CHAPTER VI
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The Hmar, one of the major tribes in Manipur, concentrates mostly in Manipur South district where nearly 88 per cent of the Hmar people inhabit. Quite a good number of Hmar also live in central district. They, though not highly developed, have obtained certain degree of modernity through Christianity, modern education and wider contact with the rest of the country since the early period of this last century. In our body politice they are a Scheduled Tribe, according to Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes list (modification) Order, of 1956 of the Indian constitution.

In this study attempts had been made to show the fundamental traditional social aspects of the Hmar community and the new ones which have been incorporated into it because of acculturation which ushered in the social changes. Further, since the Hmar culture has persisted through the ages, an attempt has been made to trace out its courses. It is well known that life implies not only survival but also continuity and adjustment. As such it is necessary to understand the Hmar society and its cultural identity plus continuity from different perspectives of their varied ways of life while they adhere to its basic principles.

Human social structure as well as social interaction and behaviour are all based upon the social values. Any change in social structure will take place when there is a change in social values. So it is necessary to understand the problem of social values in the modern context if we are to understand the problems and functioning of social and political institution of the modern Hmar. Today different cultures are coming into contact everywhere and every time on an ever increasing scale. By studying the traditional ways of life we may be able to understand the dominant values of a society and the way in which changes have taken place in these dominant values and the modifications of these values or replacement by some other values because of the changing circumstances and the changed needs of the society. Keeping all these in view while describing the socio-political institutions of the Hmar side by side the traditional and the existing state of affairs were described.
In the course of delineation of the socio-political institutions of the Hmar the researcher drew attention to the changed circumstances – a factor that really started to cause a diversion of the traditional way of life. The way of life of the people, while adopting itself to a new environment, has resulted in a steady emergence of a new social pattern. In this final chapter the researcher summarize only some to the important points that were responsible for the social changes.

As already stated, the Hmar social life has been undergoing a rapid transformation as a result of contact with the colonial power, the introduction of a new way of life by Christianity, formal education and the imposition of a new political system etc.

The advent of British administration in the hitherto undefined Hmar inhabited areas towards the end of the 19th century A.D. led to the introduction of monetary system among the Hmar who till then followed barter system in their daily transaction. The British annexation was immediately followed by proselytization. With the advent of Christianity social transformation of the Hmar society has taken place in numerous ways, viz, by the introduction of many new things many indigenous social practices and aspects of culture were abolished and many modifications in the form of additions and replacements in some of the existing social phenomena were made in the traditional social customs and practices. This kind of transformation has given rise to the much needed reformation of the Hmar society.

Before the advent of Christianity among the Hmar, they were cent percent illiterate and moreover there was no written language of their own. In 1898, two pioneer missionaries namely Rev. F.W. Savidge and Rev. J.H. Lorrain reduced the local language into writing. The first book entitled ‘Hmar Bu Bul’ (Hmar Primary) was prepared and published by Rev. Edwin B. Rowland in 1919. Thus the indigenous system of communicating their views through oral communication was replaced by the written form through the sincere efforts of the Christian missionaries. The introduction of Hmar language as a written one for communicating ideas and thoughts is the basis of modern Hmar language and literacy. Today, Hmar language is recognized as a Major Indian Language (MIL) upto graduate level by the Manipur University. Moreover, many Hmars have gone to different parts of India and abroad for various higher studies such as Management in different sectors, Engineering,
Medicines, Theology, and many other lines of study. It may be said that the Hmars now have become very much interested in the diversified fields of education.

With the coming of Christianity the Hmar people have more or less continuous contact with the outside world and now they are not immune from the dynamics of change. Their way of life has been affected. Even among the women, inspite of their inherent weaker position, today, they are now being engaged in various jobs and they can be seen in any deal a Hmar men enters into, wielding great influence over menfolk.

Church – the institution of religious affairs came into prominence in the Hmar community. As a religious institution it is the duty of the Church to bring about religious consciousness and to deepen the religious faith according to what the Bible says, and to bring about ideal Christian life accordingly. Besides this, the Church as an institution also acted as an instrument to make the people conscious about their obligations in the society as social beings. From the social point of view, the Church has to perform may social activities like marriage, divorce, and enforcement of moral laws at different social level. In short, all the unhealthy practices are now given up in the society and even alcoholic drink is also no longer served during marriage ceremony. Everything except the price distribution is organized within the purview of the Church.

