



Constitutional provision of languages: A case study of Tribal Languages and Literature in Manipur-India

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ABSTRACT

The Constitution of India, enacted and adopted on 26th November 1949, is not just a supreme political and legal document, but also an instrument of social and economic transformation. The document, *inter alia*, assures to protect and promote the interests of all communities within the territories of India. While every citizen of India is equal before law, special facilities are given to certain categories of people, in the form of affirmative action. Realising the distinctive and unique cultural and linguistic identities of the Tribal people, the Constitutional safeguards are provided to protect and preserve them. Cultural, linguistic and religious minorities' rights are part of enforceable fundamental rights. However, the Constitution has recognised a set of 22 languages only and placed them in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. While these languages enjoy higher status in comparison to the unrecognised languages, the development of the latter is left to the concerned linguistic minority group and at the mercy of the State governments. The paper is an attempt to study some of the issues with regard to the constitutional provision and the subsequent growth and development of languages and literature as well with reference to the tribal people of Manipur.

Key Words: *Constitution, Safeguards, Affirmative Action, Fundamental Rights, Minorities, languages.*

Introduction:

The Constitution of India, drafted by the Drafting Committee led by legal luminary Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, was adopted and enacted by the Constituent Assembly on 26th November 1949 after a thorough discussions and deliberations. It is one of the lengthiest written constitutions in the world. It has guaranteed to the states and the citizens powers and rights within their areas. In Part III of the Constitution, the citizens are provided a set of enforceable fundamental rights. The Constitution has provided minorities rights and also sufficient safeguards to the scheduled tribes. Article 19 of the Constitution providing to the citizens 'Right to Freedom of movement throughout the country and right to reside and settle in any part of the country' ensures that the 'distinctive culture and tradition of the tribals' are safeguarded. 'The entry of outsiders in tribal areas is restricted to protect the distinctive culture, language, customs and manners of scheduled tribes and to safeguard their traditional vocation and properties against exploitation'¹.

The Provisions:

At the time of the adoption of the Constitution, there were four different categories of states, Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D. As there was demand for creation of linguistic states especially from the Telugu speaking people of the then Madras State, the Central Government appointed States Reorganisation Commission led by Fazl Ali Commission. “This commission broadly accepted language as the basis of reorganisation of states. But it rejected the theory of ‘one language-one state’. Its view was that the unity of India should be regarded as the primary consideration in any redrawing of the country’s political units recommended creation on linguistic basis, but not ‘one language-one state’.”² Further, ‘the commission suggested the abolition of the four-fold classification of state under the original Constitution’³. Accordingly, by 7th Constitutional Amendment Act (1956), the distinction between Part-A and Part-B states was done away with and Part-C states were abolished. A state might have a dominant language but not one language. This type of state creation led to a state having a number of linguistic groups, normally one dominant language and a number of linguistic minorities. As most of the states in India are composed of different communities and are multilingual, the Constitution makers had addressed this problem by providing ‘Cultural and Educational rights’ to the minorities. Article 29 of the Constitution provides that (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them. According to Article 30 (1), all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. (1A) In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, referred to in clause (1), the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause. (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

A number of provisions in the Constitution and the ‘Official Languages Act’ deal with language policy. In India there are broadly three types of languages, namely, Schedule Languages, non-Schedule languages and Classical languages. The Constitution stipulated that English and Hindi would be used for the Union's official business for a period of fifteen years (Article - section 343(2) and 343(3)). After that time, Hindi was supposed to become the sole official language of the Union. It proved impossible to replace English with Hindi, however, because of strong opposition from the southern states, where Dravidian languages were spoken. They felt that the federal government was trying to impose Hindi across the country, including the south, and preferred to continue using English, which they found more ‘acceptable’ because, unlike Hindi, it was not associated with any particular ethnic group. Later, the *Official Languages Act* legally established Hindi and English as the languages used in Congress, while leaving states and territories free to choose their own official languages. Like every Act of Parliament, this Act too, was adopted in English and Hindi⁴.

