation to fulfil their inspiration and interest, living in
Manipur, the Naga Hills and North Cachar Mikir Hills of Assam.

Meanwhile the British authorities in Manipur state and Assam let loose of their control on Zeliangrong on the reason that India's freedom became imminent and their exit was inevitable. At this opportune time, the Zeliangrong leaders met at Keishamthong, a Kabui village at Imphal on 15 February 1947 with the initiative of the active members of the Kabui Naga Association namely Kakhengai in Manipur, and Mr. and Mrs. L. Lungalang, Dr. T. Haralu in the Naga Hills. The meeting resolved among other things.

"In view of the close ethnological and cultural connection between the Kabuis and Kacha Nagas of all the districts in Assam resolved that they shall henceforth be combined to form a large body with the objective of furthering the economic, social, educational and political advancement of this unit"

It decided to make current use of the combined three tribes i.e. Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmai into one being called Zeliangrong council comprising of all the representatives of the Rongmai, Liangmei and the Zemei.

But since the Zeliangrong Nagas were administered separately they could not function all the times unitedly and properly and failed to achieve its objectives as expected however it made an impact on the Zeliangrong. As such, the Kabui Naga association which was turned into Manipur Zeliangrong union carried its own problems in conformity with the objective of Zeliangrong council.
However, Zemei, the Liangmei and Rongmei always had the myth of their common ancestry and this provided the opportunity for leaders of these tribes to combine themselves into a single group and thus the prefixes of each of these three group names were combined into one name Zeliangrong (Kabui, 1982) it was in a large meeting held in Manipur on 15th February 1947, at Keishamthong that the word Zeliangrong was coined and adopted (Kabui, 1982).

3. **Post-British Period**

From the early 1950's Rani Gaidinliu had become more seriously concerned for the development and welfare of the Zeliangrong people than in the affairs of the whole Nagas in many fields. In this connection she met a number of Indian National Congress leaders and acquainted with them some of the acute problems faced by her people.

The militant phase of this movement had declined with the independence of India. Rani Gaidinlui's national recognition was natural. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who had accorded the symbolic title of 'Rani' to Gaidinliu for her contribution.

The development as observed among the Zeliangrong in Manipur, the north Cachar hills and the Naga hills appeared not to come to any sharp attention of the government of either Manipur or even Assam. The Zeliangrong were more stringently
suppressed by the policy and measures than what was done to them during the period of the British rule and they felt that they were treated as colonial and unwanted subjects and that the authorities had desired to keep them illiterate, and backward so that they might remain isolated from the mainstream of the Naga and not pose a serious threat to the government by not joining hands in the force of the Naga freedom movement led by Phizo, the President of Naga National Council.

In 1955, the people of Naga Hills rose in violent upsurge. As could be expected the Indian Army had to meet it. The Government of India refused to recognise the existence and freedom of Nagaland as demanded by the extremist Naga, Rani Gaidinlui ran into a great dilemma. She did not come out openly against the Naga National Council's struggle for independence. But she was against the proselytization of christianity as she upheld Naga animism. On the other hand, the Naga who were christian criticised her Animism as being against the progress of christianity and an obstacle to the Naga freedom movement since she was more directly concerned to unify the Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei areas in Manipur, the Naga hills and Assam for an administrative unit to form a nucleus of Nagaland, within the Indian Union than supporting the cause of the independence of Nagas that she was advocating before. To fulfil her aim of integration of Zeliangrong people she visited all the Zeliangrong inhabited areas in Manipur Cachar and north Cachar - Mikir hills,
and was received with warm welcome from the people. But her effort to work only for Zeliangrong were criticised as narrowly located idea by the underground Naga and had incurred their displeasure as they had been fighting the Government of India for the Naga independence and their ultimate unification of all Naga living in Assam, Manipur, NEFA and Burma. For this stand she was threatened by her enemies of serious consequences leading even to her murder and of her followers.

On January 1966, Rani Gaidinlui, taking into account of all the forces working against her movement formally agreed to lay down arms and work overground for the betterment of the Zeliangrong people through peaceful, democratic and non-violent means. After six years of hard underground jungle life in an old age, she came out from her jungle hideout to settle in Kohima and was welcomed by the people.

It may be stated that the Zeliangrong movement has touched almost all aspects of the life. It has restored faith and pride in the traditional values and customs while foresaking superstition and 'animistic' practices which overburdened the people and prevented their social consciousness. In its course the movement has not only revitalized the music and folk dances to a great extent. But has given tremendous impetus for carving out a single district comprising areas in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam where the three sub-tribes of the Zemi, the Liangmei and the Rongmei lives. All the people belonging to the three sub-
tribes are willing to take up the issue (for a single district) and have their common identity as the Zeliangrong.

III

MEITEI EXPERIENCE

General Introduction

The state of Manipur has been in the limelight for reasons like the famous Manipuri classical dances, the gorgeously costumed female dances, the energetic martial dances performed by the males, her handloom productions and the activities of the Meitei insurgency which holds the entire valley where the bulk of the Manipuri's Vaishnavite Hindu population is concentrated and the state administration to ransom.

Today, the Sanamahi-revivalist movement are slowly surfacing up. The reasons have been many. We shall deal with the reasons in this experience.

LOCATION

The Sanamahi movement of the Meitei is confined to the valley in the districts of Imphal, Thoubal and Bishenpur and relates to the growing aspirations of the Meitei, perhaps the only Mongoloid but Vaishnavite Hindi group in north-east India.
Development

Pre-British Period

Originally the Meitei, like the other hill people of Manipur, had their own animistic religion and other cultural traits. At one time the valley appears to have been occupied by many tribes, and the Meitei were one of them. The different tribes of the valley have also traditions amongst themselves that the 'Munniporees' are offshoots from them. The Manipuri seem to have descended from the surrounding hill tribes (Hodson p. 6. 1908). Hinduism came to the valley during the region of king Garib Niwas (1709-1748 A.D.) when Santidas Gosai a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the valley.

