

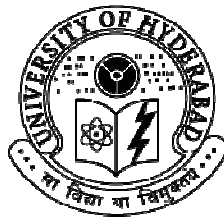
**Nation and Nationality: The Case of
Manipuris in Bangladesh**

Master of Philosophy

In

Indian Diaspora

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December 2013**

Nation and Nationality: The Case of Manipuris in Bangladesh

**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial
Fulfilment for the Award of**

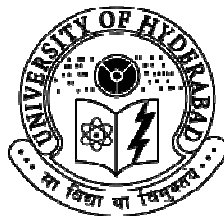
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By

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December 2013**

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this dissertation entitled “**Nation and Nationality: The Case of Manipuris in Bangladesh**” represent my own work, under the guidance of **Dr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo**, at the Centre for the study of Indian Diaspora, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, India and this work has not been submitted for a degree, at any other university.

Signature of the Candidate

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Place: Hyderabad

Date:

CERTIFICATE

This is to confirm that the work entitled “**Nation and Nationality: The Case of Manipuris in Bangladesh**” carried out by **Phurailatpam Keny Devi** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Indian Diaspora, is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This dissertation has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other university or institution for the award of any degree.

Supervisor

(Dr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo)

Director

Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora

Dean

School of Social Sciences

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

The process of human migration is a time immemorial phenomenon. It is not possible to find out a place where demographic exchange is not prevalent. In depth research about human displacement was very fascinating under social sciences covering the research areas in a wide range. Relating to this Roza Tsagarousianou has commented about migration studies in the following way:

There has been a relatively longstanding interest within the social sciences in the study of forms of human mobility, particularly migration. Predominantly premised upon and informed by cultures where territory and land are meticulously demarcated and highly valued, and where notions of 'home' are linked with a fixed place, the social sciences have reflected the fascination and, at the same time, the nomads, refugees and migrants. In this context a substantial literature has developed to comprise highly diverse studies ranging from anthropological research of nomadic life and the cultures of transhuman populations, to the study of migrant and refugee settlement in 'host' societies, to scrutinize approaches to migration.¹

But this human migration study has been categorized in recent time under the terminology "Diaspora". Though the word has considered to be a new term in academic literature, it originates from historically evident of Jews dispersal from their promised land due to religious persecution. If one sees the history

¹ Roza Tsagarousianou, "Reevaluating 'Diaspora': Connectivity, communication and imagination in Globalised world", 2007.

of their displacement, the Diaspora consists only with negative connotation. Moreover, the actual meaning of the term 'Diaspora' also found in the Deuteronomy as a form of punishment.

If you do not observe and fulfill all the law.... the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other...Among these nations you will find no peace, no rest for the sole of your foot. Then the lord will give you an unquiet mind, dim eyes and a failing appetite. Your life will hang continually in suspense, fear will beset you night and day, and you will find no security all your life long.²

The above testament shows the characteristics of Diaspora as insecure life, trauma, threaten and most importantly it also reflects that with all these unbearable problems, a Diaspora person will surely have the myth of home or in a nostalgic condition. Along with this:

The term is found in the Greek translation of the Bible and, as Baumann observes, originates in the composite verb "*dia*" and "*speirin*", namely 'to scatter', to spread', or 'to disperse' (classical notion of diaspora). There are in fact two other Hebrew words, *gola* and *Goliath*, signifying 'banishment' and 'exile', but 'diaspora' evolved as the preferred and catch-all expression covering sin, emigration and the possibilities of repentance and return (classical notions of diaspora).³

² Robin Cohen, "Global Diaspora: An introduction", p. 21.

³ Robin Cohen, "Global Diaspora: An introduction", p. 21.

The main roles played in the history of global Diaspora are Jews, Armenians, Africans, Indians and Palestinians. Their histories compose only of pain and sorrow and life which means to say is meaningless, unhappy and shattered life.

The scenario of the world is no more like the historical period where the political domination, intervention and invasion by capable person were quite common. Instead it has been turned into opportunity seeking world from both side i.e., host land as well as homeland. With this due concept the pattern of migration has been changed. On the top of this there are also some other reason that enhances migration like globalization, lenient immigrant laws, and development of means of communication technologies. Such privilege makes any individual to reach any corner of the world and people are extracting all such opportunities. So there is a stark increase of migrants over the years:

In 1990, the international organization for migration estimated that over million migrants had moved out of the country of their origin. Among them, 30 million were said to irregular migrants and another 15 million were refugees or asylum seekers. By 1992, the number of migrants had increased to 100 million, of which 20 million were refugees and asylum seekers (Castles and Miller, 1993). The United Nations population division in July 2002 estimated that there were 185 million people living for 12 months or more outside their country of birth or citizenship.⁴

Due to changing patterns of migration many phenomena occurred under the discourse of 'Diaspora' that helps to convert actual meaning, i.e., the negative connotation of Diaspora into a much desirable world. Such situation has given

⁴ Cited in "Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora", edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo & Brij Lal, 2009.

a privilege to expand the concept of Diaspora to social scientists. William Safran in his article “The Jewish Diaspora: comparative and theoretical perspective” defines Diaspora with seven important characteristics, such as:

- 1) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from specific original “center” to two or more peripheral, or foreign, regions.
- 2) They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland - its physical location, history, achievements, and, often enough, sufferings.
- 3) Their relationship with the dominant element of society in the host land is complicated and often uneasy. They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
- 4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their ancestral descendents would (or should) eventually return- if and when conditions are appropriate.
- 5) They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries, are importantly defined in terms of the existence of such a relationship. That relationship may include a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its independence, safety, and prosperity. The absence of such a relationship makes it difficult to speak of transnationalism.
- 6) They wish to survive as a distinct community- in most instances as a minority- by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious heritage derived from their ancestral home and the symbols based on it. In so doing, they adapt to host land conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration.

- 7) Their cultural, religious, economic, and/or political relationships with the homeland are reflected in a significant way in their communal institutions.⁵

The above characteristics of Diaspora give more emphasis on relations between migrants and homeland. By analyzing these features, Robin Cohen gives further definition of Diaspora in a much more comprehensive way including all the required points from both the perspective of the homeland and the host society. He expressed the basic necessary points which to be included and excluded in order to define Diaspora in a complete term:

In his first list, four of the six features mentioned were concerned with the relationship of the diasporic group to its homeland. Though this aspect is clearly of crucial importance, there was some degree of repetition of the argument. I suggested that two features should be 'tweaked', while four other features needed to be added, mainly concerning the evolution and character of the diasporic groups in their countries of exile. I amended the first stated feature by adding that dispersal from an original center is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together. I adapted the penultimate characteristic to allow the case not only of the 'maintenance or restoration' of a homeland, but its very creation. This covers the cases of an 'imagined homeland' that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's nationality in the remotest

⁵ William Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora in a comparative and theoretical perspective", in *Sociology of Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and Brij Maharaj, 2007, p. 338.

way. (In some cases – the Kurds or Sikhs come to mind – a homeland is clearly an ex post construction.)⁶

Expanding the concept of Diaspora from time to time, Robin Cohen further described the Diaspora studies into four categories. They are:

- 1) The classical use of the term, usually capitalized as diaspora used only in the singular, was mainly confined to the study of the Jewish experience. The Greek diaspora made an off- stage appearance. Excluding some earlier casual references, from the 1960s and 1970s the classical meaning was systematically extended, becoming more common as a description of the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish. With the Jews, these peoples conceived their scattering as arising from a cataclysmic event that had traumatized the group as a whole, thereby creating the central historical experience of victimhood at the hands of a cruel oppressor. Retrospectively and without complete consensus, the Palestinians were later added to this group.
- 2) In the second phase, in the 1980s and onwards, as Safran notably argued, diaspora was deployed as ‘a metaphoric designation’ to describe different categories of people- ‘expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*’. Moreover, a point again made by Safran, the term now designated a vast array *of different* peoples who either applied the term to themselves or had the label conferred upon them. Given their number (certainly now over one hundred), their historical experiences, collective narratives and differing relationships to homelands and host lands, they were bound to be a

⁶ Robin Cohen, “Global Diaspora: An introduction”, p. 6.

more varied cluster of diasporas than the group designated in phase one.

- 3) The third phase, from the mid-1990s, was marked by social constructionist critiques of 'second phase' theorists who, despite their recognition of the proliferation of groups newly designated as diasporas and the evolution of new ways of studying them, were still seen as holding back the full force of the concept. Influenced by postmodernist readings, social constructionists sought to decompose two of the major building blocks previously delimiting and demarcating the diasporic idea, namely 'homeland' and 'ethnic/religious community'. In the postmodern world, it was further argued, identities have become deterritorialized and constructed and deconstructed in a flexible and situational way; accordingly, concepts of diaspora had to be radically reordered in response to this complexity.
- 4) By the turn of the century, the current phase of consolidation sets in. The social constructionist critiques were partially accommodated, but were seen as in danger of emptying the notion of diaspora of much of its analytical and descriptive power. While the increased complexity and deterritorialization of identities are valid phenomenon and constitutive of a small minority of diasporas (generally those that had been doubled or multiply displaced over time), ideas of home and often the stronger inflection of homeland remain powerful discourses and ones which, if anything, have been more strongly asserted in key examples. The phase of consolidation is marked by a modified reaffirmation of the diasporic idea, including its core elements, common features and ideal and types.⁷

⁷Robin Cohen, "Global Diasporas: An introduction", pp.1-2.

Diaspora cannot be generalized in any case. Starting from the root cause of dispersal to experience in the host society, there is no similarity. In order to describe the meaning of Diaspora in the clearest way, Robin Cohen distinguishes Diaspora into five types:

IDEAL TYPES OF DIASPORAS by Robin Cohen

Main types of diaspora	Main examples in this book	Also mentioned and notes
VICTIM	Jews, Africans, Armenians	Also discussed: Irish and Palestinians. Many contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate in their host lands, creolized or mobilize as a diaspora.
LABOUR	Indentured Indians	Also discussed: Chinese and Japanese; Turks, Italians north Africans. Many others could be included. Another synonymous expression is 'proletarian diaspora'.
IMPERIAL	British	Also discussed: Russians, colonial powers other than Britain. Other synonymous expressions are 'settler' or 'colonial' diasporas.
TRADE	Lebanese, Chinese	Also discussed: Venetians, business and professional Indians, Chinese, Japanese.
DETERRITORIALIZED	Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis	Also discussed: Roma, Muslims and other religious diasporas. The expressions 'hybrid', 'cultural' and 'post-colonial' also are linked to the idea of deterritorialization without being synonymous.

Source: Global diasporas: An introduction

Looking from the global perspective based on the history of the Diaspora, starting from classical concept, Cohen gave the main characteristic feature of Diaspora which can even utilize in describing the modern Diaspora. He says Diaspora is:

- 1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- 2) Alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- 3) A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
- 4) An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
- 5) The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
- 6) A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
- 7) A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- 8) A sense of empathy and co- responsibility with co- ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
- 9) The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

From the above expanded concept of Diaspora, we could say that all form of human migration is considered as the Diaspora.

Relation Between Ethnic Identity and Migration

Human migration does not only mean the physical movement, but it also carried away the inherited ancestral properties like cultural and social baggage. These inherited properties were termed as an ethnic identity. The term ethnic groups and ethnicity were first used in anthropology to refer to a person presumed to affiliate with the same cultural group and who shared the same custom, language and tradition.⁸ All these components of ethnic identities never remain static. Stuart Hall explained identity as “a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”⁹

Various ways of defining ethnic groups are found in the literature, but most emphasize cultural and geographical elements. The first of these elements is usually viewed as a social construction involving insiders and outsiders mutual group differences in cultural beliefs and practices.¹⁰ People may have multiple identities, with each identity dependent upon where they are at any particular moment and who they are with. Hence there is a close relation between movement and identity.¹¹

Stuart Hall classifies cultural identity into two types. First one is based on sense of bringing oneness among the group through share history, culture and

⁸“Ethnic identity” by Trimble and Ryan Dickson.

⁹“Cultural identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall.

¹⁰“Ethnic boundaries and identity in Plural Societies” by Jimmy M.Sanders.

¹¹“Discourse on migration and ethnic identity: Interviews with professionals in Hong Kong” by F. L. N. Li, A. J. Jowett, A. M. Findlay and R. Skeldon, 1995.

ancestral origin. As he states that “the first position defines ‘Cultural identity’ in term of one, shared culture, a short collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common”.¹²

He further postulates another definition of cultural identities which is a reference to transcendence of identity showing that cultural identity is dynamic and multi-directional if the position or place of an individual is changed.

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and positioned ourselves within, the narratives of the past.¹³

The most important steps to retain ethnic identities among diaspora during pre- colonial, colonial and post colonial period is to form strong community associations. During the former two periods, socio-economically successful diaspora persons play a significant role in bringing unified form of

¹²“Cultural identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall.

¹³“Cultural identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall.

community. Such successful persons donated their wealth in the construction of co-religious temples. Like, Songor Itty, one of the economically successful people from India, settled in Mauritius, had donated the temple to the Hindu community in the year 1867.

Similarly, Doorkhee Gunga, born in Mauritius in 1867, the son of an indentured labour from Calcutta in 1854, is another example of the role played by wealthy individuals in the construction of community. Successful land deals made him a millionaire by 1920 and he donated large sums of money for the construction of Hindu temples and cremation grounds throughout the island. He also founded Gita Mandal, in association with other wealthy Indians, which was set up to administer a number of Hindi schools in Mauritius. Gunga financed the first Hindi publications to be printed on the island, after his death in 1944, a government school was named in his honour.¹⁴ These types of activities enhance the consciousness of homeland among Diaspora. Even the East African Indians also started forming associations and run temples in the 1990s, however compared to Mauritius Indians they started much late. Above this, from homeland many religious missionaries visited. Unlike modern Diaspora, social ties with homeland in these two former periods (pre-colonial, colonial) was very rare.

Any Diasporas feel secure to be with their own ethnic groups. Hence the reason behind the formation of an association is not just to preserve ethnic identities. Other motives are to defend racial and economic discrimination against the Diaspora. Pawan Dhingra described one of his interviewer's comments, who is Indian American for the need of forming association in the following way:

¹⁴“The encyclopedia of the Indian diaspora” edited by Brij V.Lal, Peter Reeves and Rajesh Rai, 2006, p.268.

Social marginalization contributed to an informants' desire to come together and practice their ethnicity. Ethnic organizations gave members a "safe space", that is, physical area in which they could affirm one another and preempt integration as subjugated ethnic minorities.¹⁵

Chinese migrants who work in Chinatown are one of the genuine examples to show the benefit of dominating the labor market by Diaspora in the host society. Economic segregation and inequality have been found to contribute to group cohesion. When productive activities are structured along ethnic lines, individuals who are excluded from the dominant labour market seek employment from their ethnic communities.¹⁶

Depending on the level of their mixing with host society culture, Sunil Bhatia classified Diaspora into four strategies, namely "assimilation", "integration", "separation" and "marginalization" borrowed the idea from Berry and his colleagues.

Berry and his colleagues suggest that *assimilation* strategy occurs when the individual decides not to maintain his or her cultural identity by seeking contact in his/her daily interaction with the dominant group. When the individuals from non-dominant group "place a value on holding on to their original culture"(Berry and Sam, 297), and seeking no contact with the dominant group then these individuals are pursuing a *separation* strategy. When individual express an interest in maintaining strong ties in their everyday life with both their

¹⁵"Committed to ethnicity, committed to America: How second generation Indian Americans 'ethnic boundaries further Americanisation'" by Pawan Dhingra, in *Transnational Migrations: The Indian diaspora*, edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, & Bri V.Lal, 2009, p.54.

¹⁶"Discourse on migration and ethnic identity: Interviews with professionals in Hong Kong" by F. L. N. Li, A. J. Jowett, A. M. Findlay and R. Skeldon, 1995.

group as well as with the dominant group, the *integration* strategy is defined. The fourth strategy is *marginalization*, in which individuals “lose cultural and psychological contact with their traditional culture and the larger society.”¹⁷

Certain factors like socio-political situation of the host society, socio-economic status of Diaspora in the host society and psychological process of the Diaspora can bring any of these strategies among the Diasporas. If the socio-political situation of host society is very hostile towards Diaspora, the migrants won't be possible to practice their own ethnic culture just in thinking of being accepted by the host society. Here we can take the example of the African Diaspora in the USA who used to bear prolong racial discrimination from the dominant group. That is why those migrated during the slavery period were totally assimilated in order to make them accepted and tolerate from prejudices. But after they freed from the colonizer, they brought back the concept of rediscovering their original identities. As Stuart Hall says:

It was only in the 1970s that this Afro-Caribbean identity became historically available to the great majority of Jamaican people, at home and abroad. At this historic moment, Jamaicans discovered themselves to be ‘black’- just as, in the same moment, they discovered themselves to be sons and daughter of ‘slavery’.¹⁸

Robin Cohen discussed the assimilated culture of Liberaian (West Africa) Diaspora even after repatriation to the homeland:

¹⁷“9/11 and the Indian diaspora: Narratives of race, place and immigrant identity” by Sunil Bhatia, in *Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora*, edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, & Brij V.Lal, 2009, p.20.

¹⁸“Cultural identity and diaspora” by Stuart Hall.