The spread of formal education effected a confrontation with the system of dormitory because this old system was the primary centre of learning for all young men in the village. Today, modern educational institutions and hostels have become the substitutes for the traditional dormitory system and have become the centre for activities of youth and the same play as much parallel educational role in the village life.

With the process of modernization social changes has its veritable impact upon the traditional family and kinship organization of this community. As it has been done in the earlier period that for a successful working of the family organization each and every member of the family needed full co-operation in day-to-day work. However, today such kind of relationship and cooperation among the family members has become almost impossible owing to dispersal of the family members in different fields to work elsewhere. To look after affairs of the family, hired labour, which was not known in the traditional society, has become a must for the family which has no helping hand from its members. It
was the immediate kin group which served this purpose on the basis of reciprocity. But as the way of life is changing, the importance of the clan and the mode of family co-operation is also changing. This has given rise to the importance of nuclear family. Under such circumstances the kinship relationship and obligations could no longer remain immune from perceptible modifications. Those who are employed elsewhere have now little time to visit their neighbours and kinsmen of the village. They cannot get the needed co-operation from the members of their families as in the past. Their personal relationships in the kinship group decreases in intensity to the extent that he cultivates relationship with his co-worker in different office establishment. This has its psychological effect of diminishing the interpersonal and kinship relationships and obligations outside the immediate family circle and kindred group. This does not, however, stop the total kinship obligations. In times of dire necessity kinsmen are there to help under any circumstance. However, it should be noted that since the people have closer contact with the outside world now the traditional way of village life is rapidly disappearing and a new identity has developed in the whole community. The era of new isolation imposed by the traditional blood feuds is replaced by one of wider and freer contact within the entire tribe and outside the tribal boundary. Thus, most of the traditional forms of economic activities which created reciprocal relationship between the group of neighbours or kins are now dying out gradually.

The immediate effect in the field of political organization was tremendous. The traditional type of political bond was based on sustained face-to-face relationship between the village chiefs, councilors and the subjects. In those days the village chiefs and the councilors were trusted and they were also dependent upon the people. The chief was not only the proprietor of village land, but was also the traditional legal authority and administrative head. He was, in short, the traditional village head in all spheres except purely ritual matters, having had the authority to enact laws and at the same time executed these laws at his discretion. But today this kind of government cannot be implemented as an effective administrative system adequate to modern conditions, because today village authorities have become mere agents of the state government. In this way there are lots of formal alterations in social and political institutions of the Hmar today...; and often the conflict between the old and the new becomes most explicit in the context of village administration. For instance, the introduction of Manipur (village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act 1956 to the whole of the hill areas of Manipur by the Government of Manipur to cope up with the modern democratic system has a big gap between the traditional customs and the so
called modern democratic principles. It may be pointed out that it could not be implemented in the most desirable way as it should have been. The Act is written in English. So this Act is very much Greek and Latin to them. Moreover, according to Chapter III, section 56 of the Hill Areas Act, 1956 all the proceedings before a village court shall be in Manipur dialect.

From the above statement, mention may be made that most of the village authority members (including the village chief) are illiterate and if such imposition is made, inspite of making their own dialect the media of village court, it can never be expected a successful implementation of the said Act in the hill area at any rate. At the same time, most of the members of the village authorities are not ready to do that. It rather served their sentiment at large. Mention may also be made here that Hmar language and scripts are quite different from the Manipuri language and scripts. Manipuri uses Bengali scripts where as the Hmar use Roman scripts. As such there is a big gap in using the language in the village court. On consideration of these points, apart from others, it is clear that, because of such problems arising, the Manipur (village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 is being properly implemented in no village. Under such circumstances, to introduce a successful democratic form of government, problems of the hill areas must be examined properly and thoroughly.