In course of time this brought phenomenal change in the cultural pattern of Meitei society, though it continues to retain many of its old tribal social traits.

At the instance of Santidas Gosai, the king Garib Niwas was against the use of Meitei script, songs and prayers. He introduced the Bengali script and substituted Meitei songs by Bengali songs. He, in a religious frenzy collected the rare manuscripts numbering one hundred and twenty. The books were burnt up by the Ramandi preacher with the help of the king. Suppressive measures were taken against the non-Ramandi system of worship. There was a great opposition from the people when Garib
Niwas tried to introduce Ramandi Vaishnavism with the help of Santidas.

To quote T.C. Hodson, "At first the decree of the king received but little obedience and the opposition to the change centred round the numerous members of the royal family who were supported not unnaturally by the Maibas, the priest of the older religion. Religions dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents and wholesale banishment and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenents of Hinduism". Many scholars (Meitei) opposed the move.

Thus, the king not only substituted Meitei scripts by the Devanagari script and had changed the original or personal name of the Meitei into a Hindu's name (e.g. Meitei name of 'Pamheiba' was changed into a Hindu name 'Garib Niwas') and had forcibly given Hindu religion to all his poor subjects.

It must not however be accepted that Vaishnavism destroyed the previous religious beliefs of Manipur. They have survived to the present day making adjustments with the new religion. The king became milder in his religious policy on account of the hostility of the public. So an attempt was tried to strike unity between the two creeds. Santidas gave the name Manipur to the country - a name ever since used. The king also ordered the Manipuri Brahmins to worship some primitive Gods like Sanamahi, Yumthai, Lai Panthaibi and Nomsava. The Brahmins of Leiheothabam
family became the worshipper of Sanamahi from this time. They worshipped this deity in the temple at Keisamthong according to Hindu rites.

**During British Period**

After the "Anglo-Manipuri War" of 1891, Manipur was totally under the cover of British rules through the puppet kings of Manipur. Thus, the first appointed king was Sir Churachand Singh, according to the Gazette of India, No. 1700E, dated August 21, 1891. A number of crisis arose during the reign of Sir Churachand (1891-1941) and Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-1955) especially on the formation of political parties and its demands for political right and freedom. It was during this period reviverist movement among the Manipuri (Meitei) also started.

One of the reviverists worth mentioning was Naoriya Phullo from Cachar District of Assam. He is considered to be the Chief founder of "Apokpa" Marup of Sanamahism (Meiteism) during the year 1930 at Cachar. He fought against the evils of Hinduism in the Meitei society. His activities were quite opposite to that of Nikhil Manipur Mahasava (Meiteism) during the year 1930 at Cachar. He fought against the evils of Hinduism in the Meitei society. This activities were quite opposite to that of Nikhil Manipur Mahasava (a political cum religious organisation, 1936). Later on 'Meitei Marup' (an organisation of Meitei's religion,
established in Manipur, during the year 1945) used to work at the line of Apokpa Marup in Manipur.

Mention also may be made of one great revolutionary late Hijam Irabot. He used to fight against feudalism and colonialism and also tried to revive the ethnic links with the Meitei who settled in Burma, Dava, Sylhet, Assam, Cachar, etc. Many competent cultural organisations begin to take shape in the valley. The movement is believed to be almost anti-communalism and had in focus the socio-economic and all round development of the Meitei.

3. Post-British period

A closer look to the most demanding movement in Manipur in 1947 to date provides an entirely different picture. Both in 1947 (strictly speaking in 1955-56) and to date, insurgency with successionist demands is the most demanding movement. Between these two periods there has been a complete change in the actors and goals of the movement. The target group, action and thrust however, has more or less remained the same.

In 1956, the Naga group of people inhabiting the hill region of Manipur, contagious to Nagaland, took to armed insurgency to press their successionist demands. The hill politics in the state took approximately the same course as in the Naga hills, then a district of the composite state of Assam. The consolidation was frequently on ethnic lines but involved major
social issues dividing the hills vertically as well as horizontally. On the one hand, the Kuki groups of hill men were divided from the other Naga groups while on the other hand, the Thadou chiefs in the Kuki land had more or less vertically divided the hills people into Kuki chiefs and commoners.

Between 1960 to 1967, the Kuki and Naga groups of Manipur hill tribes came into constant touch and were visited by the underground Naga and Mizo leaders. The Kuki chiefs, after being dispossessed of their traditional rights, began joining the underground from both the areas. The hill area of Manipur then became a corridor for Mizo underground visiting China and to the Naga underground trekking to erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Like the Mizo experience, the environmental conditions, chieftainship and the existence of a class structure were to some extent the cause of the insurgent movement. But this did not provide the requisite conducive factors essential for an effective organization and conscious realization of goals by the actors. Most of the actors, both in the initial stages and also who somehow kept on sustaining it, were those who joined it as an imitation of the Naga experience. However, with the signing of the Shillong Peace Accord of 11 November 1975, by the Naga underground leaders, the hill Manipur insurgency movement lost its punch.
In the valley, plough cultivators have a two tier caste system— the Brahmin and the Kashatriya— although of late the Meitei plainsmen are refusing to be recognised as Hindus. The communists have been quite influential in the valley and from time to time they have been organizing protests movements among the Meitei.

In the 1960s, when the Naga insurgency in the hills of Manipur was at its peak, the Meitei realized that they were one of the target group as they along with the Hindus of the rest of the country were being identified as symbol of the Central Government and exploitation. This was somewhat uncomfortable for the Meitei. The situation was uncongenial and against the very roots of the leftist inclinations of the youths and some sections of the leadership because the target group of leftists tended to be identified as their associates.