The repatriates to Liberia were from the USA and many had already achieved a modest independent status in America. This meant they came back as settlers rather than impoverished returnees. The Americo-Liberians, as they were called, soon took on the appearance of colonists – refusing to learn the local languages, imposing American-style institutions, acquiring the airs of the social elite and ruthlessly monopolizing political power.¹⁹

Being always care and concern about the ancestral identity and conscious about homeland is one of the important features of Diasporas. Maintaining ethnic identity successfully in a new land always depends on demographic number and pattern of Diaspora concentration in the host society. Relating to this concept Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal explained about the impact of having community in the host society:

Diasporas form when population disperse from their homeland to foreign lands, engage in movements between the country of origin and destination, and carry out bi-directional transactions-economic, political and cultural. In this formulation, the primary orientation and attachment of Diasporic population is to their homelands and cultures; and their claims and citizenship practices arise from this home-bound, ethnic – based orientation. In other words, Diaspora is a way of theorizing formations that are ethno-cultural, and that constitute foreignness within other nations and ethnicities.²⁰

¹⁹ “Global Diaspora: An introduction” by Robin Cohen, p.44.

²⁰“Citizenship and identity: Living in a diaspora in post-war Europe” by Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal.

In this global world, the nature of mixing identities with host society has been changed. This is because of rapid formation of multinational, Diaspora communities; in short, the world has become a global hub. On the top of this, host society provides lenient laws to immigrants. So unlike colonial period, the chances of acculturation are not only among the Diaspora. Instead, the concept of multiculturalism is adopted so that all the groups live equally without prioritizing any groups or communities. In the case of the USA, Lucius Outlaw states that “the US liberal state was founded on the principles of individualism, autonomy, egalitarianism and self- sufficiency.”²¹ So it will be very hard to find out a pristine and pure ethnic identity among Diaspora in the host society.

Maintaining identity automatically led to the representation of their cultural identities in the host society. Pawan Dhingra summarizes the reason for keeping social connections between ethnic groups by relying on the comments given by one of his informants who is an Indian American:

Opportunities to network with co-ethnics strengthened a social bond among Indian Americans that, along with their cultural ties, aided involvement in the nation-state, in particular the labor market. The goal was not simply to create supportive spaces but also to facilitate a selective cultural and social integration into dominant, representative elements of the nation-state.²²

²¹“Committed to ethnicity, committed to America” by Pawan Dhingra, in *Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora*, edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, &Brij V. Lal, 2009, p.61.

²²“Committed to ethnicity, committed to America” by Pawan Dhingra, in *Transnational Migrations: The Indian Diaspora*, edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, &Brij V. Lal, 2009, p.60.

In this highly developed, modernized and liberal world, it is not difficult to maintain ethnic identity. Maintaining identity does not only mean totally isolated from other groups. It usually goes with balancing other identities too. After all, ethnic identity can form and develop according to social context and it is multidimensional as well as dynamic. So Stuart Hall maintained in the beginning of his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in the following ways:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority to which the term, ‘Cultural identity’, lays claim.²³

Ethnic Identity of Manipuris in Bangladesh

The geographical location of Manipur played a significant role in the history of Manipuri migration. It is bounded by Burma in the east, Assam in the west, Mizoram in the south and Nagaland in the west. The total land area is 22,327 square kilometers consists of hill and plain regions. It is one of the beautiful states lies in the north-eastern region of India, surrounded by nine hill ranges in all the four directions and an oval shape plain area in the middle. The beautiful valley attracted attention of her neighbors especially from across the eastern border with Burma which resulted to devastation attack and re-appraisal.²⁴

²³“Cultural identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall.

²⁴“The pan-Manipuris” by N.Tarunkumar Singh,in *Manipur: past and present*, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba,p. 15.

Manipur was an independent kingdom until it was defeated by the British forces in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1819.²⁵ Before the land was invaded by British, Manipuri kings had relations with the neighboring country, Burma. But the relationship was not cordial all the time. It undergoes subsequent wars and fight between them. The duration of such relation was pretty long as it starts from 18th century till 19th century. M.C. Arunkumar expresses the political relation between Manipur and Burma in the first half of the 18th century as Manipur faced several attacks by the Burmese during the second half of the 18th century. The Burmese had the upper hand in these attacks. In 1819, Manipur was defeated severely by Burmese and caused devastation for seven years (1819-1826). At the time of fifth war and so far, the largest devastation in 1819, the Manipur population was 55,000 and the population had been reduced to 10,000 at the end of the seven-year-devastation. The surviving adult population in 1826 was 3,000.²⁶ This seven years are considered as black days in the history of Manipur and it is called as *catchy target khuntakpa* (Seven year's devastation).

Due to the unstable political situation, many people fled away to the neighboring places such as Assam, Cachar, Tripura and East Bengal (Bangladesh) to take the asylum. Though the migration occurred before this period, such migration was taken off-staged by this political persecution. So according to Robin Cohen's different types of Diasporas, these groups of migrants can be categorized as 'Victim Diaspora'. In order to define the political turmoil faced by Manipuris (People of Manipur) during these seven years, M.C. Arunkumar expresses it through the statement given by Kabui as "Burmese conquest of Manipur in 1819 was different in intention and

²⁵“Meitei Diaspora and the identity politics” by M.C Arunkumar.

²⁶“Introduction: Manipur past and present”, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba.

character from earlier invasions. This time they meant to rule Manipur through their puppet rulers”.²⁷

So the Manipuris who are settled in Bangladesh presently are the descendants of those victims who left their motherland to save their life from the brutal act of Burmese invaders. Though the migration was happening in the 19th century, social and cultural assets carried along with them are still preserved by their descendents. They are migrated as asylum seekers or refugees to Bangladesh but it is not wrong to include them as Diaspora as they have possessed almost all the important features of Diaspora as defined by William Safran (mentioned earlier) except they do not have legal homeland. But this does not mean that they do not have the origin. The political agreements made by the Government of India after independence and the Manipur government brought a setback in their life.

In the initial stages of their migration, Manipuris in Bangladesh were destined in the border areas of Assam called Sylhet which was part of Assam before the partition of India. But later Sylhet comes under East Pakistan. This agreement brought negative impact on their social life that made with Manipuri settled in their neighboring states like Tripura and Assam as they make social ties with them more than homeland and exchange cultural knowledge that both the groups have.

On the other hand the Manipur government signed Merger Act with Indian Government in the year 1949. The Manipuri writer, Sharatchand Thiyam, who visited Bangladesh to attend annual seminar conducted by the *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad* in the year 2004 in Bangladesh expressed his visiting experience implying the consequences given by Manipur and India government to them “Manipur na ningthou pali ngei hang tak tagi leinaraklaba

²⁷ Cited in “Meitei diaspora and identity politics” by M. C. Arunkumar.

Sylhet ki sanglaba marisibu hang gatna yenglubada chingthokpagi loiba naidri. Adubu Manipur na bharat ta punsin khiba Sylhet na bangladesh ki oikhiba pungfamdagi sang na leinaramba marisi tensil hankhrabra haibagi wahang amanadi haujiktada utlaribagum taurakli” (It is an endless topic to talk about the historical relationship between Sylhet and Manipur which was started from monarchical period. But just now a question has raised in my mind like does that relationships have been shortened up from the moment when Manipur merge with India and Sylhet became the part of Bangladesh).²⁸

These two agreements are like draconian acts for them. As these agreements have made them difficult to cross the border of the homeland. But culturally they are still practicing the inherited culture. A Manipuri migrant in Bangladesh lamented his views about the love of his ancestral culture and tradition as well as satisfaction to be a citizen of Bangladesh: “Indian identity of meiteis is not contrary to Bangladesh citizenship. Culturally we are more Indian and legally we belong to Bangladesh. These two are of equal values.”²⁹

What can we expect from the Indian government for these handfuls of people, living under the poverty stricken situation? As there was evidence that Indian government shut down their door when thousands and thousands of indentured Indians were in dire need of their support and help. Most of the indentured became twice migrants at the time of the nationalization process in the host countries. Carmen Voigt-Graft criticizes such hostile nature of homeland government in which Indians in Uganda and Fiji failed to get any help from India during their hardship period:

India’s first Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, held that the question of overseas Indians was an integral part of the colonial

²⁸“Nungshibi bangladesh” by Sharatchand Thiyam, p.120.

²⁹Quoted in “Meitei diaspora and the identity politics” by M. C. Arunkumar.

liberation and that their separate identity would merge into wider third world solidarity (Nehru). This did not happen. It was precisely in some post colonial states that the situation of overseas Indians was worse because they were seen as an unwelcome residue of colonialism rather than as victims who had suffered from the system.³⁰

Though the Indian government cannot lend their support to old Diaspora, they showed interest to keep relation with the Indian Diaspora in right time. Again Carmen Voigt-Graft extended her criticism of the time period of giving political importance of the Government of India:

The issue of Indians abroad again entered the political agenda in the 1970s when India started to receive vast amounts of remittances as a result of labour migration from India to oil-rich countries. Among other things, India arranged for labour agreements to be signed with several Gulf countries. The Indian government introduced the term “Non-Resident India” (NRI).

Whatsoever, Manipuris in Bangladesh were recognized by Bangladesh government as their own citizen under the Article 6 of Bangladesh constitution which deals with citizenship of Bangladesh. The present Manipuris in Bangladesh are the descendent of Manipuri migrants migrated to Bangladesh during the 19th century. They are recognized as citizens of Bangladesh as per the citizenship by birth:

- a) Who or whose father or grandfather was born in the territories now comprised in Bangladesh and who was a permanent resident of such

³⁰“Transnationalism and Indo-Fijian Diaspora: the relationship of Indo-fijians to india and its people” by Carmen Voight-Graft, in *Transnational migrations: The Indian Diaspora*, edited by William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, & Brij V.Lal, 2009, p.110.

territories on the 25th day of march 1971, and continues to be so resident; or

- b) Who was a permanent resident of the territories now comprised in Bangladesh on the 25th day of March 1971, and continues to be by or under any law for the time being in force. Provided that if any person is a permanent resident of the territories now comprised in Bangladesh or his dependent is, in the course of his employment or for the pursuit of his studies, residing in a country which was at war with, or engaged in military operations against Bangladesh and, is being prevented from returning to Bangladesh, such person, or his dependents, shall be deemed to continue to be resident in Bangladesh. In case of doubt as to whether a person is qualified to be deemed to be a citizen of Bangladesh under article 2 of this order, the question shall be decided by the government, which decision shall be final.³¹

This right is one of the most important means for Manipuris in Bangladesh to have a peaceful life with better socioeconomic and political status. This Diaspora assembled together as a community and followed almost all the ancestral cultural identities, but being a diasporic, to integrate with host society at least to some extent is of sure as cultural identity is an endless process of construction and destruction. That is how Manipuris in Bangladesh have assimilated with the host society linguistically.

Some factors have made them to neglect their mother tongue, Manipuri or *meiteilon* and assimilate with the host society. There are many factors such as:

- 1) There was no literary product in Manipuri language at the time of their ancestral migration as the homeland was busy in facing subsequent

³¹“Democracy report for Bangladesh” by Dalim Ch. Barman, M. Golam Rahman, & Tasneem Siddiqui.

wars and attacks from neighboring country. So their ancestor did not bring the literary knowledge unlike cultural and social baggage they carried at the time of their physical movement.

- 2) When they reached the host country, Bangladesh, they were again busy trying to bring a normal life. They are associated with the host society.

Some of the Manipuris in Bangladesh realize after the liberation war of 1971 that, if they do not do something or the other or still keep neglecting their mother tongue, it will surely endanger their mother tongue for the next generation Manipuris in Bangladesh. This situation can also lead to loss of some of their cultural identity. The nature of giving importance to their mother language by the host society has motivated Manipuris in Bangladesh to take care of their ancestral language. Like host society use to pay homage to martyr who sacrificed their lives on language movement started on 21 February 1952. From this incident, the United Nation has declared 21 February as international language day. The international language day that observed in 1975 in Bangladesh really impart enthusiasm to Manipuri language promoter A. K. Sharam that even Manipuris in Bangladesh can also give importance and love their own language. From this point of time many measures have been taken up step by step among the Manipuris in Bangladesh to promote Manipuri language. The first and foremost step was the foundation of *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad* on 11 May 1975 followed by many remarkable steps like producing journals, books and opening libraries etc.

Objectives of the Study

There is no give and take between Manipuris in Bangladesh and the Government of India unlike other modern Indian Diasporas. But Manipuris in Bangladesh play significant role in the promotion and preservation of their

ancestral language and cultural identities. After all their cultural identities were included under the diverse culture and tradition of India. Moreover Manipuri language was recognized in 1992 by the India government under the 8th Scheduled of Indian Constitution as one of the major languages.

On the other hand Manipuri language has been enlisted among the endangering language according to the report made by UNESCO on 19 February 2009. Though the Manipuris in Bangladesh are small in number, the steps taken up by these groups in preserving and promoting Manipuri languages in the host society and within their groups are worth considering to look at as their role of love and respect of their ancestral assets contribute some support to prevent one of the Indian languages, Manipuri from extinction.

This dissertation would like to represent the identities of Manipuris in Bangladesh giving more detailed study on the language promotion and preservation conducted in the host society. As language is one of the most important identities from all set of identities like race, class, religion, caste etc., loss of linguistic identity is almost similar to half lost of cultural identity.

Methodology

Research is all about searching for new knowledge of the already exist things, facts or the invention of new ideas. In order to perform this research we always use different tools and methods. According to M. S. Sridhar, the research methodology is:

- 1) A science of studying how research is done scientifically.
- 2) A way to systematically solve the research problem by logically adopting various steps.

- 3) Helps to understand not only the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself.
- 4) Aims to describe and analyze methods, throw light on their limitations and resources, clarify their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentiality to the twilight zone at the 'frontiers of knowledge'.³²

Most of the information on this dissertation relied on secondary sources of data that are derived from books, journals, periodicals and newspapers, blogs run by Manipuris in Bangladesh. It also includes the primary sources such as interviewing people from Manipur who visited Bangladesh and talks with a few Manipuris in Bangladesh through email and telephonic conversations. Jacob A. Benfield expresses on using different methods in research as a tool to fulfill their work as:

With the advancement of information and communication technology, researchers have found new methods of data collection and analysis. This has evolved from telephone surveys, computerized data analysis, and use of cell phones and pagers, to collecting information at random intervals, use of Personal Digital Assistants (or "Palm Pilots"), and use of the Internet in research.³³

Chapterisation

The dissertation consists of four chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter gives a brief sketch of the concept of Diaspora, the relation between ethnic identity and migration based on Manipuris in Bangladesh which will be the main focus of this dissertation and it also

³²“Introduction to research and research methodology” by M. S. Sridhar.

³³“Internet-Based Data Collection: Promises and Realities” by Jacob A. Benfield.

include a brief history of Manipur in order to explain the context of Manipuris in Bangladesh. It also describes the objectives of the study, methodology and limitation of this study. The second chapter is composed of two parts that thoroughly discuss about the formation of Indian Diaspora which is one of the burning topics in the present era. The second part deals with the history of Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh that remain untouched for many ages and possibly not known by many people. The third chapter discusses the ethnic identity: defining ethnic identity, nation, nationality and ethnic identity of Manipuris in Bangladesh. The final chapter is conclusion that gives the summary of the dissertation and suggestions for future studies.

Limitations of the Study

This group of Diaspora is not like other modern Diasporas that can access the internet all through the time. Comparatively their socioeconomic status is lower than other Indian Diasporas. So it is difficult to elicit direct information from them about their current lifestyle, problems and difficulties faced by them through email or telephonic communication. On the top of this, they reside in another country which is not easy to reach, so to conduct fieldwork was one of the major challenges for this study. Because of this reason, books, journals and periodical published by them as well as the travelogue wrote by some of the Manipuri writers who visited them are one of the basic sources used in this dissertation.

CHAPTER-2

THE INDIAN EMIGRATION: BRIEF HISTORY

The massive flows of Indian migration started from the early 19th century till mid 20th century under the control of colonial rulers. Gabriel Sheffer cited the time period of an immense number of migrations as “The Indian Diaspora continued to expand throughout the Portuguese rule and particularly during the British rule over India.”³⁴ These great numbers of migrations still occurred during the post Independent period, but there was a great difference between these two eras of migration. Unlike migrants during the colonial period which are destined to the European colonies as manual cheap labour, post-colonial migrants had a better life, high profile and destined for the developed countries. So the Indian Diaspora can be categorized into two groups, viz. Old Diaspora and New Diaspora. Though it occurred in a different period, most of them are economic migrants and it is one of the common features among the Indian Diaspora. There is also another new form of migration plays a significant role in shaping this modern Diaspora i.e., migration to gain intellectual knowledge of the developed countries through higher studies.

According to the expanding concept of Diaspora, as any form of migration can be considered as Diaspora, the total number of Indians abroad is estimated to be around 30 millions (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs 2013, www.moia.nic.in). Chidanand Rajghatta compares this vast number of Indian migrants with “larger than the population of Australia and close to the population of Canada.”³⁵

³⁴ Cited in “Diaspora Politics, Diasporism and Diasporas in history” by Gabriel Sheffer, p.63.