Since the administration is for the benefit of the people, they themselves should be made responsible of the administration. To cope up with the modern democratic principles and also to create interest maximum chances should be given to follow the traditional customary law, if necessary with some modification, so that the changes may not be sudden and completely out of tune with their traditions. Such kind of a momentous evolution may bring the needed democratic set up in the most successful way in the long run. It should also be noted that to earn their bread, all members of the village authority should be provided with the necessary remuneration. The most important institution of this nature should not be made a voluntary organization. The successful administration of our country, basically starts from the village administration in which each and every individual is concerned. Under such circumstances the members of the village authorities should not be made a mere agent of the government and the people. But they should be made the real responsible members of the people as well as of the government. They should be given all the necessary powers and permitted to function in collaboration with the custodian of the traditional customs and usages. They should be made well versed in all the related acts and rules from time to time.
Their position and status must be made higher by giving all the necessary facilities and privileges.

Regarding about land, it is clear that a very large portion of the hill areas in the region has not been cadastrally surveyed. As such, there is no record of rights over the land. The Hmar people who settled in the Tipaimukh sub-division just rely on customs handed down from generation to generation. The uncertainties of the laws and the land rights exercised by the Hmars inhibit development and welfare activities in the region. This system was quite satisfactory till the advent of the British towards the middle of the last century when the tribals lived alone without any sort of intrusion or interference by the outsiders from the plains. They had plenty of land when their population was very small and needs were limited. But things have now changed vastly with the dawn of independence and other developmental activities. It was, therefore, rightly suggested by the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission of 1960-61 that the work of preparing the records of rights for the tribes should be completed as early as possible which is still a far cry in Manipur. As already stated, since most of the people specially in the interior hill areas are illiterate and ignorant of the complications of various enactment, the approach to this work should be human rather than legalistic and take full note of tribal customs and traditions.

Mentioned may be made that in the absence of land ownership rights by the individual, particularly in the interior villages, a cultivator cannot receive necessary financial aids or loans from various financial institutions for the improvement of land and raise the production, etc. Under such circumstances, mortgage of land in favour of the landing agency cannot be legally created, and land is normally the security for the loans advanced. Maintenance of land records is also necessitated for the smooth functioning of the administration and is a good source of revenue. If the land records are not properly maintained neither the state nor the District Council can help the poor farmer. As such, where farms like orange, sugarcane, tea-garden, etc. are practiced in fixed plots may, with the consent of the village authorities, be mapped and surveyed and land-records prepared recognizing permanent, heritable and restricted transferable rights so that the owners may be able to receive necessary financial aids or loans from various financial institutions such as Government, banks, co-operative societies etc. for the improvement of land and raise the production, etc.
In the absence of individual land rights especially in the Tipaimukh sub-division, young generation does not find any charm to develop the cultivated area. Any sort of slackness caused by insecurity for fear of losing the same plot for next crop will be responsible for low productivity. It is a known fact that sincere efforts and hard work can convert a barren land into a best cultivable land and any neglect may convert the same into a barren land. Therefore, recognition of individual rights is one of the most essential element for raising the agricultural productivity and thereby economic development.

In the change circumstances of increasing pressure of population and the concept of land reform in the hill areas so as among the Hmars should be on a much wider scale. It should not be limited to the general idea of redistribution of land or of fixing the land ceiling. These are vitally important but as there is a time for everything they in the context of confused land system of the tribesmen as it stands at present, have to bid their time. Therefore, first, they should collect the requisite data of the land area and the crop cultivation, secondly of the area of arable land not yet brought under cultivation, thirdly of the area of reclaimable land, and lastly of the rights of ownership.

Rules and regulation have to be there and should strictly enforced. These should, however, be drafted in a way that people for whom they are meant, put in their best. If they re-sell in frustration and dissatisfaction tends to lower the return of work, the purpose of making them is itself defeated. There should be periodical review of the existing rules and regulations to modify them to suit the changing circumstances and working convenience and human psychology. To meet this end, the rules and regulations have to be slightly flexible. Implementations of such flexibilities, if necessary, may be left to the discretion of some high powered committee which should be able to take stock of the difficulty and remedy the situation.