It was unfortunate that during this period the sharing of a common identity symbol, that of being Hindu, with the rest of the countrymen did not bring the Meitei any marked economic gains, while the union government, in its bid to win over the underground elements, showed marked preference for the development of the hill areas of Manipur. This prompted the Meitei to ponder over the need for finding a new target for themselves as their own target group— the central authority— was being clubbed together with them by a section of people of
their own area. Cultural revivalism, therefore, was found to be the most useful goal. And ever since the Meitei have been trying hard to renounce their Hindu identity, revive the old Meitei (Sanamahi) culture and reform the Meitei society.

Simultaneously, a movement for revival of the Meitei script and the adoption of the same for official use has been launched.

Some Manipuri scholar has singled out two persons viz., Naoria Phulo (Cachar) and Hijam Irabot who initiated this movement in the 30's. The Hindu Society, despite the Vaishnavite sense of liberation from caste and creed, high and low became decadent under the Brahminic framework with persistent struggle for power between the king and Brahmins. The poor masses were just benumbed and suppressed inspite of an artistic flowering associated with this Indo-Mongoloid group. Power was in the hands of the king and few feudal nobles and it was their day while the masses groaned and suffered. A most obnoxious part of the social degeneration was a terror Mongba Sengba (untouchability) perpetrated on the masses by the king (Maharaj Churachand Singh) in collusion with a few Brahmins. A mere declaration by the king or somebody on his behalf or even a rumour was enough to make a family miserable as it would be boycotted by one and all. Dead bodies of their families would remain unattended for days for fear of the royal persecution.
The new Vaishnavite movement had to suppress also much of the heritage and the door to the incredibly rich heritage preserved in thousands of manuscripts by the local pandits was closed to the people.

On the other hand in the field of socio-economic reforms, an organization under the name and style of Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was started in 1934 with the king as the president who presided over both the Inaugural Session (1934) at Imphal and the second Annual Session (1936) at Silchar (Assam). The third session was held at Mandalay (Burma) in 1937 and it reflected some of the political scenario in India. The fourth session at Imphal (1938) took a political stand and was renamed Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The image of mother Manipur in bondage and tattered clothes became increasingly visible with shouts of Bande Mataram and under orders of the king and the British authorities, all the officials excepts two Hijam Irabot and Elangbam Tompak) had to concentrate on artistic movement like theatre, literature and painting. The Mahasabha assumed the name of state congress in 1946 by a resolution. The second women's war came in 1930 which led to political arrest including Irabot. Swadeshi movement and non-cooperation movement also started and Manipur experienced the dignity and horror of freedom struggle with mass movement and allied political organisation like Krishak Sanmilani (1937) and Praja Mandal (1947).
Religion or spirituality which is the soul of Indian culture has been integrated with the predominantly distinctive aesthetic temperament of this Indo-Mongoloid group (called traditionally the Kirates) and Bengal Vaishnavism (since 18th century A.D.) found its supreme expression in songs and dance in this valley with royal patronage and the British masters did not feel like interfering in it. A profound sanskrit scholar and also a social worker, Panditraj Atombapu Sharma made a persistent efforts to integrate the old culture with Vaishnavism and traced the origin in the Veda, by publishing more than 100 books in Manipuri and Sanskrit. This happens to be a major stream which raised the dignity of the socalled Non-Aryan group to the heights.

The people of the valley were proud to be Hindus and could legitimately boast of their artistic expression which won increasing recognition not only in India but also abroad.

There was however a note of dissent, a revivalist, which as mentioned earlier traces its origin in the 30's somewhere in Cachar (Assam) in the person of Naoria Phulo who started Apokpa Marup with its accent on old Manipuri gods and goddess like Sanamahi and Pakhangba. It was a reaction against Vaishnavism and had an ethnic dimension as Sanskrit was totally replaced by chaste Manipuri expression. This happened in the form of a protest and reached the valley soon and a minority (almost microscopic) movement sprang up. It found a positive echo in the
minds of the young people in their search for ethnic identity and affected the creative expression of young writers and scholars of Manipur to a considerable extent.

Consequently, a group of young people refused to accept Manipuri's merger with India and struggled for a separatist movement which, even though subdued, is still alive in the form of extremist of the Manipuri in the valley.

Yet even today, despite the iron grip of Vaishnavism, Sanamahi the highest prevedic deity rules supreme. All Hindus in Manipur, be the Sharmas, Singhs or scheduled caste worship Sanamahi. The temptation to say that Meitei is a Hindu who worship Sanamahi is irresistible.

However, the Sanamahi revivalist movement are bend upon banishing Hinduism and they Vaishnavite who they believed have submerged the ancient Meitei cult. All Hindu and Vaishnavism are to be dealt with as foreigners and got rid of. The Ras dance which has made Manipur a household name in the rest of India is to be done away with, because it started with Vaishnavism.

The caste name Singh is foreign and should be dropped. Some zealots among the revivalists have already dropped it.

'Tilak', which most valley people go in for, it to be abandoned, because that again come with Hinduism. Needless to say, Gagnopaveetham or the 'Sacred Thread' is looked upon as a
live symbol of the bondage in which the Hindu religion holds the Meitei.

According to some (especially the older generation) the chances of Vaishnavism being abjured by the valley are remote. This is not entirely due to the presence of a large Brahmin community who have become naturalised Meitei. Even the Singh who claims to be as much sons of the soils as the tribals in the surrounding hills are not likely to foreswear. Vaishnavism, for more than four centuries Hinduism and Vaishnavism have been orienting the religious and social life of the Meitei. The Bhakti cult permeates the emotional being of the common people. So amount of revivalist preaching can get Vaishnavism out of Manipur with creating a spiritual void. There is no substitute for Radha and Krishna in the Meitei Pantheon Revivalist who want to reinstates the Meitei religion, the central figure of which is Sanamahi.