³⁵ “Across the black waters” by Chidanand Rajghatta.

Convict Labour Migration

After the imperial rule started in India, according to the rules of colonizers, any Indian who committed crime was sent to other places as punishment. These convicts were used to work for them. So they are considered as important for many reasons: “the convict workforce was vital to the development of early colonial infrastructure- clearing jungles, and constructing roads, lighthouses, fortifications, canals, bridges and buildings.” The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora (2006) states that convicts came from all the regions of India and Ceylon and belongs to various socioeconomic backgrounds, but the largest proportion was from Bengal and the majorities were poor Hindus. Such transportation continued till about 1860s.

Indentured Labour Migration

This group of Diaspora had emigrated to the European colonies as contract labourers to work in the plantations and industrial sectors run by European colonizers. It took place between the mid-nineteenth centuries and early twentieth century which were coincided with the abolition of slavery in the British, French and Dutch colonies, in 1834, 1846, and 1873 respectively and India was under the control of the British Empire. This situation gave birth to the indenture form of labour from India and other parts of Asia. Most of the labourers are recruited from western Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Orissa. With the hope and expectation of earning their livelihood and make a new life, many Indian poor class families accepted the colonizers’ plan to import them as a contract worker in many far off European colonial places. But their hope and expectation were converted into shattered and miserable life. Judith Brown has maintained the factors for accepting this indentured system of migration by Indian migrants as “obviously ignorance was a factor, but so was poverty, landless and the hope for a better future. The districts from which

labourers went were ones of high population density, where there was fragmentation of landed holdings, fragile agriculture and lack of alternative opportunities.”³⁶

This system of migration was controlled by the British government, India and colonies where labourers were destined with proper official rules like “Indian recruiters in India had to be licensed, and recruiters were brought to a registration officer, usually a magistrate, who had to see that the indenture contract was understood and entered into freely before they left for the coast. There medical checks in the port of embarkation, and the ships on which they travelled were authorized, while conditions aboard were regulated.”³⁷ Using these mandatory norms, around 1.5 million Indians were left between 1834 and 1917. The recruiters provide an option of Returning to India or to stay further after the completion of five year contract period. The chief features of the indenture system:

Indentured was a system of contract by which the emigrant agreed to work for a given employer for five years, performing the tasks assigned to him for a specified wage. At the end of the five years, the emigrants were free to reindentured or to work else in the colony. The fulfillment of the contract was governed by an Immigration ordinance enacted in the country of destination. Prospective emigrants testified before a magistrate in India that they understood the terms of the contract. On making such a deposition they were housed in a depot in Calcutta until a ship was ready to take them away. To avoid competition, the governments of Jamaica, Trinidad, Mauritius and Fiji maintained an emigration agency jointly in Calcutta;

³⁶“Global South Asians: Introducing modern Diaspora” by Judith M. Brown, p.31.

³⁷“Global South Asians: Introducing the modern Diaspora” by Judith Brown, p.31.

Guyana and Natal shared another, and Surinam had its own. Several hundreds of these emigrants were dispatched in groups to Fiji and Natal in the first half of the year and the West Indies and Mauritius in the second half. Several of these countries maintained offices in Madras as well.³⁸

The great number of migration and diverse nature of migrants, recruited from many places of India that mainly includes the southern region of India and northern region of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, has occupied this pattern of migration as one of the major role in the history of Indian migration.

Kangani or Maistry System Migration

This system of migration was also recruited by colonial rulers but they are different from the indentured labour system. Basically the word *kangani* or *ministry* is derived from a Tamil word which means headmen or overseer or supervisor and most of the recruited under this system are from southern regions of India. Their destinations were only to Southeast Asian countries like Malaya, Ceylon and Burma. Unlike indentured labour, they suffered less hardship and their role has to supervise the persons working in tea and coffee plantations that belonged to colonial people. The main duties of *Kangani* are as follows:

The migrants were recruited by headmen known as the *Kangani*. Each *kangani* recruited a score or more of men belonging mainly to his own caste and kin group, and from about the turn of the century migration by families was the predominant form. Sometimes several emigrant bands, each

³⁸“Introduction: Overseas Emigration in the Nineteenth Century”, in *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature* by Ravinder K. Jain, p.6.

under its own leader, combined under the overall direction of a high- caste head *kangani*. Often the *kangani* was a man with some capital who lent his followers the expense of traveling to and settling down on a plantation. He negotiated with the manager about wages and work conditions on behalf of his group and could remove his followers to another plantation if the terms were not satisfactory.³⁹

According to the Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora (2006) “The *kangani* system prevailed in the case of Malaya and Ceylon, while the *maistry* system employed in Burma. Both systems had their own peculiarities, but they also shared similar features. Both used a network of middlemen and introduced a debt relationship to recruit labourers for the plantations in the colonies.”⁴⁰

Migration to the Developed Countries

Globalization development of communication technology and easy means of transportation brings this pattern of migration. Robin Cohen stated the four important aspects that enhance the growth of Indian Diaspora in the globalized period, such as:

1. A globalized economy that permits greater connectivity, the expansion of enterprises and the growth of new professional and managerial cadres thereby changing but creating new opportunities for Diaspora.
2. A new form of international migrations that encourage limited contractual relationships, family visits, intermittent stays abroad and

³⁹“Introduction: Overseas Emigration in the Nineteenth Century”, in *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature* by Ravinder K. Jain, pp.8-9.

⁴⁰“The Encyclopedia of the Indian diaspora”, edited by Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves and Rajesh Rai, 2006, p.53.

sojourning, as opposed to permanent settlement and the exclusive adoption of the citizenship of a destination country.

3. The development of cosmopolitan sensibilities in many 'global cities' in response to the multiplication and intensification of transactions and interactions between the different peoples of the world; and
4. The revival of religion as a focus for social cohesion through dispersal, renewed pilgrimage and translocation resulting in the development of multi-faced world religions connected in various and complex ways to the diasporic phenomenon.⁴¹

In this form of migration all the professionals like doctors, engineers, scientists, architects, entrepreneurs etc. were migrated to highly developed countries (such as the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and other European countries), in order to seek the economic opportunities available there by expanding their knowledge. This post-colonial phase of migration is designated as "brain drain" (by Bindod Khadria) in the homeland. Ravinder K. Jain stated the reason for an increase number of migrations to highly developed countries as "It has been argued by sociologists like John Rex that in the modern world migratory movements take place according to the need of different economies for labour and major movement of this kind is the migration of men and women from post-colonial to metropolitan societies."⁴²

Some of the factors like relaxation of immigration laws for the shortage of labour due to economic expansions after post-war, development of means of technologies and communication and rapid globalization enhance the growth of migration to rich countries.

⁴¹"Global Diaspora: An introduction" by Robin Cohen, Chapter 2 'Mobilizing Diasporas in a Global Age'.

⁴²"Twentieth century migration to industrially developed countries", in *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature* by Ravinder K. Jain, p.34.

Another undeniable reason for longing to migrate to the developed countries is to grab the academic excellence. As Binod Khadria, Perveen Kumar, Shantanu Sarkar and Rashmi Sharma stated:

Moreover, India is not only seen as a source of getting manpower, it also continues to be considered a must destination for internationally renowned educational institutions to woo the Indian students (Khadria 2002). This provides foreign exchange to the education exporting institutions/countries and enhances students' educational and economic profile. A foreign degree also opens gateways to enter in the labour market of that country unless the law of the immigrant country prohibits them.⁴³

Such trend is still continuing today and there is a great difference between the migrants migrated during the recent period than early phase of migration. Ravinder Jain further explained the difference between the contemporary migrations from indentured migrations as:

In contrast to the ex-indentured population migrants in contemporary times have been able-because of their comparative affluence and world-wide improvements in communications-to maintain extensive ties with India. Marriage arrangements, kinship networks, property and religious affiliations keep many migrants well- linked to their places of origin, especially as a large number are still first generation migrants. Another factor which has enabled

⁴³*International migration policy: issues and perspectives of india* by Binod Khadria, Perveen Kumar, Shantanu Sarkar and Rashmi Sharma.

overseas Indians in Britain to maintain ties to their homeland is the flow of remittances from abroad.⁴⁴

Migration to the West Asian Countries

The economic growth that comes from large production of oil in West Asian countries, viz. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab of Emirates during 1970s led to the dire needs of labour. But the majority of the migrants destined for United Arab of Emirates (UAE). K.C. Zachariah, B.A. Prakash and S. Irudaya Rajan described the economic condition of UAE in the following ways: “the sudden rise in oil prices in the 1970s and the 1980s had resulted in the accumulation of large volumes of foreign exchange. The oil earnings were used largely for large- scale investment in physical and social infrastructure resulting in the rapid transformation of the economy.”⁴⁵ This condition ultimately led to a massive exodus of migrants from Asia, contributing Indian migrants as the largest in number. Economic migrants are not always pushed by the opportunity-deficient home economies; many times they are pulled by the receiving countries to avert the negative impact of labour or skill shortages arising due to reasons such as demographic imbalance or massive expansion of economic activities

This form of migration is different from migration to the developed countries, though both the migrations are for economic benefit. As most of the migrants are in blue collar jobs like production, construction and transport sites, their working culture is on contract basis and have to return to the homeland as the privilege to settle permanently is not provided by the host society. The majority of the migrants had to undergo many unbeatable problems like:

⁴⁴“Twentieth Century Migration to Industrially Developed Countries”, in *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literatures* by Ravinder K. Jain, p.34.

⁴⁵“Indian workers in UAE: Employment, wages and working conditions” by K.C. Zachariah, B.A. Prakash and Irudaya Rajan, p.228.

...non-payment of salaries, denial of wages and non-wage benefits as per the contracts, refusing to release the passport and non-payment of charges for air ticket to return to their native place. Though the UAE labour laws stipulate that free air ticket should be given to the emigrant to return home, the majority of the emigrants are forced to spend money from their own savings to purchase air ticket to return to their homeland. Nearly one-third of the emigrants are living in worker camps and in the majority of cases, the number of people per room range from four to six.⁴⁶

These different forms of migration pattern finally possess a unique character from other Diasporas. Some of the main features of Indian Diaspora given by Bikhu Parekh as follows:

- 1) It is far more widespread than any other.
- 2) It is more varied than any other as its members represent half a dozen religious, are drawn from seven different regions of India, belong to a nearly a dozen castes, cover a wide variety of occupations ranging from labourers and factory workers to professionals and industrialists and earn both the highest and the lowest per capita income in the world.
- 3) With the exception of the Jews, no other diasporic community has suffered as such as the Indian.
- 4) For decades overseas Indian communities have little contact with each other and, with a few exceptions, only a limited contact with India.

⁴⁶“Indian workers in UAE: Employment, wages and working conditions” by K.C. Zachariah, B.A. Prakash, S. Irudaya Rajan.

- 5) There is a greater intra-diasporic movement among Indians than within any other diasporic community.⁴⁷

Geopolitical Situation of Manipur

Manipur, one of the seven sister states of the North Eastern Region of India, is an isolated hill-girt state stretching between 92°58'E to 94°45'E longitudes and 23°50'N to 25°42'N latitudes. It is a place encircled by nine hill ranges on all sides with a small and beautiful oval shaped valley at the center. The State has 352 kms long international border with Burma (Myanmar) to the southeast and 502 kms long border with the adjacent states of Nagaland in the north, Cachar District of Assam on the west and the Chin Hills (Myanmar) and Mizoram in the south and the south-west and Surma Tract and upper Chindwin of Myanmar (Burma) on the east.⁴⁸ This place has been divided into two regions viz., hill and valley in which 90 percent of the total area is covered by hills while the valley constitutes the remaining area.

Most of the scheduled tribes live in hilly areas whereas Meitei and Meitei Muslims (who came as migrants from historical period) inhabited in the valley. Nowadays many emigrants were settled in Manipur but the main original ethnic groups are Naga, Kuki and Meitei. The first two groups are scheduled tribes. Though geographically plain area is much smaller than hill area, the Meitei is one of the largest ethnic groups comprises of 56.9 percent of the total population. All three of them come under of Tibeto-Burman groups.

⁴⁷ Cited in "Gated communities: A study of interface between the local and diasporic returnees", by Bidyalaxmi Devi Elangbam, M.Phil dissertation, University of Hyderabad, 2010, p.22.

⁴⁸"Economic survey Manipur 2008-2009" by Directorate of economics and statistics government of Manipur, Imphal, p. i.

It was a sovereign kingdom at one point of time ruled by 76 kings that begin from 33A.D. to 1955 where Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33A.D.-154 A.D.) as the first king of Manipur and the last was Bodhchandra Singh (1941-1955). The current unrest socio-political situation of Manipur may not be a new thing to many people. If we see the situation of Manipur from the historical time till today, it can be observed as a state with endless political unrest. So despite of being a tiny state, it has unique and so many unforgettable histories shape the present Manipur, which are well written in Manipuri royal chronicle *cheitharol Kumbaba*.

Some of the political turmoils occurred during the historical period play a significant role in changing the pure identity of Manipur. Meitei has their own distinct indigenous faith and belief called *Sanamahimism*. But the religious persecution occurred during the King Pamheiba (1709 A.D. -1748 A.D.) converted Hindu religion as a dominant religion of Manipur. As Hodson observes:

To the royal will of King Pamheiba, the monarch in whose reign the fortunes of the state reached the zenith, Hinduism owes its present position as the official religion of the state. At the first the decrees of the king received but little obedience, and the opposition to the change centered mainly round the numerous members of the royal family who supported, not unnaturally, by the *maibis*, the priests of the older religion. Religion dissent was meted out to political opponents and the wholesale banishments and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenets of Hinduism.⁴⁹

⁴⁹“Bamons: The Meitei-brahmins”, by Longjam Nobinchandra, in *Manipur: past and present* edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, vol.4, p.451.

This led to helpless Meitei change their religion as a synthesis form of Hindu that follows both their indigenous belief as well as Hindu religion. Another negative impact of Hinduisation is of disallowing Meitei script to use and start using *Bangla* script. Naorem Sanajaoba described about the first step of importing *Bangla* script by a Hindu priest from Bengal, Shantidas Gosai in Manipur in the introductory part of “Manipur: Past and Present” as: “At the instigation of one priest Shantidas Gosai, Meitei holy books (*Puya*) had been consigned to flames at around 9-10 a.m., on the 23rd day of *wakching* (January) in 1729 A.D. The event paved the way for sanskritisation and the name of the country had been changed to Manipur.”⁵⁰

From this point the Manipuri language *Meiteilon*, which comes under the Sino-Tibeto category has been assimilated with *Bangla* language to some extent, but the original script called *Meitei mayek* was no more used and replaced by *Bangla* script. Nowadays Manipuri people got revival and start learning original script so that the coming generation would bring the original linguistic identity.

Another important day in the history of Manipur that led to the change of identity was the merger agreement with India in 1949. According to a merger agreement signed on 21st September 1949 between Maharaja Budhachandra, the then king of Manipur, and the Government of India, the state was merged into India as a part “C” State on the 15th October 1949 and controlled by the President of India through a Chief Commissioner. The status of Manipur to be a part “C” State was coming to an end on the 1st November 1956 and became a Union Territory under the Union Territorial Council Manipur and became one of the seven sister states of the North Eastern Region of India Act 1956. Manipur became a full-fledged state within the Indian Union with a Governor as the Head of the State on the 21st January 1972.

⁵⁰ *Manipur: past and present*, vol. 4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba.

The above political histories of Manipur show that the identity of Manipur keeps on changing from time to time. This led to an identity crisis among the native people. Sahitya Akademi award-winner Manipuri writer Yumlembam Ibomcha expressed this changing identity in the *Samanvay: The IHC Indian languages festival* as “For me, nationality of any kind is uncertain. I was born as a Manipuri and remained so for 56 days after which I became an Indian when Manipur joined the state of India in 1947”.⁵¹ Moreover, the merger agreement made between Manipur and the Government of India brought a major setback among the group of Manipuri Diasporas especially the Manipuris in Bangladesh who migrated before the Merger Act 1949.

The History of Manipuri Migration

The history of Manipuri migration begins from pre-Christian era. Convenience, temptation, adventurism, trade and commerce are strongest motives for early Meitei emigration and settlement in other parts of South Asia, beyond the frontiers of their homeland.⁵² But most of them are capable persons like rulers and the ordinary migrant number was less. Naorem Sanajaoba mentioned the early Manipuri settlement as “Pan-Manipuri settlements, which started since 4th century A.D. till the 19th century A.D. had been sporadic, intermittent and casual, considering the choice of settlement according to their convenience and trade facilities.”

Matrimonial alliance is also one form of migration during those days. There is no written historical record of the actual starting period of matrimonial alliance with the neighboring countries mostly with Assam, Burma, Cachar

⁵¹“Manipuri literature: Dogged by identity crisis, language conflict”, *The Hindustan Times*, (17/11/2013).