The Schedule languages in the beginning were 14, after 92nd Amendment of 2003, the number has increased to 22 languages. Out of these 22 languages, Assamese, Bodo, and Manipuri are North Eastern languages. Among these Manipuri is the only language having its own script. North East has also a high number of non-schedule languages or dialects.

Reorganisation of States on linguistic basis and placing 22 languages listed under the Eighth Schedule having special status and allowing them dominance over *other* minority languages has led to a complex situation. Furthermore, some languages are the majority in one state and a minority in another, leading to

two different types of minority languages: a) minorities that are a majority in some other state and b) minor minorities that are not dominant in any state. In addition, the Constitutional safeguards prescribed are also only declarative in nature and therefore cast no burden on the State to implement them.

While all provisions related to language can be found in Article 243 to 251 of Part XXVII, Article 343 declares that the official language of the Union would be Hindi in the Devanagari script. Article 345 permits the states and Union Territories to have their own official language that could be used for all official purposes of the states. However, the language in use in the state should be the one that at least 15 per cent of the population speaks. This article also guarantees that 'provided that until the Legislature of the State otherwise provides by law, the English language shall continue to be used for those official purposes within the State for which it was being used immediately before the commencement of this Constitution'. Article 346 on the other hand states that 'if two or more states agree that the Hindi language should be the official language for communication between such States, that language may be used for such communication'. Furthermore, according to Article 347, special provisions can be made by the President, if he is satisfied that substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by the State, direct that such language shall be officially recognised throughout the State or any part thereof for such purposes as the president chooses to specify. This rule thereby, allows other minority languages for official use in any province. In addition, it declares that a state should be recognised as 'unilingual' if only when any one language group constitutes 70 per cent or more of the total population and should be recognised bilingual if any minority group is over 30 per cent for administrative purposes.

The languages spoken in India could be broadly placed in a hierarchical order showing the status they enjoy as shown in the following Table ⁵:

Hierarchical Ordering of languages

First Tier (Official Languages of the Union)	Hindi and English	English enjoys a special status even though it is an associate official language. In spite of consistent efforts by the union to replace Hindi as the pan India official language. Even after 63 years of Independence English is still used in all public domains.
Second Tier	State official languages listed under ES e.g. Bengali, Tamil, Kannada etc. and Hindi due to its role as an official language in some Northern States of India e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar etc.	These languages are powerful in their respective states/regions. These languages in due course are the ones that enforce absolute compliance from all the other speech communities in their region. These are the languages that actually threaten the survival of the languages that are mentioned in the fourth tier

Third Tier	Other language communities in a state but not the official state languages because they have fewer speakers than the dominant state/regional languages. E.g. Tulu, Coorgi speakers in Karnataka state	Even though these languages only come second to the dominant state/regional language they still enjoy a special status and recognition from the State Governments because the members of these speech communities have better socioeconomic conditions and in some case a considerable literary history.
Fourth Tier	Indigenous Languages spoken by the aboriginal communities in India E.g Naga, Ho etc.	These speech communities are generally influenced by the dominant languages and cultures leading to bilingualism and multilingualism. The use of the mother tongue is generally restricted to fewer domains decreasing the opportunities for speakers to use their own mother tongue and gradually get assimilated into dominant languages if enough care is not taken by the state.

Explaining the table, Vanishree ⁶ has said ‘Most of the minor languages are spoken by the aboriginal/indigenous populations termed as ‘adivasis’ or ‘tribals’’. Tribe commonly called as the Scheduled Tribe in Indian context is an administrative and legal term to label some ethnic groups based on their socio-economic status, and religious and cultural customs in order to give special attention to them as mandated by the Constitution.

Manipur Context:

Manipur is a home to different ethnic groups with a variety of tongues and tribes. The dominant language of the state is Manipuri which is a scheduled language. The Manipur Official language Act was enacted in Manipur Assembly in the year 1979⁷. According to the Act, Manipuri is recognized as the Official language of Manipur. Government has issued many orders to implement the statutory provisions.