Every Meitei including the Brahmin who is a foreigner turned indigene worships him. Krishna was an addition but acquired supremacy. This supremacy could have been successfully challenged if Vaishnavism had forbidden the worship of Sanamahi. The Tolerance of Vaishnavism which makes it easy for Lord Krishna to share the people's devotion with Sanamahi frustrates the Meitei revivalists objectives.
Further, some also believe that Meitei nationalism will be able to wipe out Vaishnavism from the land when the aging generation is replaced by the coming youthful society.

IV

BISHNUPRIYA EXPERIENCE

North-East India is a Multi-Ethnic Region, and the Bishnupriya is one of the prominent groups of the region. Members of this ethnic group prefer to be referred to as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' at least on formal occasions. Cachar district of Assam, areas around Agartala town in Tripura, and Comilla and Sylhet districts in Bangladesh have a substantial and prominent concentration today.

Bishnupriya is a community the origin of which in its present form is traced to Manipur. The Bishnupriya were originally confined only to the surroundings of Lake Loktak in Manipur. The principal localities where these people were living are now known as Khangabok, Ningthoukhong, Heirok, and Bishnupur. So, at present we find the Bishnupriya inhabiting Manipur as well as some places outside it, mainly the Cachar district of Assam and parts of Tripura and Bangladesh. The Bishnupriya who are outside Manipur give their full name as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri'. The Meitei object to the Bishnupriya using the 'suffix' Manipuri along with their name.
The Government of Manipur objected to suffixing the word 'Manipuri' after 'Bishnupriya' as, according to them the 'Bishnupriya are not Manipuri'.

In October 1983 and February 1985, the Government of Assam and Tripura respectively took the decision to include the Bishnupriya Manipuri language as one of the mediums of instruction at the primary level. The decision of the Government of Assam to provide recognition to Bishnupriya Manipuri language as medium of instruction sparked off severe controversy on the justification to recognize Bishnupriya as a 'Manipuri' language. The Government of Manipur "expressed their resentment on the decision of the Government of Assam and raised objection" that "the Manipuri language is one and only language that has been accepted as state language of Manipur from the time of Maharajas of Manipur. And therefore, there can be a language spoken by the Bishnupriya as 'Bishnupriya' language, but there can never be a 'Bishnupriya Manipuri language ...... The Bishnupriya language is not a constituent part of the Manipuri language, as such, it can not claim the use of the word 'Manipuri' as 'Bishnupriya Manipuri language ......'.

There is therefore, a deep controversy between the Meitei and the Bishnupriya on the use of the suffix 'Manipuri' along with the name 'Bishnupriya'. There are two situations before us. It will be interesting to note the contrast between them. One
situation refers to the Bishnupriya in Manipur today. This refers to the Bishnupriya in the place where the identity of the Bishnupriya in the present form emerged. This is the Imphal valley of Manipur where the Meitei form the major population group. It is interesting to note that the crisis is only with the Bishnupriya living outside Manipur. The Bishnupriya now residing in Manipur have either to a great extent merged, or subdued their distinct identity vis-a-vis the Meitei identity. Moreover, there does not apparently exist any situation of 'crisis of ethnic identity' for the Bishnupriya now in Manipur, as by the very fact of their living in Manipur, they are 'Manipuri'.

The other situation relates to the Bishnupriya presently inhabiting territories outside of Manipur (the Cachar district of Assam and parts of Tripura and Bangladesh). They on their part, make two claims. Suffixing 'Manipuri' to the name Bishnupriya, specially those in Cachar, as this gave the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the Manipuri. In the face of it there was no such intention of the Bishnupriya, that to project an image that they only represent the Manipuri. In the heat of the controversy, the main issue was lost, and as mentioned by Tombi Singh, 'the extreme orthodoxy of the Manipuri outside Manipur', precipitated the issue on a totally new direction. While on the one hand the Bishnupriya claim their Manipur origin, to the extent that they claim to be the true Vaishnavites, and the
'original inhabitants' of Manipur, the Meitei on the other hand contest this to the extent of accepting that the Bishnupriya belong to Manipur.

The Meitei object to the use of the designation 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' by the Bishnupriya residing outside Manipur. The Meitei feel that the use of the 'suffix' Manipuri by these Bishnupriya outside the state of Manipur gives the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the 'Manipuri' community. The Meitei want to avoid any such situation which should give the 'wrong' impression that the Bishnupriya represent (all it may mean) the 'Manipuri' community. To strongly emphasize this apprehension the Meitei seem to go a step further to prove that the Bishnupriya is not a community indigenous to Manipur, even those living in Manipur today are 'non-locals'.

The controversy relating to the use of the suffix 'Manipuri' in a way precipitates the issues - identity controversy. It is found that this issue has orginated outside Manipur. This issue may be said to have been precipitated with the decision of the Government of Assam in 1983 to recognize 'Bishnupriya Manipuri' language as medium of instruction upto the primary standard. In 1985 the Government of Tripura also took a similar decision. The Government of Manipur expressed their resentment on the decision of the Government of Assam raised the objective to suffixing the word 'Manipuri' after 'Bishnupriya', thereby giving the impression that the Bishnupriya represent the Manipuri.
While providing their individual arguments, the Bishnupriya as well as the Meitei take it to the extent to controverting on the very 'Origin' of the Bishnupriya. The Bishnupriya on their part claim their origin in Manipur as the Meitei. And they have extended this even further by claiming that 'they' (i.e. the Bishnupriya) are the original inhabitants of Manipur. In other words, in terms of originality, the Bishnupriya proceed the Meitei. In support to this the Bishnupriya go even a step ahead to claim that they are 'the true Vaishnava followers as compared to the Meitei'.