⁵²“Introduction”, *Manipur: past and present*, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, vol. 4.

and Tripura but all the matrimonial alliances made from the 12th century are available in Manipuri royal chronicle. The culture of matrimonial alliance was mainly practiced in the royal family during the historical period. N. Khelchandra in his article *Manipuris outside Manipur* expressed that:

Since time immemorial, migration towards and from inside Manipur happened to be pattern of population movement in that period. Inter-community and internationally marriage was also common in the Meitei life style. We realize from the manuscript '*Khamlangba Khunggumlon*' that Khamlangba who left for Tripura was known as *kalika*. On his return journey, Khamlangba accompanied by several immigrants, had settled at *Uripok* and then, at *kakching* (places in Manipur).⁵³

He further mentioned about the matrimonial alliance with Manipuri princess and Meitei ladies with the neighboring princes of Assam or Tripura as "Manipuri princess and Meitei ladies had been given in matrimonial alliance, as queens and wives of the princes in Tekhao (Assam), *mayang* Takhen (Tripura) and Auwaleibak (Burma) on several occasions. Their retinues and attendants had also settled in these neighboring countries for several centuries."⁵⁴

Some of the Manipuri girls married to neighboring countries which are recorded in the Manipuri royal chronicle *cheitharol kumbaba* are:

Departure of Akoijam Chanu Yangnu-Takhel Leima for Tripura in 1609 A.D., of Kaboleima Snapubi for Burma in

⁵³"Manipuris outside Manipur" by N. Khelchandra Singh, translated by Naorem Sanajaoba, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol. 4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.4.

⁵⁴ Cited in "Manipuris outside Manipur" by N. Khelchandra Singh, translated by Naorem Sanajaoba, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.5.

1610 A.D., of Mingthoingambi married to the Burmese King in 1654 A.D. in 1688 A.D., Ningthoujam Chanu Thoibi was married to Burmese prince.⁵⁵

In 1768, Gourasyam's daughter princess Kuranga Nayani had been wedded to Ahom (Assam) king Rajeshwar Singh. Manipuri retinues in their hundreds had settled in upper Assam areas namely- Hansora and Borkula.⁵⁶

These are some of the early forms of migration. Like Indian indentured labour migration plays major role in the history of Indian Diaspora, political persecution occurred in Manipur during the first half of the 18th century till 19th century due to aggressive attacks from neighboring country Burma has created incidents, fleeing many Manipuris to neighboring countries like Assam, Cachar, Tripura and Bangladesh.

Being a neighboring country, Manipur had relation with Burma long back but the relationship was not in cordial all the time. Sometimes they are in good term and other times show hostile nature with each other that can even lead to wars and attacks. In the beginning Manipur always defeated Burmese rulers and this manner has been continued since the first half of the 18th century. After this, there was a turning point and ultimately Burmese had the upper hand. From that time, Manipur faces so many attacks from Burmese invaders. N. Tarunkumar Singh cited the political relation between Burmese and Manipuris as:

The Burmese aggression continued for a long time. The major raids and counter-raids had been recorded from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century. However, after the death of

⁵⁵“Introduction, Manipur past and present”, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba.

⁵⁶“Introduction, Manipur past and present”, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba.

Garibnawaz (50th Manipuri king ruled during 1709-1748 A.D), the power and the prestige of Manipur declined and the polity became very unstable. The political history of Manipur was characterized by successive Burmese invasions, internal disputes and dissensions. The history of succession to the thrones makes a lucid case of treason, intrigue and rebellion.⁵⁷

Three major devastations ensued in Manipur following Burmese invasions: first devastation between 1755-1758, the second in 1769 and the third between 1819-1826. The last one (1819-1826) was the most dangerous devastation that affected thousands and thousands of Manipuris specially who settled in the valley and this period is known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (Seven year devastation) in the history of Manipur. The socio-political status of Manipur was total collapse. In order to describe the worse situation, N. Tarunkumar Singh mentioned:

The Burmese overran Manipur, and totally exterminated the wholesale valley of Manipur. The seven-year long suppression and genocide of Meiteis are engraved in the history of Manipur as '*Chahi Taret Khuntakpa*'. Successive Burmese invasions in Manipur lasted for 60 years and the entire valley population of Manipur was reduced to insignificance. It is estimated that "the adult male did not exceed to 3,000" after the seven year-devastation.⁵⁸

Because of this reason so many Manipuris took shelter in the neighboring countries like Assam, Cachar, Tripura and Bangladesh, even the Manipuri

⁵⁷ Cited in "The pan-Manipuris" by N. Tarunkumar Singh, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.17.

⁵⁸ Cited in "The Pan-Manipuris" by N. Tarunkumar Singh, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.18.

kings also took political asylum during these devastation periods like king Chourjit along with his two younger brothers seek shelter in Sylhet (in Bangladesh). Some of these refugees didnot come back to homeland after the situation turns into normal and finally became the citizen of their respective host societies.

During this period there was a case of huge Manipuris being captivated by the Burmese invaders and were deported to Burma and Burmanised them. There was no separate record of how many Manipuris were captivated and killed but it is estimated that around two hundred thousand Manipuris were captured as well as killed by the Burmese since 1764-1824. According to W.S. Desai,

The captured Manipuris were settled in the districts of Amarapura and Sagaing...They introduced the *Acheik* pattern in silk into Burma. The Burmese monarch enrolled Manipuris into his army in cavalry corps. When Alaungpaya* invaded Siam,** he had 500 Manipuri (Meitei) horsemen with him. Manipuri Brahmins served as astrologers and priests at royal state functions.⁵⁹

The captives were tortured, threatened verbally as well as killed them brutally, they used to call them *Ava* which means the strangers or barbarians, put them together in a big house that does not have ventilator or windows and burnt red chilies so that they could die of suffocation.

This chapter discussed about the history of Indian and Manipuri diasporas in two different parts. The massive migration of both Diasporas occurred mainly

*King of Burma ruled during 1752 to 1760, and the founder of the Konbaung Dynasty.

** Place that comes under Thailand.

⁵⁹ Cited in *The Pan-Manipuris* by N. Tarunkumar Singh, Manipur past and present, vol4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p19

in the 19th century but the root cause of migration is not similar at all. In other way we can differentiate Indian diaspora as labour Diaspora and Manipuri diaspora as victim diaspora according to Robin Cohen's theory. For Indian Diaspora, Robin Cohen has already categorized them under the Labor Diaspora, Manipuri Diaspora however is yet to be categorized. But the root cause of Manipuri migration shows that they are victim diaspora who are traumatized, fled from an oppressive situation of not being able to bear all such situations. Both the Diasporas have some common features which are mentioned by William Safran, Robin Cohen or Steven Vertovec.

CHAPTER-3

NATIONALITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: THE CASE OF MANIPURIS IN BANGLADESH

The human being is bound with certain inseparable assets which are not static but keeps on continuous flows of changing according to place and time. It is something very important to every individual and use as a means to define them in society, it is called as 'identity'. In fact, identity is a multi layered substance composed of so many things such as race, class, education, religion, values, culture, tradition, nation, language etc., and is synonymous with ethnic identity. But it is always oriented to place. As Wendell Berry opined that "in order to know who we are, we must first know where we are".⁶⁰

Different scholars coined different definition of ethnic identity by relying any of these multilayer elements. Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson defined the term ethnic identity in a very general way with the help of describing the origin of two terminologies "ethnic" and "identity" separately. They say that:

The construct, ethnic identity, can best be understood through an examination of its etymology origins. The term *ethnic* has Latin and Greek origins - *ethnicus* and *ethnikas* both meaning nation. It can be used historically to refer people as heathens. *Ethos*, in Greek, means custom, disposition or trait. *Ethnikas* and *ethos* taken together therefore can mean a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs. The second part of the construct, *identity*, has Latin origins and is derived from the word *identitas*; the word is

⁶⁰Cited in "Tracing an Indian diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations", edited by Parvati Raghuram *et al.*, p.284.

formed from *idem* meaning *same*. Thus, the term is used to express the notion of sameness, likeness, and oneness. More precisely, identity means “the sameness of a person and thing in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” (Simpson & Weiner 1989, p. 620). Combining the definitions and interpretations of identity and ethnicity it can be concluded that they mean, at minimum imply, the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residence.⁶¹

People used to form their own groups on the basis of similar ethnic identity. This group is again known as an ethnic group. Nowadays identity has become a game of politics. It is very connected with the person’s social position and power. The ‘politics of identity’. Keith and Pile (1993) thus highlight the fact that identity often has to be contested. This interpretation implies that ethnic identity is not merely a neutral description of ethnic group membership, but is often a statement of a person’s social position and power vis-à-vis members of another group. Thus the concept of ‘positionality’- the positions of individuals in the dynamics and structure of social and power relationships- is crucial to the understanding of ethnic identity.⁶² This type of politics is commonly faced by the person who Trans-bordered from their own place to other places. A person’s social status can be changed from one place to another. The idea of positionality shows that identification is an endless process of recognizing common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group leading to solidarity and allegiance. And moreover ethnic identity is a continuous process of formation, destruction, construction and assimilation.

⁶¹“Ethnic identity” by Joseph E. Trimble and Ryan Dickson.

⁶²“Discourse on migration and ethnic identity: Interviews with professionals in Hong Kong” by F. L. N. Li, A. J. Jowett, A. M. Findlay and R. Skeldon, 1995, p. 344.

In this present global hub where any person can reach to any corner of the world, the labeling of ethnic identity has become a common phenomenon. Labeling of ethnic identity means that rating the ethnic identity group on the basis of their status. Philip E. Lamb says that on the basis of labeling theory of ethnic identity, ethnic identity can be distinguished into two types, such as, primary ethnic identity and secondary ethnic identity. He defines primary as well as secondary ethnic identity as:

Primary ethnic identity refers to the personal identification an individual makes with a specific ethnic group on the basis of primary socialization. It is a recognition or cognitive awareness of ethnic membership. This ethnic self-identity develops early in life, based principally on the individual's experiences with family, friends, and neighbors.

Secondary ethnic identity refers to the subsequent self-identification an individual develops with a particular group on the basis of societal reaction to him or her. It is an affirmation of ethnic membership which places ethnicity at the core of one's self-identity or ego-identity. This self-identity develops on the basis of how members of society in general ethnically identify, label, and respond to a person. It is a personal response to the treatment and ethnically derived labels applied by others.⁶³

This differentiation proves that identity can also be changed or transform or react their own identities according to time and situation. The main factors that can induce to form a secondary ethnic identity are radicalization, discrimination or stigmatization. This situation may frequently face by

⁶³“Ethnic identity and ethnic community among Mexicans” by Philip E. Lampe, p.111.

migrants or minority groups. He further explained the advantages of distinguishing two types of ethnic identity based on labeling theory as “this distinction can then be used to understand the nature and functions of ethnic identity, as well as to integrate and refine existing theories on ethnic community.”⁶⁴

Identity classified into three facets according to Hilary N. Weaver, such as self identification, community identification and external identification. The author’s views of identity did not restrict only to cultural identity. Self identification is defined as one’s identity according to what they believed. Such identification is based on his or her choice from their native identities, but these choices depend on social, economic and political factors.

Human being is a social animal. It is very obvious that if there is a society there will be a certain definition of the identity of that particular society or community. People cannot neglect for their communities and obey that common definition. The author again clearly mentioned some of the basic criteria that needs by an individual to identify as a member of that particular community as:

Sometimes identity boundaries are defined by policy and law as well as conventions. Tribes have the right to determine the criteria for membership. This regulation of membership, in some ways a form of regulating identity, has implications for political access and resource allocations.⁶⁵ Likewise, enrollment (or lack thereof) has implications for how a person

⁶⁴“Ethnic identity and ethnic community among Mexicans” by Philip E. Lampe, p.110.

⁶⁵ Cited in “Indigenous identity: What is it, and who really has it?” By Hilary N. Weaver, p.245.

perceives him or herself and is perceived by others, both within and outside of the native community.⁶⁶

This type of identification is categorized as community identification. The last identification is just about how the identity of a person is defined by another person who doesn't have the same identity. This type of identification can be made in terms of stereotyping. The writer gave the quote of how non-native look after indigenous people. "Non-native people may view indigenous people as having a harmonious relationship with nature and possessing an unspoiled spirituality. Sometimes indigenous people are viewed as tourist attractions, victims, and historical artifacts."⁶⁷

Ethnic identity can be discussed in many dimensions in Diaspora context. Some of the phenomena that occurred which is related to ethnic identity after the person get trans border from their own land are assimilation, integration, acculturation or enculturation. Their concern and consciousness of their own ancestral identity shows the love and respect of their own ethnic identity but their identity is always mixed up with host society ethnic identity. Related to this Shehadeh says "when you are exiled from your land... you begin like a pornographer to think about it in symbols. You articulate your love for your land, in its absence and in the process transform it into something else."⁶⁸

The most basic needs among the Diaspora to retain their ethnic identity at least to some extent is to have better socio-political policy of the host society towards Diaspora and to settle the Diaspora with their own ethnic group as a community. When we say better socio-political policy in host society we can analyze with the support of the hostile nature of the French government

⁶⁶"Indigenous identity: What is it, and who really has it?" By Hillary N. Weaver, p.245.

⁶⁷ Cited in "Indigenous identity: What is it, and who really has it?" By Hillary N. Weaver, p.247.

⁶⁸"Tracing an Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations", edited by Parvati Raghuram, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Brij Maharaj, & Dave Sangha, 2008.

towards Indian Diaspora who came in Reunion Island as an indentured labour recruited by French ruler. Ankita Bhattacharjee cited the policy of French ruler that brings cultural transformation among the Indian Diaspora during the indentured system of migration in this place as:

Since the beginning of the immigration, the French government followed the policy of assimilating the population under its control. Except for the Muslims who came from Gujarat, all the Indians were routinely categorized as Catholics more or less. Despite the contractual commitment specifying that they could practice their own religion, the Indians were barred from worshipping Hindu God and Goddess. Thus, they involved themselves with hidden worship coupled with fear and guilt. The discontent was severe when they comprehended that, in fact, everything was set up to convert them to Christianity. The non-display of a Christian mannerism was criticized and was considered as a bar to integrate into the mainstream society. The French name was imposed. The legitimate reason put forward for the change of name was that under assimilation the name should not identify a particular national origin, race or religion. In order to assimilate with the certain behavioral patterns of the host society for their advantages the migrants accepted the Christian name.⁶⁹

This shows that the nature of host society can assimilate the original identity of Diaspora to their majority ethnic group identity. Even in this hostile situation, Indian Diasporas did not let all their ethnic identity diluted. The self-consciousness towards their ethnic cultural identity made them to preserve

⁶⁹ Cited in “PIO in Francophone Reunion Island: Assimilation and identity” by Ankita Bhattacharjee, in *Indian diaspora in Africa: A comparative perspective*, edited by Ajay Dubey, p.145.

some of the ancestral identity. But nowadays the situation has changed and Indian government is supporting them to develop the cultural identity of homeland like by sending ICCR troupes, visiting Indian media group above this even the Indian origins are being taken up some of the enthusiastic steps by forming an organization.

Unlike the past where means of communication and technology was not so developed, religious missionaries play a big role to impart culture and tradition among the Diaspora groups. Like in the case of the Indian Diaspora Arya Samaj, RSS visit most of the places where Indian people have settled since the early days till now. But nowadays along with this system, new media like mobile phone, internet gives ample opportunity to communicate with the homeland. This situation has made them success to retain their own ethnic culture or tradition. S. Raveesh has examined the purpose of using internet by observing especially among the Indian Diaspora as follows: “Internet is a tool to interlink the diversified Indian Diaspora and it is a powerful medium in maintaining the sense of identity among the Indian diasporic community. It provides a feeling of belongingness with their ‘mother land’”.⁷⁰

It is very necessary to analyze the ethnic condition of Diaspora as they are even part of both the societies i.e., host land and homeland. Patrick Eisenlohr explained the reason for studying ethnic identity of Diaspora by using the statement given by Anderson as:

...diasporas do not exist objectively on the basis of a documented historical case of migration, voluntary or involuntary, but through the labor of memory, and the conceptual transformation of places of departure into homelands. Such newly conceived homelands then function as

⁷⁰“Internet: A tool to interlink Indian diaspora” by S. Raveesh, pp.1277-1278.

a reference point for processes of self-identification vis-à-vis what are perceived as ethnic and social “others” in an overseas location. Therefore, the condition of Diaspora is not merely a historical “fact”, but a cultural category, which may consequently change over time.⁷¹

In Diaspora context linguistic identity is one of the primary elements from other multi layered elements of ethnic identity. Ravinder Barn explained the interconnection between language and ethnicity as “Language is generally perceived to be inextricably intertwined with ethnicity and culture. It is generally perceived as a central vehicle for accessing a culture, constructing shared identities and defining out groups. Its dynamic and evolving nature is also recognized.”⁷² Especially the Indian Diaspora which is diverse in nature, language plays a big role to categorize among them so the language can bring unity and diversity among Indian Diaspora. Language can represent an individual in an ethno national level, as Patrick Eisenlohr cited “Languages are connected to ethno-national identities within the framework of linguistic ideologies and not because they “unite” people by providing a medium of communication.”⁷³ But in order to live in host society it has always happened to pick up local languages of that place. This is the reason why language shift is very common among the migrants. Since the process of shifting is a gradual process so the fluency of mother tongue decreases from generation to generation. Rajneesh Kumar Gupta described the fluency of mother tongue among the Indian diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania that “However,

⁷¹“Language and identity in an Indian diaspora: “Multiculturalism” and ethno-Linguistic communities in Mauritius”, by Patrick Eisenlohr, in *Sociology of diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and Brij Maharaj, p.773-774.

