

ABSTRACT

*Nothing makes us as cruel as religion and nothing makes us as tender as religion.
This has been in the past and will also, in all probability be so in future"*

Swami Vivekananda



INTRODUCTION

Society consists of various sub-groups. These sub-groups may be seen in terms of caste, region, religion, language, habitat, etc. Scheduled tribes fall into both groups. In India tribals are recognized by the Government of India under Article 341 of the constitution. These Scheduled Tribes are divided into various groups and sub-groups and are distributed over a vast geographical area from the foothills of Himalayas to the lands of Gujarat to the hills in North-East (Panigrahi1992:1). The total population of the Scheduled Tribes in the country stands at 84,326,240 with 8.10 % of the Scheduled Tribes population to the total population of the country (Source: Population Profiles, Census of India 2001, RGI).

Religion has been considered to be one of the major subsystems of culture. For an individual's social and cultural identity religion is a strong basis. Above this it is also a common yardstick for people to compare themselves with others. The ways in which religious structure enhances the human survival, adaptation and reproduction have been emphasized by V. Reynolds and R.E.S. Tanner (1983). Religion is also an important tool which manipulates superstitious people.

The total population of Manipur according to the 2001 Census was 23, 88,634 with a density of 107/km². The state has 32.31 percent of tribal population. The Scheduled Tribes population in the nine districts as percentage of total population is Senapati district-32.38%; Tamenglong district-95.38%; Churachandpur district-92.90%; Chandel district-88.64%; Thoubal district-1.17%; Bishnupur district-2.98%; Imphal East and Imphal West districts-5.49 %; Ukhrul district-95.42 % as shown in Table I.4 (Census of India 2001). The major religions followed in the state are Hinduism 58 %, Christianity 34 %, Islam 7 % and others 1 % (Manipur Fact File 2001:35).

In the present study what has been attempted to show is that the parts of a society are interrelated and in turn help each other to maintain and survive in the

long run. The most relevant and significant theoretical approaches to be applied in the present study would be the functionalist and cultural approaches like acculturation and assimilation perspectives.

Part I of the study deals with the introduction of the study, starting with a brief introduction of the state and its people, selected districts for the study, aim and focus of the study, and the hypothesis (Chapter I); review of literature of the studies conducted till now by local, national and international scholars and the justification of the present study (Chapter II); the conceptual framework includes theoretical approaches, methodology, tools and techniques used, strategy of enquiry with the help of which the issues could be studied/analyzed scientifically and the objectives of the study undertaken (Chapter III).

Part II deals with the main aspects of beliefs consisting magico-religious beliefs and practices, witchcraft and sorcery (Chapters IV). Traditionally, whatever happened in their lives was related to one or other kinds of spirits. For which the thiempu or the village priest performed rituals to ward off the evil spirits. But now, the dual purpose of a priest as the officiator and the village medicine man has been taken over by the church pastor and the modern medical doctors. Since they now follow the organized religion of Christianity, they have a fixed sacred place, the church. In the church prayers are offered by the pastor and even by the commoners as well. Realizing that belief in mundane things like magic, using charms and amulets do not have any effect directly or indirectly on their life, they discarded rationalizing the positive and negative aspects of these beliefs. Since witchcraft and sorcery are not approved by the church it is no more in practice.

The main aspects of ritual concerning with the life of man, the physical phenomena, and the economic activities are dealt in (Chapters V). Everything unknown to them were feared and appeased. But after believing in the True God and after knowing all His creation they bow their heads before Lord Jesus only. They offer whatever they can in the name of Jesus to help others. The birth of a child is considered as a gift of God and hence time for celebration. Naming the child just after birth somehow gives a glimpse of the ongoing traditions among the Kukis. Though every aspect of Christianity has been adopted by the Kukis, Christian names are not

common in their society. Marriage with maternal uncle's daughter is common. Bride-price is still preferred by many. The practice of burying of the dead body in the courtyard and in some cases under the house was totally changed after the coming of Christianity since it is not a hygienic practice. In the present Kuki society since education and professional work and other activities have taken the place of the traditional secret societies.

Part III deals with the role of man and woman in ritual practices (Chapter VI). Traditionally, among the Kukis women's status was low. In the present Kuki society, the status upliftment of women is seen due to the coming of Christianity. Only the Meitie women were found to have some major role in the ritual process as practitioners and as priestesses. The role of Christianity has been dealt in (Chapter VII). Christianity has not made much impact on the native religion of the Meities and the non-Manipuris, but it has made tremendous impact on the Kuki tribes. The various aspects of their indigenous religion, which formed a significant part of the tribal life, have been replaced by simple Christian way of life. The tribal way of life-spiritually, economically, hygienically and disciplinarily, has changed positively after following Christianity. The impact of acculturation is discussed in (Chapter VIII). Although, the Kukis, the Meities and the non-Manipuris follow different religions, they have a harmonious relationship with one another. The Kukis are found to be more acculturated to Christianity than their ancient counterparts, the Meities. Globalization seems yet to be very far away from this small state except for the presence of the world religion, Christianity, among the Kukis.

Part IV deals with the concluding remarks along with the suggestions for future studies in this area (Chapters IX). Though only a small percentage of the Kukis (2%) are following their indigenous religion, some older people still have knowledge about their traditional beliefs and still are interested in their old beliefs and customs to continue. The Kukis have not totally assimilated their traditional beliefs with the Christian religion. They have discarded every belief and rituals related to indigenous religion and retained some of the social customs which are for the betterment of the society. Certain customs and laws regarding wife choosing, bride-price, naming of child, and chief's authority in the village, land use, ownership system, inheritance, food habits, etc. are in vogue in the modern Kuki society. After

accepting Christianity, one can find a whole lot of changes among the Kukis in various areas of their socio-cultural-religious life. In turn these changes are providing an opportunity to grow professionally. Besides Christianity, the schemes and grants provided by the Government for the tribal development, for the students-especially to get higher education, reservation for jobs, etc. have also helped in bringing a dramatic change in the lives of the Kukis. Influence of Hinduism is absent among the Kukis while the impact of Christianity among the Kukis could be clearly seen.