History in this respect is in a way rather clear. Vaishnavism came to the valley of Manipur around the 18th century, during the reign of king Garib Niwas (1709-1748 A.D.), when Santidas Gosai a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the valley. History also has it, that prior to this it is possible that some kings have brought some of them (the Bishnupriya) and allowed to settle in Manipur. In Bishenpur district, the areas surrounding the Lok-tak' lake in Imphal valley are identified as the original place of the Bishnupriya. Formerly, Bishenpur was the capital of Manipur and the Bishnupriya were concentrated in Bishenpur (formerly known as Bishnupur).

In the history of Manipur, during the 17th and 18th century, the Bishnupriya migrated to other places particularly to Assam, Tripura and Bangladesh. Two causes may be assigned to the out-
migration of the Bishnupriya from Manipur. One of the causes of their out-migration has been the internal conflict between the princes of Manipur and the second cause has been the repeated attacks of the Burmese on the Manipur kings.

The Bishnupriya in Manipur are older than Vaishnavism. This the Bishnupriya do not contest, rather using this aspect of the history they claim to be 'the Vaishnava compared to the Meitei'.

A review and comparison of the ethnographic and historical traits of the Bishnupriya and the Meitei reveals some interesting features. The starting points of discussion is the acceptance of the fact that the Bishnupriya community comprises of people with origin outside Manipur. In an ethnographic study of the Bishnupriya (Shibani Das) in Cachar, we find that like the Meitei, the Bishnupriya also have only two castes, the Brahmin and the Vaishya. This is claimed to be as a result of the impact of Vaishnavism on the Meitei, as well as on the Bishnupriya. It is said that the Vaishnavism was a 'leveller'.

A little closer look at the caste system among the Bishnupriya reveals a rather different situation. The Meitei are divided into seven clans, while the Bishnupriya are divided into nine clans. The clans names among the Bishnupriya are similar to that of the other Hindu castes, while the clan names of the Meitei reflect continuity from their animistic past, the pre-Vaishnavait period.
A prominent point of difference between Bishnupriya and the Meitei is the reference to the geneology at time of marriage. Among the Bishnupriya, an account of father in respect of geneology is very important. Among the Meitei, an account of mother in respect of geneology is very important and a lack of it is taken to be a very important draw back. In relation to marriage the Bishnupriya have adopted some traits from the Meitei, while they have retained set of other traits the origin of which can be traced to the origin of the Bishnupriya from the Bengali. The Bishnupriya share structural characteristics with the Bengali. Both are divided into nine gotras, and both strictly follow the rule of avoiding marriage within the Sapinda. All that the Bishnupriya have borrowed from the Meitei is the ritual solemnized marriage.

According to Grierson the Bishnupriya language is of Indo-Aryan group, while the Meitei language is of the Tibeto-Burman group.

The Bishnupriya Manipuri language is therefore different from the Meitei language. Moreover, the Bishnupriya Manipuri language has drawn sustenance by assimilating words from the Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language. Further Bengali language had exerted the longest influence on the growth and formation of the Bishnupriya Manipuri language.
In the discussion of culture forms such as dance, music, food, dress, and ornaments, it becomes clear that there is no significant difference between the Bishnupriya and the Meitei except folk dance. The folk dance of the Bishnupriya, namely, 'Varan-Dahani Mritya' is not practised by the Meitei. On the other hand, the Meitei folk dance presented in the course of a 'Lai Haraoba Festival' is not practised by the Bishnupriya.

Moreover, Rain-invoking song is the oldest folk song of the Bishnupriya. Meaning of the song, reveals that the song was composed probably in the 16th century which supports the earliest existence of the Bishnupriya in Manipur.

'Ras-Leela' and 'Kirtana', the greatest features of the Bishnupriya culture, have got equal prominence in both the Bishnupriya and Meitei. Members of these two ethnic groups feel proud for this. As regards the food, dress and ornaments there is no significant difference between the Bishnupriya and the Meitei; they are differed from Bengali particularly in respect of dress. The traditional dress of the Bengali women is 'Saree' whereas that of the Bishnupriya is 'analuri' or 'Lanau'.

It is interesting to note that as mentioned earlier the acceptance of the fact that the crisis is only with the Bishnupriya living outside Manipur. The Bishnupriya now residing in Manipur have either to a great extent merged, or subdued their distinct identity, vis-a-vis the Meitei identity except that the
Bishnupriya have their marriage alliance between three villages - Ningthoukhong, Heirok and Khangapok.

However, there does not apparently exist any situation of 'crisis of ethnic identity' for the Bishnupriya now in Manipur as by the very fact of their living in Manipur, they are 'Manipuri'.

The Bishnupriya-Meitei affair on review of history, reveals that it is one of identity controversy rather than one of identity-crisis of the Bishnupriya.

Like the Thadou experience Bishnupriya find themselves in an ambivalent 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, identity themselves as the Bishnupriya-Manipuri, distinct from the Meitei. The genesis of this can be traced to their exposure, culture-contact with other ethnic groups.

V

THADOU EXPERIENCE

Among the tribes of the Kuki group, the movement for ethnic transformation which draws our attention is that relating to the Thadou. They form the main prominent group of tribes among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group.
Kuki is a name which has been imposed on the people now holding the name. Originally they were known by their own tribal names, which in most of the cases was based on the name of the clan or the village. With the coming of Christianity among the Kuki group of people, it came first to the Thadou, and thus the first translation of the Bible was in the Thadou dialect of the Kuki group of languages. The implications of this were far reaching.

Gradually the British officers and so also their records started referring to the Kuki as the Thadou-Kuki. This gave the impression that the Thadou represented the entire Kuki group. This continued for considerable time. According to the 1950 part C state order, the tribes were listed as Kuki, but by a modification which became necessary, by 1956 this name had to be dropped and the tribes, like the Hmar, Paite, Gangte, Vaiphei, Zou etc., who were hitherto known by the generic name Kuki, had to be referred to by their tribal names. Only Thadou continued to add the name Kuki along with their name.