⁷²“Indian diaspora in the united Kingdom: Second-generation parents’ views and experiences on heritage language transmission” by Ravinder Barn, in *Tracing an Indian diaspora*, edited by Parvati Raghuram, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Brij Maharaj, & Dave Sangha, p.203.

⁷³Cited in “Language and identity in an Indian diaspora: “Multiculturalism” and ethno-Linguistic communities in Mauritius” by Patrick Eisenlohr, in *Sociology of diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and Brij Maharaj, p.776.

fluency in speaking Indian languages varies by generation of migration. As first generation migrants often consider Indian languages their mother tongue but second and third generations of the Indian migrant community may not be as fluent in Indian languages.”⁷⁴

This does not mean that they are totally neglected their heritage language. Every diaspora do something or the other in order to preserve their ancestral identities before it gets completely extinct. Moreover some host society gives value to community languages and they even support them in the process of preservation and promotion. Like in New Zealand, people have started doing research on community languages based on the significance of being bilingual among the diasporic community people. John Holmes has cited some of the basic needs of preserving community language that has to be given to community people as:

To ensure that children from non-English-speaking backgrounds have the opportunity to maintain their first language into adulthood, support is needed for parents who want to maintain the language in the home setting, for linguistic communities who take the initiative to establish their own language programs, as well as for schools who choose to introduce community languages into their curricula.⁷⁵

No language is static so no culture remain stagnant, but it is always important to preserve and protect from the situation of being totally extinct as it is one of the important asset given by our ancestors. The socio-political status is no more like the early days where the cultures of ruling by powerful groups to

⁷⁴“Indian diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania: Historical legacies and contemporary challenges” by Rajneesh Kumar Gupta, in *Indian diaspora in Africa: A comparative perspective*, p.50.

⁷⁵ Cited in “Keeping tabs on language shift in New Zealand: Some Methodological Considerations” by Janet Holmes, p.18.

underdeveloped countries. And moreover it is easy to access what we want and can connect any person at any time. This does not mean that the new Diaspora group did not face any challenges in maintaining their identity. Some groups still facing racial discrimination or stereotyping but comparatively the new diasporas are much better than old diaspora in term of social-political status. So in this situation, Diasporas can live like living in their homeland wherever they go.

Manipuris in Bangladesh

According to Robin Cohen's patterns of Diasporas, Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh can fall under the category of victim Diaspora. These are the groups of diasporas migrated from the North Eastern region of India during the 18th century disastrous Manipuri-Burmese war that lasted for seven years (1819-1825). It was a period of anarchy where people just wanted to move to a safer place. Most of these victims do not migrate directly to Bangladesh from the homeland. A. K. Seram stated that "...the members of the royal family of Manipur, with their loyal followers, have sought refuge in the neighbouring states, especially, in Cachar, Assam and Tripura. Subsequently, they have advanced further and settled in different places of Bangladesh, like greater Sylhet district, Mymensingh, Dhaka and Comilla."⁷⁶

Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh consists of three different types of ethnic groups. They are Meitei (Manipuri), Meitei Pangan (Meitei Muslim) and Bishnupriya Manipuri. Meiteis are the real inhabitants of Manipur. They are also called as Manipuri and the language spoken by them is known as Manipuri or Meiteilon. On the other hand, the Meitei Pangan (Meitei Muslim) and Bishnupriya Manipuri are the immigrants of Manipur but later became the

⁷⁶“Manipuri (Meitei) settlement in Bangladesh” by A. K. Seram, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.114.

citizen of Manipur. They also migrated during the seven year's devastation like the Meitei people migrated to Bangladesh. Linguistically Meitei and Meitei Pangan (Meitei Muslim) are homogeneous but not from the religious context. Whereas Bishnupriya Manipur and Meitei have the same religious background, but not the language. These different ethnic groups used to live with their own ethnic groups.

This dissertation focuses on Meitei Diaspora in Bangladesh. According to William Safran's broad definition, Meiteis in Bangladesh are deserved to be called as Diaspora even though they do not have officially recognized homeland. Most of them reside together in the form of community in the rural areas. There are no census data available of the total demographic figure of this Meitei Diaspora, but it is observed that their population is diminishing day by day. Thokchom Jitendra Kumar Singha expressed the reason for declining Meitei population by relating with 1947 partition:

The partition of British India in 1947 gave birth to both India and Pakistan including East Bengal, known later on as East Pakistan. During the Pak-regime, the minority Hindu Bengalese had a tendency to migrate from the then East Pakistan to India. On the other hand, the Indian government at that time, on humanitarian grounds adopted a policy of accepting Pakistani migrants by providing them with facilities, however limited may be, in respect of rehabilitation, education, services and etc. For all these reasons, a pretty number of the Meiteis also like the other Hindu Bengalese migrated to India from time to time whenever they got the scope. Consequently, the size of the Meitei population has been reduced to the present one.⁷⁷

⁷⁷“Inter-Ethnic relation in Bangladesh” by Thokchom Jitendra Kumar Singha, in *Manipur: Past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.146.

If we want to describe the maintenance of identity by Diaspora, it is appropriate to mention Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh. It is very appreciable to see the steps taken up by Bangladesh Manipuri Diaspora to preserve their original identity in second largest Muslim populated country in the world. Their hardworking, dedicated, having a sense of belonging blend with unity and solidarity, can win their wish to follow their own identity which is transcended by their ancestors.

No doubt, in order to fit into the society where they landed every Diaspora automatically picks up some identities of the host society. So Diaspora is always blending up with many identities. Before analyzing the current scenarios of their ancestral identities, I will discuss about their socioeconomic life in Bangladesh that is part of the identity formation.

Economic Status

A steep hike of India's remittances from the Indian diaspora shows that a diaspora always depends on the development of host land in order to have a better economic status. As we know that most of economic success stories of Indian diaspora came from the new Indian diaspora who are skilled and semi-skilled migrants migrated to the developed countries like Europe and North America. An interview conducted by the Business Standard group, based on the recent flows of remittances, shared the opinion as follows:

The USA, the UK and the Gulf Co-operation Council countries have been major contributors for inward remittances to India, traditionally. Over the past decade, with the boom in oil exploration and infrastructure sector the GCC region has attracted a huge number of migrant workers from the Indian

sub-continent. UK and U.S have seen more of skilled workers migrating – be it businessmen, IT professionals or management and finance professionals. With rising employment opportunities, these regions have emerged as a significant remitter to India. Having said that, there are a lot of other markets which are coming up as high potential remittance markets; countries such as Australia, Malaysia, and Hong Kong are coming up in a big way for India. In India, apart from major remittance receiving states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab, we are also witnessing a surge in inward remittances to emerging remittance pockets such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.⁷⁸

The life of Manipuris in Bangladesh is totally contrasted from this type of modern diaspora as the host society itself is far behind in the race of development. The blog called *Index mundi* described the economic status of Bangladesh for the year 2013 as:

In real terms Bangladesh's economy has grown 5.8% per year since 1996 despite political instability, poor infrastructure, corruption, insufficient power supplies, and slow implementation of economic reforms. Bangladesh remains a poor, overpopulated, and inefficiently-governed nation. Although more than half of GDP is generated through the service sector, 45% of Bangladeshis are employed in the agriculture sector with rice as the single most important product.⁷⁹

⁷⁸“Remittance flow to India on the rise”, Sudesh Giriyan, an interview report of Business Standard, 8/12/2013.

⁷⁹“Bangladesh economy profile”, 2013, *Index mundi*.

Moreover the majority of Manipuris in Bangladesh confined in the rural areas. Most of them are economically backward, their main occupation is farming. Both males and females involve in income generating activities. Women used to make handloom products and their product (sarees, dupatas, bags are some of the major items) is always appreciated by the customers. L. Rajendra Ch. Singh says that:

The Bangladeshi Manipuris, no doubt, from a poor class of people in the country. Economically, they are a poverty-stricken community. Their participation in trade and industry is virtually nil in its sense. Their cottage industry, namely weaving industry, is of primitive type and has proved uneconomical by now. They depend for their livelihood largely on agriculture. After liberation, a weaving institute has been set up in Sylhet town. But still requires government-aid and care for its proper functioning.⁸⁰

Settling there for nearly three centuries, the Bangladesh government has partially accepted Manipuris as Bangladeshi by recognizing them as a sub-nation. It is an ongoing debate of recognizing them as sub-nation as few people are happy to receive this status by the Bangladesh government, though the Bangladesh government gave some reservations in some of the government sector jobs. That is how some of the Manipuri Diaspora starts holding respectable posts in the government offices in recent time. Some important occupations are teaching, carpentry, livestock rearing, *Ayurvedic* treatment, tailoring and automobile mechanics. The economic condition of Manipuris in Bangladesh can compare with the descendant of old Indo-Fiji diaspora. As they have been there for so many years but there are many whose

⁸⁰“Socio-Political movement in Bangladesh”, by L. Rajendra Ch. Singh, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.142.

economic status is still very low. Donald Brenneis described the main occupation of Indo-Fijians residing in the rural areas of Bhatgaon as:

Most families lease rice land from the government of Fiji, and, although they work as seasonal cane cutters or in other outside jobs, most men consider themselves rice farmers. Leaseholds are generally small, and rice farming does not afford Bhatgaon villagers the same opportunities for wealth available in sugarcane raising areas.⁸¹

This shows that some of the Indians are still under poverty even though they are free from the colonial rule.

The Habitation

Usually all Manipuris in Bangladesh lived together in specified places forming their own colonies. Decreasing population of Manipuris in Bangladesh is one of the key issues of the ethnic group. Because of this reason some of the Manipuri colonies earlier established with good habitations, are now extinct, such as: *Dhaka Manipuri Para* and *Bur Dhamai*. Till today Manipuris are living in the 47 colonies that belonged to different districts or sub districts of Bangladesh. The majority of them lived in Sylhet district of Bangladesh which is a part of Assam before partition. The detailed information is given in the table-1.

⁸¹“Aesthetics, performance, and the enactment of tradition in a Fiji Indian community”, by Donald Brenneis, in *Gender, genre, and power in South Asian expressive traditions*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom, Margaret A. Mills, p.366.

Table No 1: Places Manipuris reside

Name of districts	Name of the places
Sylhet	Amborkhana, Naya Bazar, Shivganj, Gowaipara, Kewapara, Sagordigirpar, Baghbari, Laladigirpar, Lama Bazar, Dakshingao, Rajbari, Brojonath Tila
Maolbi Bazar	Fotiguli, Goyalbari, Naldhari, Baroitolini, Ramangarh, Khaaspur, Balisira, Gaurangar, Puthador, Choto Dhamai, Patahariya, Gaurangbil, Madhobpur, Chaisiri, Homerjan, Magergaon, Shangaon, Hkdiyargola, Shripur, Vandharigaon, Chitiliya, Noyapatan, Gang ganpur, Bhanubil, Katibil, Kunagaon, Totaigaon, Mangalpur
Habibganj	Goborkhula, Aabadgaon, Shibanagar, Dudpatil
Sumanganj	Nayapara or Nayanpur, Lakhat, Ratanpur

Source: Bangladesh Khongchat

Socio-Political Status

Culturally Manipuri migrants in Bangladesh are very different from host population but being stayed there for nearly three centuries they are very much friendly with the host society. These migrants are not isolated from them. They paid same respect, love to the host people like what they feel to homeland people. Manipuri Diaspora always invites the host people as a guest, who is deserving to be invited, in most of their functions. Even the host people also, have the feeling of oneness with Manipuri Diaspora, hence they are invited too. For example, Bangla Academy, one of the government institution that plays a big role in promoting Bangla language and literature worldwide, had conducted a felicitation program for the Manipuri people who visited to Bangladesh to attend the annual meeting of ‘Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad’ in the year 1997. Manipuri migrants also contributed in the development of Bangla literature as they became bi-lingual. Some young Meitei aspirants joined in the preservation of art and literature. That is the

reason why Bangla people did not fail to remember their past though their population is quite small and culturally different.

The changing nature of extreme orthodox mentality to unorthodox can be used as a proof of being very social with the host people. Thokchom Jitendra Kumar Singha, for instance, pointed out that the Meitei in Bangladesh becoming more social in the present era, who were once conservative:

It was, perhaps, due to the Manipuri orthodoxy and conservatism. In the distant past, as we have heard, the Meiteis, who would return home from outside-it might be from either shopping or any other working or business places-had to change all the clothes worn outside and leave them in a corner of their houses. The idea of participation in the social and religious functions of the Bengalee community by the Manipuris was not contemplated in those days. But in modern days, the Manipuris today have abandoned all those social and religious superstitions as a result of the spread of education in their community.⁸²

Manipuri migrants took part actively in some of the political activities. There are remarkable incidents in which their life was deliberately dedicated for the sake of host land and satisfied by the host society by seeing their fearless activities. During the liberation war of Bangladesh 1971, many Manipuris extended their support in bringing independence. Ten Manipuri brave heart migrants had ended their life and received the martyr award by the Bangladesh government, there were also twenty freedom fighters who fought against the Pakistan's army and being recognized. But the irony is that, many of them are

⁸²“Inter-Ethnic relations in Bangladesh”, by Thokchom Jitendra Kumar Singha, in *Manipur: Past and Present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.146.

losing their identity and location and it is difficult to find them where they are today.

Another noteworthy incident was Bhanubil peasants' agitation in 1930. This *andolan* was against the zamindar for restricting their freedom and some of his mischievous acts. L. Rajendra Ch. Singh explains this *andolanas* "There once arose a dispute between the peasants and the zamindar over the rent issue. It lasted for as long time and eventually became to be the Bhanubil peasant-agitation."⁸³ One of the Manipuri farmers, Baikuntha Sharma and his daughter Lilabati, who was only 19 years old at that time played a significant role in this agitation. Under the leadership of this young lady, Lilabati, fight against the *zamindar* for their rights continuously after her father got arrested. Finally, they won the battle and fulfil the demands. All these acts have become history in Bangladesh and today Bangladeshis do not forget this dedication.

Traditional Assimilation with the Hostland

No matter how much Diasporics retain their cultural identity of homeland, it is very obvious that someday or the other they have to be assimilated. It is partly due to the socio-political situation of the host society. As F. L. N. Li *et al.* said "while migrants' primary ethnic identities are partly influence by their original cultures, the socio-political and the economic environment they move into can further affect their cultural identification. The notion of 'positionality' is particularly useful in understanding changes in ethnic identity after migration".⁸⁴ In the case of Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh, linguistically they are assimilated as the education system of Bangladesh is mostly in Bangla medium. So the coming generation is more comfortable to talk in

⁸³"Socio-political movement in Bangladesh", by L. Rajendra Ch. Singh, in *Manipur: past and present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.136.

⁸⁴"Discourse on migration and ethnic identity: Interviews with professionals in Hong Kong" by F. L. N. Li, A. J. Jowett, A. M. Findlay and R. Skeldon, 1995, p. 365.

Bangla and use meiteilon (language of Manipur) only at home. That is why they became bi-lingual. Other assimilation which is easily visible just at one glance is all the married women of Bangladesh Manipuri Diaspora put vermilion on the parting line of the head which is not accustomed in Manipur and women usually wear Manipuri traditional clothes in the form of the sari.

The above markers of identities are developed in the host society over a period of time. In order to know the identity of Diasporic Manipuris, it is necessary to discuss some of their ancestral identity.

Meitei Identity

Meitei is a dominant group among the four different groups (Naga, Kuki, Meitei pangal or Muslim) of Manipur. Geographically the size of the state is very small but it is well known of its multi-ethnicity in India. According to the region wise distribution of the population, they are divided into two sections such as hill population and plain population. Hill region is mostly inhabited by tribes and meitei lives in plain areas. The Meitei are the largest Tibeto-Burman people who synthesize their own indigenous faith with Hindu religion. The language spoken is known as Meiteilon or Manipuri, which was recognized as a state language of Manipur under the 8th scheduled of the Indian constitution. Apart from this, there are so many different dialects for different tribes. The term Manipuri and Meitei are synonymous. To quote Dr. G. A Greirson-“Manipuris are those who call themselves as Meitei and called by others as Manipuri”.⁸⁵

If we see the history of Manipur, Meitei poses different identity according to different situation and time period. Some of the historical facts shows who is

⁸⁵“Manipuri (Meitei) settlement in Bangladesh”, by A.K. Sheram, in *Manipur: Past and Present*, vol.4, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, p.113.

pure Meitei and who is a modified Meitei. The identity of Meitei has been adulterated from the context of religion. This has made the history of Manipur to divide into two periods (pre-Hindu period and post-Hindu period).

Pre-Hindu Period

The pre-Hindu period extends till the first half of the 18th century. It was a form of homogeneous society that does not have the concept 'untouchability'. The indigenous religion followed during this era is known as *Sanamahism*, worshipping the creator as a god. According to the belief, one can consider *Sanamahism* as a form of animism. *Atiya Shidaba*, *Apanba* and *Ashiba* are the incarnation of God as the creator, the preserver and the annihilator of this universe respectively. *Pakhangba*, *Sanamahi* and *Nongpok Ningthou* are considered as male deities of the Meiteis whereas *Leimarel Shidabi* and *Panthoibi* are the female deities. The Meitei society is divided into seven clans. They are such as *Mangang*, *Luwang*, *Khuman*, *Angom*, *Moirang*, *Khaba Nganba*, *Chenglei (Sarang Leishangthem)*. All these clans are collectively known as *salai** (*sa* means animal and *lai* means god). Actually Manipur was formed by the fusion of these seven clans, before its formation it was a different kingdom. The main festivals are *Lai Haraoba*, means merry making god and *cheiraoba*, means Meitei New Year celebration.

