Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY

From time immemorial Manipur had been the home of several tribal communities who inhabit today the hilly regions of this picturesque small state. Under the Constitution of India, 29 tribes of Manipur have been recognised as the Scheduled Tribes, and the Tangkhul is one of the Scheduled Tribes of Manipur. With a population of 57,851 in 1971 Census, the Tangkhuls are the most populous Naga tribe of Manipur. It will be difficult to assign specific period with regard to the antiquity of Tangkhul settlement in the hills of Manipur. However, it may not be wrong to admit that they were contemporaneous with other Naga tribes of Manipur sofar as their settlement in the hills of Manipur was concerned. The Tangkhuls are known for their hospitality, bravery and war-like nature. They used to attack on Manipuri settlements whenever there was an opportunity. "One of the earliest raids mentioned in the chronicles of Manipur is dated 1435 A.D. and is said to have been the work of Tangkhuls who then, as on subsequent occasions, availed themselves of the opportunity afforded them by the temporary absence of the forces of Manipur on what the local historian calls a march of conquest in the direction of Thaungdut, to make a raid on the valley." ¹

¹ T.C. Hodson, Naga Tribes of Manipur, p.11.
In spite of the minor skirmishes, the Tangkhul chiefs were seldom united in the past, and inter-village feuds among the Tangkhuls themselves were very common. When the king of Manipur introduced the system of "lalup" or forced labour in 11th century which had been in force till late 19th century until abolished by the British, the Tangkhuls were subjected at a later stage to this system in which every adult male had to work for the king ten days in every forty. They attended the palace to carry out the king's orders. "Of the Tangkhuls, the chief duty is gardening. They sometimes also hew stones and make vessels of that material." ¹

During pax Britannica, when peace prevailed throughout Manipur, the development activities of the state were confined more or less within the central valley, and the surrounding hilly regions including that of the Tangkhuls remained neglected. The absence of modern system of communication in the hills for a pretty long period of time was primarily responsible for the comparative backwardness of the hilly regions of this state. The only major means of livelihood of the Tangkhuls was agriculture. During the winter, when the agricultural activities were ever, they used to come down to the plains in search of work. The Tangkhuls earned and very deservedly, a reputation as earth-workers.

Review of previous works

The tribals of Manipur are comparatively backward with regard to economy and education. Usually they live in the undeveloped region. It is necessary that they should also join the mainstream of other Indian population. The Tangkhuls are one of the Naga tribes who live in the hilly regions of the north eastern part of Manipur. They are still following their old occupation, tradition and culture. This important tribe and its problems have not so far been studied by geographers and other social scientists. British social anthropologists like G.M. Godden, George Watt, R.G. Woodthrope and J.P. Mills published some papers on the north eastern frontier Naga tribes. They made short discussions and reviews of tribes. Other British Administrators and scholars like McCulloch "Account of the valley of Munnipore and of the hill tribes" (Cal. 1859), R. Brown "The statistical account of the native state of Manipur" (Cal. 1874), T.C. Hodson, "The Naga tribes of Manipur" (London 1911), W. Crooke, "The native races of the British empire" (northern India) (London 1907), U.G. Bower, "The Naga Path" (London 1950) and V. Elwin "The Nagas in the 19th century" (London 1969) wrote about the ancient social life of the Nagas. M. Horam, a Tangkhul writer, on his two books "Naga Polity" (Delhi 1975) and "Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas" (Delhi 1977), discussed only social life of the Nagas and the Tangkhuls.
H. Risely and J.H. Hutton (1931) made short discussions on the anthropological aspects of the Nagas, but sofar no author has made any elaborate discussion on the economic and cultural life of the Tangkhuls. The writings mentioned above provided meaningful clues to various aspects of the problem faced by the tribes of Manipur in general.

**Significance of the study**

The Tangkhuls live in an isolated hilly region. They practise jhum cultivation. Jhuming causes deforestation, soil erosion and destroyed many valuable forest resources. They use only manual labour. For their daily food, they kill a large number of cattle which are very useful for agriculture. They are using their old agricultural implements and tools without any chemical fertilizers. The land belongs to the village community collectively. There is no land record on patta system. Therefore, it creates a big problem in the development of agriculture in this region.

The natural potential resources are not preserved and exploited properly. The local people waste these natural resources without knowing the exact value of their wealth. The transport and communications are so undeveloped that there is little chance to communicate with the modern techniques of agriculture and urban life. Naturally the people are economically backward not to speak of any worthy industry in this region.
The percentage of illiteracy among the Tangkhuls is very high in comparison with that of the people living in the plains of Manipur. Here the children have a little chance of attending school due to paucity of schools on the one hand and poverty of the local people on the other.