In 1960 translation of the Bible was printed. It was called the Kuki Bible, though it was one in the Thadou language.

Interestingly enough, this led to fissiporous tendencies among the Thadou themselves. The dispute ultimately reached the court, for arbitration. One party claimed that the language in which the Holy Bible was written should be named Thadou, while
the other party claimed that it should be designated as Kuki.

Kuki is a generic name of several clans (sub-tribes) of Kuki. For Manipur, Kuki covers two groups of different clans:

### KUKI GENERIC NAME OF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. GROUP</th>
<th>B. GROUP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956 Recognised</td>
<td>Unrecognised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1. Aimol | 1. Baite |
| 2. Chiru | 2. Changsan |
| 3. Chothe | 3. Chongloi |
| 4. Gangte | 4. Doungel |
| 5. Hmar | 5. Guite |
| 8. Paite | 8. Haokip |
| 11. Simte | 11. Kilong |
| 12. Sukte | 12. Lenthang |
| 13. Thadou | 13. Lungkim |
| 15. Zou | 15. Lupho |
| 16. Lupheng | 16. Lhunghim |
| 17. Lhunghim | 17. Lotjem |
| 18. Misao | 18. Lotjem |
| 19. Mate | 19. Misao |
| 20. Mangte | 20. Mate |
| 22. Sah-um | 22. Ngoilu |
| 23. Thangeo | 23. Sah-um |
| 24. Tuboi etc. | 24. Thangeo |

1. Those clans of Kuki, recognised to the level of a tribe in Manipur, each tribe (now) has a slightly differing pronunciation of the Kuki common language and they develop their dialect for their own group.
2. But Thadou clan now recognised to the level of a tribe speak the common language of the Kuki people with those unrecognised clans which could have been elevated to a tribe like in the case of Thadou. As shown in the diagram Thadou speaks one and the same language to be named after their clan name Thadou. Here other 26 clans with whom Thadou speak one and the same language objects on the ground that Thadou is a name of a person and that name Thadou does not cover other clans, speaking the language, but Kuki name covers both Thadou and others clans as stated above. Therefore, the language name is Kuki as justified by the District Court back 1972 and the Government of Manipur has been using Kuki to be the name of their language ever since then. It should continue for unity and integrity of the Kuki people.

4. The Thadou worked through their way to change the Government standing order (using Kuki) when Mr. Paokhoaei Thadou became an elected Member of legislative Assembly in 1984. As the matter is politically motivated, the present Government, thought understands the mistake or misnamed of the Kuki language is waiting order of the Court of Justice to make do the correction once for all.

This situation may be interpreted as follows:

While the section which is in favour of designating the language as Thadou represent the 'purisit' group, while those who are in favour of carrying the Kuki name represent the
'politicized' group. This latter group appears to be in search of a wider identity which (a) has been current so far (the Kuki) identity, and (b) has the potentiality of mobilizing a viable and effective larger group for political bargain. In the midst of the dispute referred above, the pro-Kuki section demanded a constitutional modification of the list of Scheduled tribes for Manipur to make a room for Kuki in the constitutional list of scheduled tribes. They succeeded in this. In the latest official list, Kuki is the name of a major division while under it there are a number of tribes.

As mentioned earlier, in Manipur, among speakers of the Thadou language, there are those who favour to be designated as Thadou and there some others who would like to be designated as Kuki. In fact this division has gone down to the clan level. There are some clans which favour to be referred to as Thadou while there are some others who would like to be referred to as Kuki. It has been noticed that within the same clan sometimes opinion is divided. Some members would like to be called Kuki while other would like to retain the name Thadou Kuki. The reason for this is something which demands careful attention.

The Thadou follow the principle of primogeniture. Among the Thadou, in a village, those who are the descendants of the senior ancestor would like to be designated as Kuki. This gives them the advantage of maintaining superiority over the other smaller
clans. According to Kamkenthang, "Thadou as the ancestor is not the senior most ancestor for all the Thadou speakers. They do not like to bear the name Thadou. They prefer to be known as Kuki. They say that to bear the name of a junior is contrary to the norm of the society".

However, Shaw (The Thadou Kuki, 1929) mention that "the origin of this word (Kuki) is not know, but it first appears in Bengal, Rawlin's writing of the "Cucis on Mountaineers of Tipra" in Asiatic Researcher (II, XII) in 1792. Klongshai is the name used in Aracan for the Lakher tribe (Shakespear, Lushai-Kuki clans, p. 212) and some of the Thado-Haokips, I think - are said to use a word Khongshai for Kukis in general which reappears in the Meithei Khonjai and probably in the Angami Naga Kotso-ma. They speak of themselves as Thado, and though this term may be taken to cover only the descendants of that eponymous ancestor, it is generally used to cover also dependent clans now intermingled with and closely associated with those descendants though not actually claiming Thado as an ancestor, such, in particular and the descendants of Lenthang and Lunkin for whom, if they are not to be called Thados, there is no other distinctive term".

Thadou claim that the Chongsan, Lhangum, Lenthang, Lunkim, Kom, Gangte, Vaiphei, Kholhang, Chiru and those of inferior lineage were all under the wing of the Thadou and so were then included under that term.
This dispute has taken extreme forms, as a result now the
name of the tribe has been retained as Thadou-Kuki. The other
who were previously in the Kuki category have prefered to be
designated by their original names, like Vaiphei, Paite, Simte,
Ralte, Hmar, etc. There are many who have been opposing the
multiplication of names. In one of the memorandum presented by
the Manipur Kuki Tribes Recognition Demand Committee, "The
existing list of 1956 was the result of spot study carried out by
the Backward Classes Commission headed by the late Baba Kalelkar
Saheb in 1953. The Commission met representative of all group
concerned and their recommendation was examined and considered at
all levels before the order of 1959 was issued. Now after thirty
years (1986), no new tribes has been born and could not have been
born. No genuine difficulties have been encountered during the
last three decades. The present proposal to increase the list is
nothing but the desire to create more fragmentation by bringing
down the tribal level to the clan level and to emphasize even
minor differences ignoring things which have been common and
which held the communities so long and so far."