There was a Meitei script, but the literature produced was abundance in the form of oral tradition. Most of the oral literature is based on religion. Thingnan Kishan Singh described the oral tradition of Meitei in the following ways:

These songs (ritual) and hymns are not treated as folk songs and part of folklore as they were not widespread amongst the people. Neither were they handed orally through successive

generations. They were confined to a certain erudite section of performers whose performances were limited to particular ceremonial functions, ritual observance and festive occasions.⁸⁶

Some of the ritual songs are *Ougri*, *Khencho*, *Anoirol* and *Lairemma Paosa* and it usually sing during *Lai haraoba* (festival of merrymaking god). This festival celebrated successfully by performing many other cultural dances, accompanied by singing ritual songs, hymns as well as playing *Pena* (traditional musical instrument). The culture of martial art was predominant and the trend of using literature is also seen prevalent. The reason for the existence of martial art was explained by Thingnan Kishan along with the use of literature in playing martial art: “Another important aspect of the literature of the early period was the treatment of heroism. Rivalry and clashes resulted in the development of martial skills. Bravery and courage remained central to the numerous conflicts that created the martial culture.”⁸⁷ Some of the indigenous games are *Thang Ta* and *Sharit Sharat* (Manipuri martial art), *Khong Kangjei* (Manipuri hockey), *Yubi Lakpi* (Manipuri style rugby), *Hiyang Tanaba* (boat race), *Mukna* (Manipuri wrestling), *Sagol Kangjei* (polo), and *Kang*.

Post-Hindu Period

Vaisnavite Hinduism has been introduced in Manipur in many stages but the religion is being accepted by whole Meitei groups during the reign of King Pamheiba (1709-1748). No doubt, many scholars found the evidences of following other religions rather than *Sanamahism* during pre-Hindu era. Nilakanta Singh made a report of following Shaivism and Tantric cults before the existence of *Vaishnavism*. According to the text, Chingurembi *khonglup*

⁸⁶“Manipuri literature in history”, by Thingnan Kishan Singh.

⁸⁷“Manipuri literature in history”, by Thingnan Kishan Singh.

which claims Hindu influence as early as the second half of the seventh century, the Meitei king Naothingkhong, who ascended the throne in 663 A.D. married the princess from the west.⁸⁸ People did not accept Hinduism as their own religion so easily. Just for the sake of the king's order they embraced the Hindu religion. There are so many forceful activities were adopted by the ruler in order to transform the Meitei indigenous society into Hindu society. Some of the difficult steps that had been taken place during those days are:

...it should be acknowledged that the proselytizing of Hinduism as a state religion, particularly in the reign of Garib Niwaz, was blatantly aggressive. It involves such measures as the destruction of the traditional '*lai*' (gods), the burning of ancient manuscripts, the banning of Meithei script and its replacement by the Bengali script, the introduction of the Hindu calendar and the system of '*gotras*', enforcement of the Hindu dietary laws, and the sanctification of the first recorded instances in Manipuri history of '*sati*'.⁸⁹

The helpless Meitei finally embraced both the religions and bring a synthesis form of Meitei indigenous religion with Hindu religion. But the society has been influenced more of Hindu ideology and beliefs. Even the name of the state, Manipur has been given after Hinduisation, before it was known as Meiteileipak (land of Meitei), Kangleipak and Meitrapak. Some of the indigenous cultures were completely unaware by the new generations and they are endangered too. Rustom Barucha explained the present situation of Manipuri society in the following way:

⁸⁸“Manipur: Religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.90.

⁸⁹“Politics of indigenous theatre: Kanhailal in Manipur”, by Rustom Bharucha, p.748.

What needs to be acknowledged here is that Hinduism flowered in Manipuri soil, it was at the cost of uprooting (devaluing) at least some of the basic elements of the indigenous culture and faith. This is not to deny that the pre-Hindu Meitei deity, *Sanamahee*, continues the powerful Hindu hegemony.⁹⁰

After the process of Hinduisation, Manipuri society has been classified into two castes, *Brahmin* and *Kshetriya* and one exterior caste, *lois*. *Lois*- meaning 'Slaves or dependent'- is applied by Manipuris to the small tribes which inhabit the valley of Manipur. They are called *Singmei*, *Andro* and *Cheirel*, all of them speak different dialects but with a considerable mixture of Manipuri words.⁹¹ Though the society is mixed up with Hindu culture, there are no strict rules for the caste system. Relating to non-existence of a rigid caste system, Chander Sheikher Panchani has cited the quotes of Sir Johnstone in his book 'Manipur Religion, Culture and Society' as:

Though rigid Hindus outwardly, they have a curious custom by which a man of low-caste, marrying a high-caste woman, can be adopted into her tribe, the exact reverse of what prevails in India, where a woman of high-caste marrying a low-caste man is hopelessly degraded and her children outcaste.⁹²

In addition to this uniqueness of Meitei Hinduism, ritualistic performance is not compulsory to perform only by elders; it can be carried out by youth and women too. Some of the changes brought by Hinduisation in the society are: 1) replacement of the archaic script by Devnagri script or Bengali script;⁹³ 2) putting tilak on forehead till the tip of the nose (Chander Sheikher Panchani

⁹⁰“Politics of indigenous theatre: Kanhailal in Manipur”, by Rustom Bharucha, p.748.

⁹¹ Cited in “Manipur religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.72.

⁹²“Manipur religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.98.

⁹³“Manipur: Religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.94.

says that “The most common and prominent is to distinguish a *Vaishnavite* Hindu man and woman by their distinct ‘Tilak’ mark on their forehead which is pasted on the ridge of the nose just behind the nose tip, upward, right to the centre of the forehead”); 3) culture of *Purohits* and Pundits was emerged. The system of priesthood evolved as a functional aspect and then it established itself was a hereditary right of those in a priest's family;⁹⁴ 4) Manipuri Hindu man starts using title Shri, Singh and Sharma whereas Srimati (Smt), devi to the girls; and 5) The adoption of Hinduism followed by the construction of Hindu temples met the society’s need for religious institutions and individual’s spiritual satisfaction.⁹⁵

The culture of Meitei has changed immensely during the post-Hindu period. Many new cultures, traditions and festivals have been added. Almost all the Hindu festivals are celebrated and ritual practices conducted at the time of birth, death and marriages are performed according to the Hindu norm. No doubt, Manipuri culture has been evolved newly shaped, but it has not undergone extinction.⁹⁶



Photo: Ritual ceremony conducted before performing cultural dance program

⁹⁴“Manipur: Religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.98.

⁹⁵“Manipur: Religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.142.

⁹⁶“Manipur: Religion, culture and society”, by Chander Sheikher Panchani, p.116.



Photo: Temple of Meitei community

A recent phenomenon of Hinduism has brought some of the theatrical Hindu religious performances like *Nata-sankirtan*, *Ras lila*, *Gostha lila*, *Gour lila*, and *Udukun lila*. Even the Manipuri literature evolves into a new form which is influenced by the new religion. The Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer Yumlembam Ibomcha noted in one of the articles in the *Hindustan Times*, based on the impact of Manipuri literature of having dual identity, “The writers were stimulated by the new religion and ethos”.⁹⁷

From this two different religious background, Meitei has become a mosaic of ancient and medieval traditions that finally brings rich cultural patterns. These are the common religio-cultural history of both Meitei in Manipur and Bangladesh. Let me now discuss the status of their ancestral identities after they moved to Bangladesh.

⁹⁷“Manipuri literature: Dogged by identity crisis, language conflict”, by Yumlembam Ibomcha, *Hindustan Times*, 5/11/2012.

Cultural Status of Bangladeshi Manipuris

Bangladesh is considered as one of the historically connected land of Manipur. As the Hindu religious ideology has been spread in Manipur by Shantidas Goshai, a Hindu preacher who came from Sylhet in Bangladesh. One theory is that the land was named Manipur by missionaries who arrived there from Sylhet during the reign of Maharaj Garibniwaz in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ After the incident of religious transformation, seven year's devastation was followed after some years. Including some of the Manipuri rulers, many Manipuris took asylum in this place and continued their life. Those capable rulers constructed new palaces, temples and settled down there as their homeland started a new life. The most important temples which are used as a source of Manipuri history in Bangladesh are: a) Temple of *Pakhangba*, b) Temple of *Yumjao lairembi*, c) Temple of *Nongshaba*, d) Temple of Mahapraphu and Mandapa, and e) Temple of Nara Singh Akhada, above these two palces were constructed i.e., the palace of Gambhir Singh and Palace of Marjit Singh. This shows that from an early period the social and cultural baggage carried by Manipuri migrants was reconstructed in the host society. This situation is almost similar to the old Indian Diaspora, where the groups usually constructed temples or Gurudwaras or mosques. The difference is the maintenance of these religious places. Indian Diasporics have maintained their religious sites properly, but the Manipuris in Bangladesh failed to protect their ancestral property from natural decay and destruction. Even among the Indian Diaspora, the construction of religious building is not a new phenomenon. Here we can give the example of first Sikh Gurudwara in Kenya constructed in the year 1898. Especially for Indian Diaspora, temple plays a big role to promote the culture and the language of the ethnic group.

⁹⁸ Cited in "Meitei (Manipuri) Speakers in Bangladesh: A Sociolinguistic Survey 2008", by Amy Kim and Seung Kim.

Manipuri Diaspora in Bangladesh is not so far from homeland (traditionally, culturally they are Manipuris but officially not recognized by the Indian government as Indian Diaspora) like the Indian indentured Diaspora that traveled across the oceans. Above this, the acceptance of Hindu as their own religion before their migration to Bangladesh makes them find certain similarity with Hindu Bengalese (native people of Bangladesh but their composition is very less, consist of only eight percent of the total population). A quote from one of the Manipuris in Bangladesh cited in an article titled 'Meitei diaspora and the identity politics' by M. C. Arunkumar as: "in spite of our religious affinity, the Bengalese keep a distance because of the linguistic difference. We also do not like to mix them up at the cost of our (linguistic) identity."⁹⁹ Staying in the form of community with their own ethnic group is also another important factor that made them success to protect their own ethnic identity from the influence of the dominant ethnic groups. Their main features of staying together as a community and preserving their own ethnic identity can categorize them as the Diaspora. Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram make the difference between just living outside and Diaspora by citing the statement given by Toloyan as: "Diasporic communities attempt to maintain (real or imagined) connections and commitments to their homeland and recognize themselves and act as a collective community. In other words, people who simply live outside their ancestral homeland cannot consider Diasporas."¹⁰⁰

No matter how much they retain their ethnic identity, some of the identity markers are declining day-by-day as in Diaspora it is not possible to retain all identity markers. If there are so many favorable conditions to develop their ancestral identity, there will be surely some unavoidable situation to preserve all their ancestral cultures. Manipur is a land of many cultures and traditions.

⁹⁹ Meitei diaspora and the identity politics by M. C. Arunkumar, p8

¹⁰⁰ "Culture, Hybridity, and the Dialogical self", by Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram, in *Sociology of Diaspora*, vol.2, edited by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and Brij Maharaj, 2007, p.620.

Sometimes Manipuri Diasporas are unable to maintain all their ancestral cultures and traditions. A.K. Seram expressed the present cultural status of Manipuris in Bangladesh with reasons for not being able to retain some of their ancestral identity in the following way:

Manipur gi dharma ga mari leinaba culture ga mari leinaba
singdi fajana ngakna chatli haujik faoba. Kang chingba, kang
pali tauba, luhong khongdongba asisu hanagi taunariba
mawong da adum chathari. Adubu nongma- nongma gi sum
khara mangtharakpigi mawong dudi lak e. masi masing
liktharakpa natraga atopa sanskriti gi safu na asum henjilakpa
dagi sum sum mangtharakpa yaowi. Jhulan matamda jhulan
esei fajana shakpasi madi sylhet ta fajan chathari. Kang sanaba
chathari. Mangtharakpa khara gi marakta maru oina folk ki
saruk penna leitre. Hana penna leirami. Pena shakpa leikhidre.
Khongjom parba shakpa bashak shakpa nupi pala shakpa kaya
mathang mathang mangtharakpa yaorak le. Masi ngaknaba
hotnadabdi natey. Aikhoi kana hotnari. Atopa sanskriti gi
safuna kalakpa na ngakpa ngamlak tabsu yaorak libani.¹⁰¹

[We are still following the culture and religion of Manipur. We celebrate the Rath Yatra festival and the wedding ceremony like the norm of a homeland. But day by day some cultures are on the process of degradation. This is all because of decreasing Manipuri population or by the influence of the dominant culture. The culture of singing ritual songs during *Jhulon* festival (one of the Hindu religious festivals celebrated in the month of august) still practicing in the Sylhet (place in Bangladesh). One of the Manipuri indigenous games, *Kang*, is still playing. Folk culture *Pena* (indigenous string musical

¹⁰¹“Travelogue Nungsibi Bangladesh (In Manipuri)”, by Sharatchand Thiyam, p.40.

instrument of Manipur), *Khongjom Parba*, *Bashak* (folk songs of Manipur), *Nupi pala* (women group singer) is in a most dangerous situation among the losing culture. We are trying very hard to protect all such endangering cultures. But sometimes it is unable to protect it if the power of another culture is very strong.]

Because of their non-recognition by the Indian government as Indian Diaspora, in many ways they are neglected. They did not get the advantages like the other groups of Indian Diaspora lives in Europe or North America. For the old and new Indian Diaspora, for the promotion of culture and religion the homeland gives much attention. For example, ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) mainly imparts the cultural knowledge by reaching every hook and corner of the world where Indian Diaspora formed. Similarly Arya Samaj or Sanatan Dharma or RSS (Rastrya Swayamsevak Sangh) plays a significant role in promoting Hindu religion abroad. Above this, the Indian TV channels are available to them all the time. There is no single report of visiting any scholar in Bangladesh in order to represent Manipuri culture or disseminate the ideology of Hindu religion. The below example shows that ICCR is contributing remarkable role in promotion and connection between the homeland and the Indian Diaspora:

The ICCR (Indian council of cultural relations) is engaged in the promotion of cultural relations among the PIOs in Reunion. The ICCR also engaged with the promotion of cultural relations with countries abroad. Though ICCR is not particularly Diaspora-specific yet countries in which PIOs constitute a significant part of the population naturally attract a large share of the ICCR's attention. The budgetary allocations for ICCR's cultural activities should be augmented in Reunion to enable it

to meet the aspirations of the PIOs and to deepen our linkages with the diaspora.¹⁰²

With the help of this, Indian diaspora is successfully maintaining their ethnic cultures and traditions in the utmost possible way. Even the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora explains about their cultural status:

Members of the Indian Diasporas are deeply conscious of their rich cultural heritage. They are aware that they are the inheritors of the traditions of the world's oldest civilization. Being part of such a rich legacy they are naturally keen to maintain their cultural identity. Deep commitment to their cultural identity has manifested itself in many ways and every component of the Indian Diasporas. There is probably no other Diaspora in the world, which has such an extraordinary diversity. It is as diverse as the ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in India itself. The original members of the Diaspora, therefore, carried with them the rich traditions of harmonizing different customs, practices, values and beliefs.¹⁰³

Even though they do not recognize as Indian, the homeland people merge with India, they do not have any negative feelings or think to denounce the religion or culture; instead they feel close to India just because of having similar culture with Meitei. M.C. Arunkumar observes the views of Manipuri in Bangladesh as: “most interestingly, the Meiteis in Bangladesh think the citizenship is quite a different thing from their cultural relation with their homeland which is in India today... Indian identity of the Meitei is not

¹⁰²“PIO in Francophone Reunion Island: Assimilation and identity”, by Ankita Bhattacharjee, in *Indian diaspora in Africa: A comparative perspective*, by Ajay Dubey, p.153.

¹⁰³ Cited in “Indian Diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania: Historical legacies and contemporary challenges”, by Rajneesh Kumar Gupta, in *Indian Diaspora in Africa: A comparative perspective*, edited by Ajay Dubey, p.47.

contrary to Bangladesh citizenship. Culturally we are more Indian and legally we belong to Bangladesh. These two are of equal values.”¹⁰⁴

The most unfortunate part is that, the Indian government is yet to approve to start a satellite channel for Manipuri language even though this language is recognized under 8th scheduled of Indian constitution as a regional language. Almost all the regional languages of India have 24 hours regional language satellite channel which can be used to promote culture, tradition or news of that particular region. This missing link brings another setback to Manipuris in Bangladesh. Relating to this, an opinion given in the editorial column of the regional newspaper of Manipur, *Poknafam*:

Karigumba Manipurigi oiba pung 24 gi satellite channel hangba tarabadi Manipuri gi oiba thauram sing mafam kayada uba fang gani. Maru oina bharat ki manungda leiriba Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram na chingba mafam kayada khundariba Manipuri sing na Manipuri culture, tradition, sports na chingba pumnanmak mayek seng na ujava fang gani. Bangladesh, Myanmar na chingba leibak sing dasu Manipuri kaya khundari. Karigumba satellite channel hangba tarabadi tongan tonganba leibak singda leiriba Manipuri sing nasu Manipuri gi oiba thauram sing uba fang gani.¹⁰⁵

[If there is a 24 hour satellite channel for Manipur many programs can be broadcast in Manipuri. This will help to impart cultural, traditional and sports information of Manipur especially to the Manipuris that resided in numerous parts of India like Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram. Even in Bangladesh and Myanmar, many Manipuris are also settled. If

¹⁰⁴“Meitei Diaspora and the identity politics”, by M.C. Arunkumar.