There are 37 communities having their own languages or dialects. Except Manipuri and Nepali, all are non-scheduled languages. The people of the state speak 37 different languages. Manipuri – the Meiteilon is the State official language and is spoken by the Meiteis and the Meitei Pangals as their mother tongues. Of the 37 native languages spoken in Manipur, 35 are tribal languages. They are Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru Chothe, Gangthe, Hmar, Inpui (Kabui), Koirao (Thangal), Koireng, Kom, Kharam, Lamkhaeng, Liangmai (Kacha Naga), Mao, Maram, Maring, Mate, Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Paumai, Purum, Ralte, Ruangmei (Kabui), Sahte, Sema, Simte, Tangkhul, Thangal, Thadou-Kuki, Vaiphei, Zou, Zeme (Kacha Naga). These are not only languages, but are the storehouses of the indigenous custom, culture and history of the people which are the beautiful integral parts and fundamental elements of the emotional integrity of Manipur.

Of the 35 tribal languages, as of today, only 10 have been approved as Major Tribal Dialects of Manipur. They are Hmar, Kom, Mao, Mizo (Lushai), Paite, Ruangmei (Kabui), Tangkhul, Thadou-Kuki,

Vaiphei, and Zou. Most of the remaining 25 tribal languages might become endangered if proper measures are not taken to promote them. Even the 10 approved languages in school education, suffer due to apathy of the state government. The Government of Manipur is constitutionally bound to provide medium of instruction in the educational institutions in the mother tongue. Article 350A of the Constitution says, 'It shall be the endeavour of every State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups'. This will be one of the best ways to develop the language. The Constitutional provision means, the state must take steps:

- a) To provide adequate facilities for instructions through mother tongues/minority languages at (i) primary stage of education and (ii) secondary stage of education;
- b) To provide adequate number of text books of mother tongues at (i) primary stage of education and (ii) secondary stage of education;
- c) To provide adequate number of teachers to teach mother tongues at (i) primary stage of education and (ii) secondary stage of education;
- d) To set up proper machinery at (i) State level, and (ii) district levels;
- e) To implement all the schemes of safeguards for linguistic minorities;
- f) To establish a Language Academy for all the tribal language groups

It is the duty of the state government through various authorities, particularly, the Education Department, Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM), Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM), Tribal Literature Societies, Tribal Research Institute (TRI) Manipur, etc. In Manipur, in the first place, only 10 of the total 35 tribal languages have been used in primary, secondary level education. Few of them are also offered at the Higher Secondary level and Under Graduate level. None of them is offered at the Post Graduate level of study. The children of the remaining 25 tribal language groups are deprived of the opportunity of learning in their mother tongues in the school ⁸.

Safeguards for Linguistic Minorities as given by The 44th Report of the Commissioner Linguistic Minorities (2005-2006) are:

- a. Translation and publication of important rules, regulations, notices, etc. into all languages, which are spoken by at least 15% of the total population at district or sub-district level;
- b. Declaration of minority languages as second official language in districts where persons speaking such languages constitute at least 60% of the population;
- c. Receipt of, and reply to, representations in minority languages;
- d. Instruction through mother tongues/minority languages at the Primary stage of education;
- e. Instruction through minority languages at the Secondary stage of education;
- f. Advance registration of linguistic preference of linguistic minority pupils, and inter-school adjustments;
- g. Provision for text books and teachers in minority languages;
- h. Implementation of Three-language formula;
- i. No insistence upon knowledge of State's Official Language at the time of recruitment. Test of proficiency in the State's Official Language to be held before completion of probation;
- j. Issue of Pamphlets in minority languages detailing safeguards available to linguistic minorities;
- k. Setting up of proper machinery at the State and district levels ⁹.