The Thadou Experience - One of the most populous tribal groups
in Manipur, belonging to the Kuki group of tribes is being
suspected of trying to over-rule the distinct identity of other
category of Kuki tribes. Such a suspicion has arisen among the
Kuki groups of tribes themselves, all about one section of the
same ethnic group.
There is a group of people who have no proper name by which they can collectively identify themselves as an ethnic group. They live in the Indo-Burma border areas. This ethnic group is divided into a number of tribes and the tribes are further subdivided into clans. Most of the tribes are now christians. Before they embraced christianity they were all animists worshipping various spirits dwelling in different places like the precipice, water, woods, rocks and spirits of the ancestors etc. These people are known by various names by outsiders. A bulk of their population is found in the Chin State of Burma while other members are dispersing in Manipur, Tripura, Bangladesh, Assam and Mizoram. The tribes found in India were known as Kuki by the outsiders. Their cognate tribes found in Burma were known as Chin by the outsiders. So they become both Chin and Kuki whether they like it or not. The Kuki-Chin race is a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman or Indo-Chinese family.

The terms Kuki and Chin are foreign words unheard of by the people themselves at first. They were the names given as their generic names without the knowledge of the people themselves for whom there have been much confusions about the names.

These Chin-Kuki people are all closely interrelated tribes having many common characteristic features such as same name,
their appearance, customs, languages, which cannot separate them from one another. Naming the same group of people by different foreign names is really confusing for the insiders as well as the outsiders. An outsider thinks that Chin is different from Kuki and vice-versa. An insider who may like to accept either Chin or Kuki is again in an embarrassing situation when another name is applied to him. It creates confusion in him also. Besides these confusing names there are various tribal names by which they are identified with reference to one another. This group of tribes have a number of common affinities by which even an outsider will be convinced that the various tribes belong to the same stock. Some of the common features are no longer operated in full but remained in vestigial form owing to socio-cultural changes that are taking place through ages. Some of the common characteristic features are given below.

1. **Clan Songs**

Possession of clan songs by the clans forming the tribes is a very unique feature of the Chin-Kuki tribes. Members of the same clan in each tribe possess clan songs. Owing to Christianity the knowledge about possession of clan songs is very dim among some clans and tribes. The clan songs are dirges lamenting the death of a member of the clan. They are sung at wake, burial and during mourning. But they would never be sung at ordinary times. The clan songs afforded means of reaching the spirits of the dead to the land of the dead and rejoining the
spirits of the dead ancestors and of members of the clan.

2. Linguistic Affinities

Linguistic affinities prevail among these group of tribes unlike among the tribes of Naga. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman speech group. A remarkable feature among them is that members of different tribes can converse one another by using their own respective dialects or languages. But there are some tribes which are a bit remote in linguistic line but one can make idea out of the speech in course of conversation. In such cases understanding is difficult but one understands something out of it.

The whole group can linguistically be divided into R-group and Non-R-group of languages. The non-R-group has no R-sound and some consonant clusters like TI.Hm etc. their languages. Such groups are Thadou, Paite/Tedim Chin, Zou, Vaiphei etc. The R-group include Lushai, Hmar, Lakher, Pawi and all the so called old Kuki who happened to be in contact with outsiders earlier than their cognates. Of the old Kuki group, the Kom, Anal, Chiru etc. may be viewed to be far removed from the Chin-Kuki ethnic affiliation with reference to the non-R-group of tribes in linguistic point of view. But they are very closely related again to the R-group.

3. Belief in Common Origin

The different tribes of the Chin-Kuki world held a common belief that they originally emerged out of a cave or hole
according to their mythological stories put in different but in analogical versions. This mythological cave is known by various names like Khul, Khur, Khurpu, Khurtu-bjur, Sinlung, Chinlung and so on by various tribes like Thadou (Shaw 1929 : 24-26), Lushai (Shakespear 1912), Lakher (Parry 1976 :4), Paite/Tedim Chin (Kamkhenthang 1967: 1-2) and Moyon-Monsang etc.

4. Possession of Common Folktales

There are many folktales common and current among these tribes they are dispersing for and wide geographically. We are having such tales as Khupching and Ngambawm, Thanghou and Liandou, Ngalngam (Ralngam), Temtatpu/Tingtingpa (the dao sharpener) a wild cat and a domestic hen and so on. These stories are found more or less in similar forms in Manipur, Burma, Mizoram, Assam etc. Possession of the same folktales means nothing but the people are of the same folk having similar, social ritual norms and similar philosophy of life.

The same folktales reflect the thought, idea, socio-cultural life including value systems.

5. Each of the tribes under the Chin-Kuki group has particular design of cloth associated with the tribe by which they can be identified as a group. In this regard particular interesting designs are found among some tribes. These designs may conveniently and provisionally be termed as Kuki element. They are KHAM-TANG SAIPIKHUP designs of cloth found among the Thadou,
Kom, Aimol, Chiru, Chothe etc. Besides these, there is what we may term as Thadou Linguistic element in their languages. That is the sound of double vowels called i.e. as in Pathien Lienpu etc. are found in Hmar, Thadou, Aimol, Chothe etc.