¹⁰⁵“Satellite channel gi taksinba (Demand for satellite channel)”, *Manipuri regional newspaper Poknafam*, 30/5/2013.

the satellite channel has been started, any Manipuris who ever settled in different countries may get the privilege to watch all these Manipuri programs.]

The main reason for endangering some of the cultural assets is linked with the history of India-Pakistan partition. Before partition exchange of cultural knowledge was practiced with Manipuris settled in neighboring states like Tripura and Cachar (Part of Assam). One of the Manipuris in Bangladesh shares the reason for degrading the cultural identity particularly based on partition of India as follows:

Bharat Pakistan khaidoktri ngei mamang dadi Cachar amadi Takhen (Tripura) dagi jagoi ras, pung tambiba oja kauduna jagoi esei pung tamnarami. Sylhet, Bhanuganj amasung Bisgao gi oja sing su Takhen, Cachar chatnarami. Kala gi lamda pithok pisin taunabata natana ningol fao thana rami. Nungairami matamdo khul da ramayan, mahabharat ki wari tanaba, khubak esei, bashak, udukhal, mangrati huranba chatpana chingba Meitei aikhoigi oiba punsi ama leirami...¹⁰⁶

[Before the partition of India and Pakistan, a teacher from Tripura, Cachar was hired to learn the Manipuri classical dance, *ras lila* and Mridangam. Even the teacher from Sylhet, Bhanuganj and Bisgao also visited in these places. There was an exchange of arts. Even their woman has been given for matrimonial alliances between the people of these places. It was such cheerful days. At that time we (Meitei) have our own life like listening Ramayana, Mahabharata and all the folk

¹⁰⁶“Banga Bondhu gi leibakta (In the land of Banga Bondhu)”, by Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh, p.15.

songs (*Khubak esei, bashak, udukhal*) in the Manipuri colony
by gathering together...]

Those who have enough knowledge about Manipuri art and culture are getting old and some are dying. So nowadays there is a great threat to the Meiteis in Bangladesh as there are no adequate number of teachers that can impart the knowledge of arts and culture. Every Bangladeshi Manipuri felt a great loss when veteran artist, Leichrambam Brajadhan was expired. He played a significant role in representing Manipuri arts and culture in Bangladesh. One can compare Leichrambam Brajadhan with Pandit Ootoo, an Indo-Mauritian Diasporic originated from Andhra Pradesh, came back to the homeland for the purpose of studying Telugu and Sanskrit. His 13 years of settlement in the homeland has made him to get enough knowledge and later shared his understanding, especially regional forms of Hindu worship and festivities of Andhra Pradesh to Telugu Diaspora in Mauritius. Similarly, Leichrambam Brajadhan, one of the enthusiastic Manipuri in Bangladesh was well experienced in the field of Meitei *pung* (Meitei Mridangam) and Manipuri dance. In a way, one can say that he was the one who promote Manipuri arts and culture in Bangladesh. He came back to Manipur for a few years just to learn Manipuri dance. Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh defined this well artiste in Bangladesh, Leichrambam Brajadhan as:

Meitei pung amadi jagoi gi guru ni. Manipuri jagoibu
bangladesh ta pak sana sandokhibasi oja asigi mapan nani.
Mahak na 1955 da Dhaka da pangthok khiba international
dance festival da Manipuri jagoi utkhi. Manipuri jagoi bu stage
da puthok pasi maduna ahanbani bangla leibak ta. 1965 da
mahak Dhaka gi Bulbul Lalit Academy da Manipuri jagoi gi
ahanba oja oina thabak taukhi. Manipur dasu chatuna guru
Amubi amasung guru Thambal gi mafam dagi makhal makha

kaya gi Manipuri jagoi tamkhibani. Kala asibu leibak sinba thung na san doknaba “Sylhet Manipuri Cultural Association” kauba sansthan amasu lingkhat khibani. Oja asigi jagoi troupe na Bangladesh ki mafam kayada toina chatuna show kaya utkhrabani.¹⁰⁷

[Guru of Manipuri *pung* (Mridangam) and dance. He performed Manipuri dance in international dance festival 1955, Dhaka. He was the first person who brought up the Manipuri dance up to the level where it could be performed on the stage in Bangladesh. He served as a first Manipuri dance teacher among the Meiteis in Bulbul Lalit Academy, Dhaka. He even went to Manipur to learn various types of Manipuri dances from Guru Amubi and Guru Thambal (well known artists of Manipur). He formed “Sylhet Manipuri cultural Association” for the welfare and development of Manipuri art and culture. He presented many programs in different places of Bangladesh.]



Photo: Performing Manipuri classical dance (*pung cholom*) at Sylhet

¹⁰⁷ “Banga Bondhu gi leibakta (In the land of Banga Bondhu)”, by Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh, p.14.



Photo: Audience watching Manipuri classical dance (*Pung Cholom*)

Though Manipuris in Bangladesh did not get any external support from India, without any complaints or raising any voice for their recognition of Indian government they try very hard to preserve their ethnic identity. The only place where they took the external support is from Manipur. They usually asked for support from the homeland by requesting them to send (Manipuri people whom they know) cultural groups that can share cultural knowledge and tradition to younger generations of Manipuris in Bangladesh. Likewise, recently according to their invitation some Manipuri cultural troupes visited to perform *Pung Cholom* (Classical dance of Manipur usually comprises of singer, Mridangam drummers and Conch Shell player. The songs of this classical dance are based on the divine love of Radha-Krishna and the drummer perform dance at the same time. It was started only after the Hinduisation in Manipur) for 426th Narottam Thakur's death anniversary conducted by "Sree Sree Radha Krishna Jagabondu Temple Committee", from 22-23 November 2013 at Shivganj Manipuri para Sylhet, Bangladesh.

One of the cultural performers who visited for this program says that:

...there were in total 13 people in that cultural troupe lead by Guru Meihabam Satyaban Singh, J. N. Manipur Dance Academy teacher. We perform 4 cultural programs in two different places of Bangladesh i.e., Sylhet and Dhamai. In order to organize this cultural program successfully, the Meitei community people in Bangladesh contributed money the amount they can, but they didn't get any financial assistance from Manipur Government or India Government. According to my experience they have great interest in anything related to homeland. Though they are the descendents of those who migrated during the seven year's devastation, they are more concern and conscious of their ancestral cultural identity than people of the homeland.

Based on this cultural show, a regional newspaper of Manipur called *Naharol gi Thoudang* reported that:

Hena pukning nungsi ningai oiba amana sylhet ki maru oiba Shivganj gi nupi macha leisabi sing aduna khul khul khuding gi makhoi masel pao faonaduna Meitei gi fajaraba fijol oiriba wakhei fi amasung mapal naiba fanek setuna mandir gi mamang da pareng pareng famduna Nat-Sankirtan gi babok leiteng amasu oiri.[The most touching thing is that all the Manipuri women of Shivganj came with traditional attire called *wangkhei fi* and *Mapal naiba* as they inform to one another from village to village. All of them sat in front of the temple as an audience to fulfill the program.]¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸“Bangladesh the Narottam Thakur dead anniversary pangthokhre”, by Manipuri regional newspaper *Naharol gi Thoudang*, 22/11/2013.

This shows that, the Manipuris in Bangladesh have interest and consciousness of their ancestral cultural identity even though some of them are endangered. The present cultural situation of Meitei in Bangladesh no less than the situation in the homeland.

Meiteilon among the Manipuri Diasporas in Bangladesh

According to Ravinder Barn, “Language is generally perceived to be inextricably intertwined with ethnicity and culture. It is generally perceived as a central vehicle for accessing a culture, constructing shared identities and defining out groups. Its dynamic and evolving nature is also recognized.”¹⁰⁹

Linguistic identity is one of the primary elements of all the other identity especially among the Diaspora. It is used to represent the individual in an ethno-national or ethno-regional level. Like Indian Diaspora which is one of the diverse and heterogeneous group, mainly used linguistic identity in order to represent their identity. For example, Indian Diasporics from Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar have recognized themselves as Telugus, Marathis and Bhojpurisin the Diasporas respectively. Similarly Meitei in Bangladesh used to define them as Manipuri diaspora as the language spoken by them is known as Manipuri or Meiteilon. M. N. Karna defines the most important characteristics of linguistic identity that help to understand how linguistic identity is used in the representation of the individual’s identity in ethno-national or ethno-regional basis in diasporic context: “the linguistic identity of a nation may remain intact even if its state boundaries are lost. A state may be geographically or politically divided but its language does not

¹⁰⁹“Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom: Second- generation parents’ views and experiences on heritage language transmission”, by Ravinder Barn, p.203.

break its promise. A nation remains intact if it maintains its distinctive linguistic tradition.”¹¹⁰

Steven Vertovec defined diaspora with three important points that includes: a) Diaspora as a social form, b) Diaspora as type of consciousness, c) Diaspora as mode of cultural production. Even though Manipuris in Bangladesh are conscious of their ancestral identity, they also consider the identity of the host society. Comparing to all the layers of identity, the feasibility to assimilate the linguistic identity is much faster than other layers of identity like culture, religion or values. That is the reason why usually Diasporas are bi-linguistic or multi-linguistic. Here we can give the example of Indian Diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania migrated during the indentured labour period and assimilated with the dominant society, but still prefer to use their mother language at home as:

Kiswahili is the most common language of communication in East Africa and most of the urban educated population is well-versed in English language. Interestingly, People of Indian Origin have a general understanding of both languages and use these languages for official purpose and while conversation with indigenous African. However, they prefer to speak languages borrowed from motherland at home and while talking to other Indian people. During the interaction with Indians in Kenya, I observed that Hindi has become the lingua-Franca among them for mutual interaction. They prefer to speak their mother tongue but if people of two linguistics

¹¹⁰“Language, Region and National identity”, by M. N. Karna, in *Nation and National identity in South Asia*, edited by S. L. Sharma, T. K. Oommen, p.83.

groups interact with each other they speak in Hindi instead of speaking in English and Kiswahili.¹¹¹

Similarly Manipuris in Bangladesh became bi-linguistic community due to their long period of stay in Bangladesh. A socio-linguistic survey on Manipuri (Meiteilon) speaker in Bangladesh conducted by Amy Kim and Seung Kim shows the clear cut status of Manipuri language among the Manipuris in Bangladesh. On the basis of their studies they got the result of Manipuri language status as:

- 1) Mother-tongue Meitei speakers consistently reported that the Meitei language is widely used in their villages. This is apparently true whether Meitei speakers are praying or conversing at home or with neighbors. Probably because Meitei is widely used in Meitei villages, this is seen as the most useful language to know in Meitei villages and as the language mothers should speak with their children.
- 2) Meitei children do appear to continue to speak Meitei as their best language, which is an indication that the Meitei language is not being lost. On the other hand, Meitei speakers acknowledge the need to know other languages, primarily Bangla. They tend to feel that Bangla should be the medium of education in primary schools, and that it is okay for their children to speak another language better than Meitei.
- 3) Because nearly all Meitei children attend Bangla-medium schools, it is very possible that children of the next generation will become increasingly fluent in Bangla. As a result, they will be less apt to use Meitei widely. Furthermore, because younger people are more literate in Bangla than in Meitei, it is likely that they will learn a broader

¹¹¹“Indian Diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania”, by Rajneesh Kumar Gupta, in *Indian Diaspora in Africa: A comparative perspective*, edited by Ajay Dubey.

vocabulary and become increasingly fluent in Bangla. Over time, this will be a threat to the vitality of the Meitei language in Bangladesh.¹¹²

The above data shows that Manipuris in Bangladesh are bilingual in nature. The social situation made them to bring this type of identity. And Diasporas are essential to be bi-lingual in order to adapt in the host society as well as to carry on their ancestral identity successfully as there is a strong connection between language, culture and religion (which are mentioned above). Janet Holmes in her work based on 'how to develop a bilingual society in New Zealand' expressed about the benefit of being bi-lingual by citing the quotes of Waite as: "bilingualism can offer major personal, social, economic and cultural benefits to New Zealand and New Zealanders".¹¹³

Despite being bi-lingual fluency in the host language is increased from generation to generation. As Rajneesh Kumar Gupta says that "...fluency in speaking Indian languages varies by generation of migration. As first generation migrants often consider Indian languages their mother tongue but second third generations of the Indian migrant community may not be as fluent in Indian languages."¹¹⁴

The major indication that shows Manipuri language (Meiteilon) is used only in oral communication is the evidence of not having single Manipuri writer among the Manipuri Diaspora. Literature is the basic need of protecting heritage language, culture and tradition.

¹¹²“Meitei (Manipuri) Speakers in Bangladesh: A Sociolinguistic Survey 2008”, by Amy Kim and Seung Kim.

¹¹³ Cited in “Keeping Tabs On Language Shift in New Zealand: Some Methodological Considerations”, by Janet Holmes.

¹¹⁴“Indian Diaspora in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania”, by Rajneesh Kumar Gupta, in *Indian Diaspora in Africa: A comparative Perspective*, edited by Ajay Dubey, p.50.

Manipuri language promoter, writer Sharatchand Thiyam, explained thoroughly about the interrelation between language and culture: “There are so many cultural or ritual program that used to perform by chanting mantras and hymns in our own language. If we neglect the simple words which are not even a literary term, one day there might not be anyone who can conduct our own ritual ceremony. In this way the cultural identities start losing and ultimately lead to extinction or transformation of culture.” This can happen easily among Diaspora compared to the native population.

Bangladeshi Manipuri Diaspora migrated when Manipur was busy in conflict with the Burmese and the war between the indigenous faith and the alien Hindu faith. Manipuri literature was completely set back for more than centuries even though it was very rich during pre-Hindu period. So there was a lack of Manipuri literature in the social baggage of Bangladesh Manipuri which was carried at the time of their physical movement. Their early life in Bangladesh has been just hand to mouth as there was no time to think of anything else other than earning for their livelihood. Bangla was the common medium for studies. That is how Manipuri language became a secondary language for them. They are highly assimilated with hostland from the linguistic point of view. There are a handful of initiators who have great interests in Manipuri language and absorbed their life to bring back from the endangering situation of Manipuri language. But they did not get enough material to read. As Shanta Khuman pointed out, the way of collecting Manipuri book because of non availability of Manipuri books after the establishment Tetai gao Rashid Uddin high school in 1958 (changed into Tetai gao public high school) as:

Whoever went to Manipur from Pakistan illegally brought one or two school or college magazines. We used to borrow those magazines. Due to the insufficient in term of quantity,

sometimes it tears into half. Most of the magazines are from D.M. College Manipur and Jiribam Higher secondary school magazine.¹¹⁵

The way they protect the cultural heritage, even have the same interest in the heritage language. They know that only after preserving the linguistic identity, it helps to develop artistic skills of writing Manipuri literature. For this, they have taken up some of the steps which are worth discussing here.

Steps taken up by Manipuris for the Development of Manipuri Language

One of the most significant incidents that bring revival to the development of Manipuri language among the Meitei of Bangladesh was the language movement agitated by native people against the Government of Pakistan on 21st February 1952, when Pakistan government decided to make Urdu as their national language. Many lives were sacrificed for the sake of mother tongue Bangla. From this incident, the United Nations declared 21st February as the International Language Day. Without fail, Bangladeshis observed this day every year. All such dedication extended by Bangladesh people for their mother tongue really inspires the Manipuri language promoter of Bangladesh, A. K. Sheram. From this inspiration, he thought of preserving and promoting Manipuri language gifted by the ancestor.