Many of these provisions are not implemented by the Government of Manipur as alleged by Council of Tribal Languages & Literature Societies, Manipur (CTLLSM). There is no committee at the state level for monitoring the implementation of the safeguards. Directorate of Education is in charge of the implementation. Joint Director (Language Cell) is the Nodal Officer. At the district level, the Zonal Education Officers look after this work. There is hardly any publicity for the safeguards.¹⁰

The fund available for their development for translation and text book writing is very meagre. While text books of Hindi, English, Manipuri, Social Sciences, Environmental Studies, Mathematics, etc. are brought out by BOSEM and COHSEM, at the State expenses, the Tribal Literature Societies alone are responsible for production of mother tongue text books at their own expenses with partial financial

assistance from the State Government through Tribal Research Institute (TRI). The Tribal Literature Societies have all types of work from developing, translating text books, printing them stocking, distributing and storing the stocks at the house of President or Secretary, to set questions for various types of exams at the school level, TET and also examine them. For all these, they have very little infrastructure, stationery etc. 'Manipur Government, under TRI is providing Rs.8 lakhs (4:4 State + Centre fund) for 10 approved languages for school text book printing at a flat rate of Rs.25,000/- per text book for 32 approved textbooks for 2010-11 and Rs.29,000/- per textbook was sanctioned for 2011-12 under the same department whereas the actual needs for printing a single textbook is around Rs. 1 lakh.' (CTLLSM p.41) 'Also there is an allocation of Rs.1 lakh in the Budget of the Department of Education (S) Manipur for 2011-12 for purchase of books of tribal languages. This is the entire allocation of fund in the Budget of Education Department for all the 35 tribal language groups in Manipur'. If the Government is serious of preserving and promoting the tribal languages, it is estimated that Rs.200 lakh per annum for the 35 languages are required.

Total Literacy Campaign and Saakshar Bharat Mission 2012: The national flagship programme known as Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) was implemented in Manipur since 2002 and Saakshar Bharat from 2010. These two national programmes are to impart reading, writing and calculation capabilities to the illiterate adults especially woman adults from 15 years of age and above. All the major language groups in the State are picked up for implementation of TLC and SBM and the primers are prepared in these languages. But these two schemes are not properly implemented in the hill districts of Manipur¹¹.

As regards to the teachers for teaching the tribal languages in schools and colleges, no trained teachers in the concerned languages are appointed by the Government. Teaching of tribal languages is done with the understanding of community, serving in various private or Government colleges. The teachers take these extra classes apart from their normal workload in their own subjects, without any remuneration. No regular teachers are recruited for tribal languages. It becomes impossible to provide language teachers, as no Trained Graduate Teacher or Post Graduate Teachers are available for any of the language subject. The Government did conduct TET exams for recruiting teachers in tribal languages, but it was said by the candidates that it was far easier to pass in other optional subjects than tribal languages except for Mizo. There was still controversy over the spelling and tones among people of same language settled in different parts of the state. Moreover, differences occur on denominational basis regarding spelling and tones. The successful candidates in the TET exams also were not qualified in the language subject but in other major subjects. Such teachers would not be able to do justice to teach the language. Further, all these teachers are posted in Government schools whose performance is dismal. Most of the parents in Manipur desire to send their children to private English medium schools, where tribal languages are not taught. The parents and the students simply felt it as waste of time and energy to study in mother tongue. Also the craze for English education, the desire of the parents to see their children converse in English and the vast scope English language offers to people compel them to choose English medium of education than through their own mother tongue. English, formerly perceived as a library language and the language of higher education is now in demand by every quarter as a means of progress and the key to a better life. As Graddol points out, the language which was a 'key part of the mechanism of exclusion because of its very unequal distribution in society' is now seen as a means of inclusion¹². The English language in India today is both an admired and a hated phenomenon. On the one hand, there is an increasing demand for the language which associated with progress and development, while on the other the language is perceived as a killer of native or indigenous languages. Deprived sections of the society perceive the language as an instrument for progress.¹³ This is very much true in case of Manipur. Most of the tribal students study in English medium schools than in mother tongue.