From the foregoing paras one can see the problems of assimilating the new values in the context of the old ones. Many of the values, both old and new are vital and active and of immense significance to the development of the highland group as well as of the individual. Today the society is struggling consciously or unconsciously for its survival by retaining the old as well as incorporating the new values. This is the urgent task confronting before the Hmar society. The people must tackle the problem carefully and should see that the matter is not left to circumstances and also should not allow the good things of the past to become
extinct by the speedy currents of changing modern civilization. Everyone should try to understand the implications of the traditional values as well as the modern ones. The limitations of both the values notwithstanding both can be adjusted for the best interest of the people in their forward march for social equality and justice plus an improvement in their standard of living.

From the data presented in the receding chapters it is evident that Hmar culture of today is much different for what it was only half a century ago. The advent of modernity has resulted in number of traditional institutions undergoing change. It is a new society in place of the old. It is worthwhile, in this context, to discuss at the theoretical level regarding the significance of this transformation.

With the decline of intra tribal feuds, the institution of Zawlbuk which also acted as reserve man-power for the village defence has become completely extinct, as with the decline of inter-village feuds, and with the establishment of modern schools and hostels the necessity of Zawlbuk is no longer there. As such there is not trace of these institutions at present as it happened to be in the past. The functional operation of zawlbuk has changed concomitantly and today it has been taken by the modern schools and hostels etc. to suit the existing modern conditions and social changes in Hmar society. It clearly proves that an institution which loses its function in relation to the total society loses its rights of existence in its puritan form. It is obvious that an institution changes its function and adapts itself to the changing circumstances.

We do not find any material in the preceding pages on any dysfunction of any traditional Hmar institution which caused disnomia and ultimately led to realignment again reverting to unomia. It cannot be said that introduction of Christianity in Hmar society was caused by malfunctioning of the traditional religion, rather, it was merely an historical accident that Christianity came just at the time Hmar society came in contact with the outside world through the advent of the colonial power and they found that, education, modern way of living, and such other things were incompatible with the traditional religion. Consequently they changed many of their customs, so also they changed their religion. The transition was so smooth that there was no intervening period of tension.
It has already been shown that the three most important factors triggering change in the Hmar community, namely Christianity, improvement of communications and consequent more intimate contact with the outside world and participating in the democratic political institutions with the rest of the country, caused the Hmar society to move towards modernization. It is to be emphasized here that though the Hmar are on the way to modernization, they still retain much of the traditional values. However, an urban version of Hmar culture has grown. Many Hmar are now living in Churachandpur, the headquarters of Manipur South District where all the urban conditions are found- modern technology, facilities for modern education, impersonalized services etc. And Hmar have adapted to this situation. The urban version of the Hmar culture is more oriented towards modernization than towards the rural version. This is not peculiar to Hmar society only; in all societies of the world today urban versions are more oriented towards modernization than rural version though all the rural societies of the world today are marching rapidly towards modernization, causing the gap between rural and urban versions to be narrower and narrower.

In the foregoing pages an attempt was made to depict the traditional Hmar culture and what shape it has taken after all the changes that came during the last hundred years. After this study can we not visualize as to what will the course of Hmar culture in the days to come? As the past events of transition were tensionless, it can be anticipated that the future course of events also will be smooth. Christianity has become so deep rooted in this society since conversion took place in 1910 that cent percent of the Hmar today are Christians. It is remarkable to note that among the Hmar the new religion has not changed its colour in conformity with the traditional culture. Christian revivalism is there, which is charged with emotion, but here also except the traditional khoung (drum) which is occasionally used to induce ecstasy, there is no other element of older culture.

This brief research works is expected to serve a useful purpose not only to sociologists but historians and other social scientists in general and in particular it will give relief to those ethnographers who depicted about the Hmar character, ideals, norms and philosophy without going deep into the ethos or value system of the people. This research work by a researcher from the same tribe reveals the true nature of their steadfast stubbornness in pursuing the ideals set by their heritage which itself is being enriched generation after generation. The events of their dark period of history clouded by ignorance, stark isolation and in in-group feeling stand in dead contrast to the shining light of the
modern period when they are manfully facing the realities of the modern way of life, culture and civilization by freely assimilating themselves in the mainstream of national life whether it is in the field of politics, economic enterprises, cultural affluence or civil exuberance. Hmar cultural resurgence had root in their heritage, which, because of its inner vitality and resilience has absorbed the modern ideas and concepts without sacrificing what their heritage stood for.