Lastly the socio-economic backwardness of the people has caused a great obstruction to general prosperity of the people.

Objective of the study

In this region the people resort to the local method of productions with regard to agriculture, forest resources, cottage industry and manufacture of salt. Among the people, the pursuit of economic activities appears to be confined to different localities. For instance, in the northern part of the region, cottage industries such as pottery, salt manufacturing and terraced cultivation are well advanced. In the western region, weaving and terraced cultivation are practised by only a few. In the south west portion, wet rice cultivation and double cropping are popular. In the south and south east, only jhum cultivation is practised. Therefore, under different geographic environments, different types of activities are carried on.
Organisation of the study:

The study has been divided into 9 Chapters. In Chapter I, the background information relating to the land of the Tangkhuls has been furnished. In Chapter II, a description of the physical features, natural resources etc. of the region inhabited by the Tangkhuls have been given. In Chapter III, demographic characteristics of the people, their migrations etc. have been described. Chapter IV deals with settlement pattern, habitat and village organisation. Chapter V, VI and VII deal with Economic Activities, Social Life and Religion and Education respectively. In the concluding chapter suggestions have been offered for the overall development of the region with reference to the economic resources and geographical situation of the land of the Tangkhuls.

In addition to the topology and characteristics of the local people maps and cartographical illustration have been provided in order to clarify a geographical background to other past and future studies on Tangkhuls of Manipur.
The aim of this study is to make an attempt of a proper survey of the economic activities of the local peoples and study the potential natural resources of Manipur East district. A geographical analysis of the human activities and natural resources for the rapid growth and all round development of the area in the future is the main objective of this thesis. With this aim in view, the objective of this research work is to highlight the following areas:

(1) Encouragement of different techniques in different areas for more agricultural production.

(2) Promotion of cottage industries which are already developed in their traditional ways.

(3) Channelisation of social development so that the people may join the mainstream of social life of the people of Manipur.

In order to analyse the above problems three geographical conclusions are examined. Firstly, the distribution pattern of population. Secondly, the present communication problems and thirdly, the socio-economic problems of the tribe.

Methodology

As has been stated earlier the field studies had been carried out in 20 Tangkhuls villages scattered in different areas. A questionnaire was canvassed first.
According to Tangkhul tradition, if any outsider visits their village, and wants certain information, he has to take permission from the headman who will call a meeting of the village authority (elders). They are very simple and frank and answered all questions relating to their agricultural activities, production of food crops, areas of land owned by them etc. most satisfactorily.

As regards weaving, many of the married and unmarried females of various age-groups gave replies to queries about their capacity of work and difficulties.

Besides, the questionnaire, other government departments like the Agriculture Department, Forest Department, offices of the Deputy Commissioner and of the Superintendent of Police, Manipur East District and Tribal Development Blocks were contacted for the purpose of collecting relevant informations. Unfortunately old records on climate, agricultural products, areas under different types of food crops, cottage industries etc. are not available as most of the offices were opened recently.
Field investigation

The field investigations in Tangkhul villages were carried out for about two years from 1975 to 1977 and obtained detailed information about the people and their way of life. However, during the period of my field investigation the law and order situations in many Tangkhul villages in Manipur East district were extremely bad. In the midst of curfews, imposition of section 144 Cr P.C. etc. from time to time, I was able to carry out field investigation after obtaining necessary permits from the Security forces and the Deputy Commissioner of the district. Another hurdle in the performance of field investigation was the absence of smooth bus services in the region. The existing bus services, the details of which will be described in the sequel, are far from satisfactory with regard to the station they served and their frequencies per week. It is needless to say that during the monsoon, when the roads were blocked by landslides, bus services were discontinued or disrupted for several days. During the period of my field investigation only three important centres viz. Ukhrul, Phungyar Phaisad and Chassad were connected by bus services. Since the nature of my field work
required visits to interior villages where there were highly unsatisfactory transport facilities, I had bitter experiences of journey in thick jungles and of climbing uphills. Snakes, Leeches and poisoneous insects and plants were great nuisance. In many cases, engagement of porters was necessary. I had to spend Rs.10.00 per day for a porter. Engaging of interpreter was another problem since many of the illiterate elderly folks do not understand Manipuri.