6. Agamous Marriage

Majority of the tribes follow agamous marriage in which a man can marry any woman within and outside his clan. The distinctiveness of the tribes and clans of the Chin-Kuki group is its agamous marriage. All the major tribes like Thadou, Hmar Paite/Tedim Chin, Kakher, Lushai etc. practice agamy. The only exception to this rule is the so called anthropological old Kuki.

They follow Purum type of marriage in which there is a marriage circle. There are definite wife taking and wife-giving groups. A man cannot take wife from some groups and he is to get wife from predetermined group or groups. He cannot marry from his own social group as among the Anal, Monsang, etc. They also have a system of marriage by service whereas in the case of other group marriage is by purchase. Among the Hmar also there had been marriage by service in the past as practised by Anal, Moyan, Monsang etc.

7. Historical Course of Migration

As tribes claimed emergence from cave or hole uniformly they had more or less mythological and historical course of migration. Tradition tells us their movement from China through Tibet to
Burma. From Burma many tribes made their farther movement into different places in Bangladesh and India while many of them remained in Burma. Mizoram is one of the routes through which migration took place as claimed by many tribes now living in Manipur.

In addition to the above common characters there is a set of characteristic features of the tribes applicable to them at one time. Vamkhohau (1973 : iii) reproduced the characteristic features of the Chin-Kuki people in a book "Zo Suanh Khang Simna" as recorded in the Encyclopaedia Britanica as follow:

"The respect from the birth and the knowledge of pedigrees the virtue of hospitality the clanish feeling the suddens of their raids"

There was truth in the remarks. The remarks were nicely applicable to them in the past during the period of tribal vandalism. There are some remarks which still hold good uptill now. The clanish feeling and knowledge of pedigree are still very strong in many case. As for example, all the clans speaking Thadou are aware whether their clans have direct genealogical connection with the ancestor of the Thadou or not. This makes fissiparous tendency dividing loyalty into proper Thadou and Kuki. The clanish feeling is expressed in the clanwise organisations and demanding recognition of the clan to the Government as a tribe.
They have established the oneness of the tribe basing on their socio-cultural affinities. They have a good deal of homogeneity. Earlier authorities classed the Naga as nearly akin to the Chin-Kuki. But that is not correct. The Naga are distinctive for their heterogeneity and the Chin-Kuki tribes are distinctive for their homogeneity. The difference between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki can be shown in brief in the following points. The tribes of Naga believed that they either originated at or dispersed from a place called Makkeal near Tadubi village in Manipur whereas the Chin-Kuki tribes believed that they emerged out of a cave somewhere in China. Tuck and Carey (1876: 3) had shown the distinction between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki) and said "The Government of Nagas tribes is distinctly democratic. Their chieftainship does not necessarily pass from father to son. The Kuki chiefs, on the other hand, invariably inherit their position by right of birth and take initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen". There is marked difference between the Naga and the Chin-Kuki in methods of cultivation in which the Naga have more developed and terraced cultivation whereas the Chin-Kuki work on jhum in a wasteful and untidy manner on the hill sides. The Naga do not keep hair long but the Chin-Kuki people kept hair long in the past. The male kept their hair in a knot either at the back of the nape, example, Paite, Thadou, Hmar or at the occiput of the head as in the case of Lakher, Pawi, Maring etc. There is more unity and a
sense of oneness among the heterogenous Naga whereas there is more disunity among the homogenous Chin-Kuki tribes.

Now we have established the facts showing that the Naga and the Chin-Kuki are far removed and not related as examined under their marriage form, migration, folk arts, material and spiritual cultures. The Naga form their own separate identity and the Chin-Kuki also have their own distinctiveness which cannot hide them from view. The Naga have vigorous forms of dances whereas the dances of the Chin-Kuki are very slow and lethargic. The Naga dances are attractive and the dances of Chin-Kuki group are very dull.

The Naga observe strict clan exogamy in which members of the same clan do not marry unlike the practice of agamy found among the tribes of Chin-Kuki-Mizo.

The Naga construct house on a flatered surface of the ground. The floor of the house is rammed earth on which the house stands. In the case of Chin-Kuki-Mizo the normal way is to construct a house on a slop surface of the earth. The floor is never of earth but of bamboo matting. There is sufficient space underneath the floor to keep the domestic animals. Houses of the chiefs or richmen are usually conspicuous by having horn-like structures displayed on the ridge of the roof and also by having very steep roofs. The houses of the Chief among the Chin-Kuki are normally big in size having maximum
varandah which may be divided into roofed part and unroofed part.

Formally part of the Lushai speakers was Kuki while another part was Chin. But now they had completely succeeded in disowning the terms, Kuki and Chin by adopting an inborn word 'Mizo' for their identity. Various attempts have been made either to replace the terms given by the outsiders or to find out acceptable name for the people as a group.

The Chin, Kuki, Mizo are thus different names adopted by the same ethnographic group, the difference depending on the territory of their location. Those inhabiting Burma have identified themselves as Chin, while those in the contiguous territory within Manipur identify themselves as Kuki and those in the Mizoram part of the continuation of the territory like to be identified as Mizo. This cluster of tribal population inhabiting Manipur today by some factors of history are referred to as Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of people.

The increase of this fissiporous tendencies is clearly seen among the Kuki group of tribes. Either of the terms like Chin/Kuki/Mizo is not unanimously acceptable to the community as a whole.

By 1973, the resentment against the Kuki identity had grown tremendously. While the generic designation 'Kuki' was not acceptable to all. Similarly the generic name 'Chin' was also
not acceptable, as it gave the impression of close identity with the Tedim Chin from Burma.

Ultimately, the only solution was to adopt an expanded name, which will include the identity of the three sections - the Chin, the Kuki and the Mizo. We thus find that the Kuki groups of tribes, though linguistically and ethnographically homogenous have not been able to forge a common identity. This appear in sharp contrast to the experience from the Naga group of tribes, who otherwise represent greater of diversity.