Nowadays the social status of Bangladeshi Manipuris has been improved than it was before. Many of them are in the respectable positions either in the government sectors or in the private sectors. Some of them even started living in the developed countries as a result of after twice migration. They can now find time to think for the development of Manipuri language. Many

¹¹⁵“Bangladesh ta Manipuri lal gi fibam amasung chaokahtnabagi thaurang (condition of Manipuri language in a Bangladesh and its developmental steps), by Shanta Khuman, p.12.

praiseworthy measures were taken up recently before it completely drowned into the Bangla society. The first step in this regard is the formation of an organization called 'Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad' in the year 1975. Gabriel Sheffer shared the advantages of forming an organization among the diaspora groups in the following way:

The diaspora organizations' maintenance functions include fund raising, carried out through general or special-purpose organizations, routine administration of cultural, economic, and social functions, such as schools and community centers, oversight of religious institutions, such as mosques, churches, synagogues, and theological schools, and supervisions of universities and colleges and research institutions.¹¹⁶

Every year *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad* organizes conferences by inviting prominent writers from the homeland with an aim to improve the status of Manipuri literature in Bangladesh. The letter sent to Manipuri writer Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh by *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad* as an invitation to the annual conference for the 1997 session reads as follows:

Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad ki 22 suba chahigi mifam February gi aroiba natraga march ki ahanba chayol da pangthoknaba sillangjari. Mifam sida saruk yabiranaba oja gi luching Manipuri sahitya parishad ki maikei dagi meoi ani ahum dang gi mihut ama Bangladesh ta lengbirak naba bartan taujari. Oja Nilakanta gi ming dasu tonganba chithi ama thaja

¹¹⁶“Stateless and state-linked diaspora”, in *Diaspora politics*, by Gabriel Sheffer, p.174.

khibani. Lakpagi chaorakpa matam tarik kahng hanbirak paga akhoigi mihut Akhaora checkpost ta okcharamgani.¹¹⁷

[Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad is going to organize the 22nd annual conference at the end of February or in the first week of March. We are inviting you to attend the conference as well as pleading you to come along with some other two or three writers of the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad under your supervision. We have sent a separate letter to Mr. Nilakanta (well known Manipuri writer). Could you please inform us the arrival date and time before hand if you have accepted our request, so that our people can wait in Akhaora (border area of Tripura and Bangladesh)].

This meeting continues for at least 2-3 days so that they can discuss thoroughly the current situation of Manipuri literature by analyzing the mistakes or the challenges faced by them in the host society at the time of taking up any steps for the development of Manipuri literature. Discussion is not the only program of this meeting. They organize some activities like symposium, paper reading sessions related to Manipuri literature as well as Manipuri poem recitation, that helps in understanding the Manipuri literature and act as an encouragement to younger generations who can pick up the art of writing. Some of the topics they discussed so far, are given below.

In the international conference on Manipuri literature conducted on 11th December 2009, discussed about the challenges in the development of Manipuri literature and culture. The program was followed by symposium in the form of Manipuri literature. The paper read out on the last day of the meeting are:

¹¹⁷“Banga Bondhu gi leibakta (In the land of Banga Bondhu)”, by Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh, p.1.

- 1) The evolution of Manipuri poetry in Assam (Assam da Manipuri seireng gi khongchat) by Dr. Naorem Bidyasagar from Assam.
- 2) The evolution of Manipuri literature in Tripura (Tripura da Manipuri sahitya gi khongchat) by L.Birmangol from Tripura.
- 3) The evolution of Manipuri sahitya in Bangladesh (Bangladesh da Manipuri sahitya gi khongchat) by Khoirom Kaminikumar from Bangladesh
- 4) The form of Manipuri poetry (Manipuri seireng gi saktam) by B.S Rajkumar from Manipur).

Seminar conducted in the annual session meets of the year 2004 reads papers on:

- 1) The evolution of Manipuri literature (Bangladesh Manipuri sahitya gi khong chat) by Bimbabati from Manipur.
- 2) Spelling of Manipuri language and challenges faced by Bangladesh writer and reader (Manipuri lull gi banan amasung Bangladesh ki ayiba - apaba singna mayoknariba samasya) by Kaminikumar from Bangladesh.

A thorough discussion and observation was made by giving comments on these topics whoever participated in the seminar. Sometimes they conducted Manipuri poem recitation for the encouragement of younger generations to contribute at least some role in the promotion of Manipuri literature in Bangladesh.

An active volunteer of Bangladeshi Manipuri, Kaminikumar share his happiness about the thumping success of reciting competition to Sharatchand Thiyam “Oja gi seireng Africa du khaktada seireng thibagi competition ama

Bisgao da pangthokhi. Onthokna nungaikhi. Achauba mai pakpa competition ama oikhi. [We had organized recitation competition just only the poem “Africa” in Bisgaon. It was a great fun and a kind of grand success competition.]¹¹⁸

They started opening library to make use of it by the local Manipuri people. The names of some of the libraries are ‘Beikunth Sharma, Kasim Ali library Bhanubil Majirgaon’, ‘Manipuri Pathghar run by Bisgao Manipuri club’ and ‘Meitei Lairik Pukei at Chota Damai’. These libraries do book collections that are based on Manipuri literature. Sometimes Manipuri writers also gifted them, the books written by them, whenever they make a visit.

Challenges Faced by Manipuris to Improve their Language Status

The dedication and hard work shared by some of the eminent young leaders of Bangladeshi Manipuri made it possible for carrying the Manipuri culture and literature in the path of development. Being clubbed together as a community like in the homeland, Manipuris in Bangladesh were easy to communicate and bring unity among them. This is one of the important factors for their success in the steps taken up by them. However, this success did not reach so easily. They had faced several troubles and objections in the initial stage. Khoirom Indrajit told the first and foremost practical work which was being resolved in the meeting held in Lamabazar under the guidance of A.K Seram, including the challenges met at that time:

...aikhoina angang oina Anantakumar Seram mayam na A.K
Seram hairiba Ananta da gi matung ilaga chen- chongba si
yaokhi. Matam duda meiteilon ngangba si yamna ekainarami.
Sahitya haibasi karino sansad lingkhatlaga kari taugadauribano

¹¹⁸“Nungsibi Bangladesh (Lovely Bangladesh)”, by Sharatchand Thiyam, p.84.

haibasi kana hang narami. Meitei masel marakata ling jel manadaba mayam ama leirami. Adubu eikhoina imalon gi damak ta hotnarasi haibaduna sansad ki mifam ama sylhet ta pangthok nanaba Lamabazar da leiba Manipuri mandop ta meeting ama famduna sahitya academy award fangkhraba oja Kunjamohan gi Alisha amagi mahao haibasi A.K Seram na dramatize tauraga utpa haina yanakhi. Loinana oja Kunjamohan gi ayaba lauraga Bharat tagi ayiba ama laka dauri haina sylhet ki Zindabazar dagi mic ta meiteilona publicity chatpa na chumgani haiduna tempo amada mic pansinduna publicity chatpa haukhi. Masina sylhet sahar da meiteilona laoduna chatpa ahanbani. Eikhoina laoduna chatpada mayang singna kari hairibano haiduna khamlaga hanglakhi. Adubu akhoina afao saraduna haidoktey. Laoba matamda yamna mayek sengna mafam matam drama bharat tagi lakadaba haibana chingba laobadagi makhoi na drama sana gadauri maley haibasi khang khi.¹¹⁹

[When we were very young, we started working under the supervision of Anantakumar Seram also known as A.K Seram. At that time, everyone felt so shy to speak Manipuri language (Meiteilon). Majority of Bangladesh Manipuri was ignorant about literature and it was a common question of what is the point of establishing *Sansad* from everyone. Lack of unity was the major problem to achieve support from them (Bangladesh Manipuri). But we still decided to work for mother language. Finally a meeting was held at *lamabazar* mandap (means congregation hall) and makes a decision to conduct sansad's conference at sylhet as well as decided to show a drama based on Manipuri novel "Alisha ama gi mahao" (A taste of an

¹¹⁹ Nungsibi bangladesh (Lovely Bangladesh) by Sharatchand Thiyam, p91

Alisha) written by academy award winner Kunjamohan (Manipuri based writer). We appointed A.K Seram to convert the novel in dramatize form. We thought that it will be suitable to make an announcement regarding the program we had been made, in Manipuri language (Meiteilon). So we took up a very surprising move like carrying microphone in tempo and made an announcement in Manipuri language regarding the plan we made by taking permission from Sir Kunjamohon and a visit of one of Indian writer in Bangladesh. They announced all sorts of information in Manipuri in one of Sylhet city, Zindabazar.]

The organizer had to undergo so many unbearable troubles but with heart and soul, keeping the faith of bringing success they were ready to fight any type of challenges. In the very beginning, most of the Bangladeshi Manipuri criticizes about their aim and vision. Some people came out and even pass very rude comments while announcing on the way. Khoirom Indrajit continued how the Bangladesh Manipuri welcomed them when they announced in Manipuri colony.

...meiteilona adumna laorakani haibasi kananasu thaja naramdey. Shivganj haiba khul aduda chatlaba matung da angakpa mawong ama thokhi. Aikhoina meiteilona ngangkhiba dudi makhoida ekaiba gumba ama thokhi. Chana na thingba haukhi. Nakhoina tauribadu namaidu ekaidra lamsida nakhoina meiteilon lao- khongduna tauribadu ekaidra hairakhi. Nayabazar da chatpadadi chin thiba mak natrabasu lao- khonglakpa yaokhi. Tasengbadi chatkhro haibagi mawongni makhoina laoribado. Akhoisu ngaihak laoramlaaga halakhi. Asigumba kaya kaya amani aikhoina theng narakliba...¹²⁰

¹²⁰“Nungsibi bangladesh (Lovely Bangladesh)”, by Sharatchand Thiyam, p.92.

[...no one believes that such an announcement will be made in Manipuri language (meiteilon). When we reached shivganj, a surprising incident was happened. Making publicity in Manipuri language was such an embarrassing moment for them. They really came out to ban our pronouncement. They even asked us whether we don't feel ashamed at making noise or shout in Manipuri language in this place. When we move to Nayabazar, they didn't use abusive words exactly but at least shouted us in a very harsh tone. Their responses really mean us to move back. Still we announced it for a while. These are some of the problem that we faced at that time...]

Though they achieved the wish of gaining support from the people, the financial condition of Bangladeshi Manipuris is still comparatively weak. This has made another setback in the development project of Manipuri language. No doubt they start producing some literatures like the journals and short stories, but the readers are very less. Without losing their interest they keep releasing books and journals.

If we compare the condition of Manipuri language before the establishment of *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad*, the status of Manipuri literature has been improved. But this does not mean that they are completely neglected Bangla language after the improvement of mother tongue. Some writers still writing in both the languages. One of the benefits of knowing both the language is that some writers write about the homeland which can be used as a means to represent who is a Meitei and what are the arts and culture of Meitei, like the book that published in 1996 titled “*Bangladesher Manipuri troyee sanskritir tribeni sangame*”, written by Bangladesh Manipuri writer A.K Seram. It is an edited book about Manipuri language, culture, and religion. The writer clearly states the core purpose of the book:

“...masina Bangladesh tadi aikhoi Manipuri bu saktakpagi kanaraba machak amadi piri. Maru oina bengalee sing nasu yamna singthanei. Sylhet ta leiba university amana aige lairik asibu makhoigi anthropology department ki reference book oina laukhatpiduna aikhoige Manipuri lol culture khangbagi tengbang ama oina lauri. [This helps to tell about who the Bangladeshi Manipuri is. Most importantly, it is like by many Bangalee. In one of the universities at Sylhet it is used as a reference book in the Anthropology department to know about Manipuri language and culture.]¹²¹

So far they have published number of books, among them majority are poetry and monthly journals. The capability to publish journals and books shows the interest and enthusiastic nature of the Bangladeshi Manipuris, after facing so many hardships.

¹²¹“Nungsibi Bangladesh (Lovely Bangladesh)”, by Sharatchand Thiyam, p.34.

CHAPTER-4

CONCLUSION

Migration is not just a mere physical movement, it also carries the socio-cultural baggages of the homeland to the new society. The ancestral belonging is one of the major sources to make them think of the homeland throughout their life. Such consciousness can bring an everlasting connection between homeland and hostland and thereby helps them to preserve and maintain the ethnic identities. This is the present scenario of Manipuris in Bangladesh, despite not getting the privilege to be Indian Diaspora, the way of preserving and maintaining ethnic identities by Bangladeshi Manipuris is an example to show that ethnic identity can indeed bring connection with the homeland.

The present dissertation is divided into four chapters. The main purpose of the first chapter was to describe briefly understanding the meaning of the Diaspora by using the definitions of Diaspora given by well known scholars such as Robin Cohen and William Safran. It also described about how the concept of Diaspora has been expanded over time and the connection between migration and ethnic identity, followed by analyzing the current ethnic identities of Manipuris in Bangladesh, by giving a brief history of their migration. In a way it is very ironical that Manipur is a part of India but not the Manipuris in Bangladesh. For this reason Manipuris in Bangladesh have been totally neglected by the Indian government. All such phenomena are discussed in the chapter along with the reason for not being officially recognized by the Indian government. It also presents the objectives, methodologies, limitations and the chapterisation.

The second chapter of this dissertation deals with the histories of two different groups of Diasporas, i.e. Indian Diaspora and Manipuri Diaspora. In order to have more clarity, it also described some of the geopolitical history of Manipur. As the root causes of Manipuri migration was the political persecution and aggression created by neighbouring country Burma. The main motives of their migration has been to search for the safe place. Hence, they are mostly the asylum seekers, however, according to the expanding concept of Diaspora, they can be included under the rubric of 'Diaspora'. On the other hand, the history of Indian Diaspora consists of various types and each type has different patterns of migration. From the early period of migration itself, the main reasons of Indian migration is for economic purpose. But there are vast differences between the pre-independence and post-independence migration. The early period of Indian migrants became victims of harassment from colonial rule. They suffered their life in many ways after migration, which is contrary to the Manipuri Diaspora. The chapter shows that the history of Diaspora is consists of pain, sorrows and griefs.

The main theme of this dissertation is being discussed in the chapter three. It begins with the concept of ethnic identity given by different scholars. Here it also depicted identity as a multi-layered element which can be defined from various contexts. Analyzing the ancestral ethnic identity of Manipuris in Bangladesh and finding it out the level of assimilation and preservation of ethnic identities are the essential components of this chapter. It also described the political history of Manipur which is crucial in order to know who the Manipuris in Bangladesh are.

For not being able to contact directly with Manipuris in Bangladesh, this work has been relied on three travelogues and newspaper reports along with interviewing the respondents who visited Manipur over last six months. All the travelogues were written by Manipuri writers from Manipur and these

were written only after meeting with the Manipuris in Bangladesh. The important travelogues are *Banga Bondhu gi Leibakta* by Thokchom Ibohanbi Singh, *Nungsibi Bangladesh* by Sharatchand Thiyam and *Bangladesh Khongchat* by Kesho Singh Irengbam. All were written in Manipuri language. The main purposes of the visits by these writers are similar, as they have visited with reference to the *Bangladesh Manipuri Sahitya Sansad* annual conference. The writer Thokchom Ibohanbi traveled there in 1997, followed by Sharatchand Thiyam in 2004 and Kesho Singh Irengba in 2009. Though they are travelogues, they focus mostly on the life of Manipuris in Bangladesh instead of giving more preference about the beauty of the place. Though they visited during different periods but the thoughts, ideas status and maintenance about the Manipuri culture and tradition is almost same. This shows that Manipuris in Bangladesh are still preserving the ancestral ethnic identities. The quotations and comments (in the travelogues) were mainly taken from people who are above 30 years of age.

We can conclude that the present ethnic identity of Manipuris in Bangladesh is more or less similar to the homeland. Language is one of the markers of ethnic identity which is assimilated in utmost level at one point of time. But the present generation ignored this assimilation aspect and taken many steps to bring back the ancestral language alive. Being not an Indian, bring so many disadvantages in their life as so far they do not have any homeland government support. They can seek support and help when they need. This shows that proper homeland is one of the basic needs of every diaspora. If the ethnic identity is the necessary element to build nation then why cannot they become an Indian diaspora? No matter what they are, they still have an emotional attachment to the place of their origin, that is the homeland 'Manipur'. That is the reason why they can maintain connections with Manipur. The dissertation would like to conclude by saying that ethnic identity is one of the important ways to keep in touch with the homeland.

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Annexure-1

List of the book publish by Manipuri writers of Bangladesh (Source:
Bangladesh ki khongchat ta)

Sl. No.	Name of the books	Types of book	Writer/Editor	Year of publication
1	Basanta kunipal gi leirang	Poetry	K. Seram	1982
2	Bangladesh ki Manipuri seireng	Collection of poems	K. Seram (Editor)	1990
3	Mang mapei marakta	Poetry	Seram Nirranjan	1995
4	Wakhal gi nachom	Poetry	Hamom Pramod	1995
5	Manipuri saktak khudam	Collection of prose	K. Seram (Editor)	1999
6	Leinam yaodrabi leirang	Poetry	Sanaton Hamom	2000
7	Ek basanteer valbasha	Translated poem	Mutum Apu (Editor)	2001
8	Nongaubi	Short story	K. Seram	2001
9	Thawai gi nungsirei	Poetry	Sanaton Hamom	2003
10	Machu naiba mang	Prose	Khoirom Indrajit	2003
11	Atoppagi pirang	Poetry	Seram Nirranjan	2004
12	Leirang gi leirang	Poetry	Mutum Apu	2004
13	Echel Iraokhol	Collection of poem	Seram Nirranjan, N. Jogeshor Apu (Editor)	2004
14	Enaphi	Poetry	Khoirom Indrajit	2005
15	Mongpham thamoigi nungsiba	Poetry	Meishnam Rajesh	2005
16	Natei chadraba prithvi	Poetry	Seram Nirranjan	2005
17	Mang marakta	Poetry	Sanaton Hamom	2006
18	Malang gi atiya	Poetry	K. Seram	2007
19	Wakhal gi mangal	Poetry	Imodam Rabin	2007
20	Farangjai wakhal	Prose	Seram Nirranjan	2007
21	Angakpa malem	Poetry	Imodam Rabin	2009