The Commissioner of Linguistic Minorities has remarked in the 44th Report that '... there was no sanctioned post for teaching tribal languages. However, any teacher of the school whose mother tongue is one of the recognised languages is assigned to teach the language'¹⁴. Most often, the students in colleges offering Tribal language study by themselves. Sometimes if Tribal teacher or lecturer in English or Economics or Humanities is available, he/she is given the additional classes apart from his normal teaching

assignment to teach his or her language, even if he/she has no knowledge in his or her own language and literature. In such a situation, it is everyone's guess how a language can be promoted.

At the same time, Manipur is the only state in India offering highest number of non-scheduled languages at the school level. According to 44th Report, 'Ten languages viz, Mao, Rongmei, Kom, Vaiphei, Mizo, Zou, Tangkhul, Hmar, Thadou-Kuki and Paite are taught as language subjects; the first four from class 1 to 5; Mizo and Zou from class 1 to 10; and last four from class 1 to 12.'¹⁵ Few of them like Hmar, Thadou-Kuki, Paite and Mizo are also offered in Undergraduate course under Manipur University.

Status of Manipuri Language: Manipur is a miniature of India. It is beautiful multilingual state with a unity of 38 different ethno-cultural communities. Manipuri is the only language in the Tibeto-Burman family, with its own script, nearly 2000 years old. It is one of the languages in the Eighth schedule of the Constitution. According to Prof. Awadesh Kumar Mishra, Director, Central Institute of Indian Languages Mysore, 'the inclusion of Manipuri in the 8th schedule gives recognition of that language and giving more emphasis and producing materials in each and every aspect of human endeavours in that language only gives more laurel to the language.'¹⁶ Manipuri language was using the Bengali script since the adoption of Hinduism by the Meiteis. After the inclusion of Manipuri in the 8th schedule, the original Manipuri script (Meetei Mayek) has been adopted as the only script for Manipuri language in place of Bengali script and introduced in all the schools of the state from Classes I and II from the academic year 2006. Every year one class is added and in the 2013, up to Class IX. It will go on till the script of Manipuri language is completely switched over to Meetei Mayek. Even though, the process started late, transcription of all available Manipuri books, records, periodicals, papers etc. are taken up.¹⁷ Now Manipuri students in Colleges and Universities in Manipur are also writing their undergraduate and post graduate examinations in Meetei Mayek. There is enough text books transcribe in Meetei Mayek and has been kept ready for students after replacing the three century old Bengali script. There is also a move by the Government of Manipur to get Manipuri declared as a 'classical language' together with Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. Manipuri as a scheduled language enjoys Constitutional benefits, such as an M.P from Manipur can speak and deliver his speech in Manipuri language. An M.P. whose mother tongue is Manipuri can participate in Language Commission and Committee, according to Article 344 (1) of the Constitution. Candidates are allowed to choose Manipuri as an optional paper for UPSC exams. The Central government grants can be availed for development of the language. There are also other benefits such as broadcasting in Manipuri in AIR and TV Delhi, preparation of syllabus and teaching aid in NCERT, New Delhi, etc.

Growth and development of tribal language and literature:

While the Manipuris (Meiteis) had their own script from the very early times there literature is very rich. As they mastered the art of writing, they developed the habit of maintaining records of their past in the form of royal chronicles, clan genealogies and other literary works that covered different branches of knowledge. They were maintained in the form of manuscripts written in the old script. These manuscripts cover varied subjects such as traditional faith, mythologies, rituals, astrology, description of nature, genealogies, description of different hills found in Manipur, study of clouds and so on. Even in the absence of scribes to keep records of their ways of life, a clear impression of their civilization and cultural status can be gathered from their burials, dwelling houses, household articles, tools, weapon, musical instruments, paintings and also from folk memories¹⁸.

The Bengali script was one of those which spread to the present northeast region of India by 1390 A.D. However, Manipuri language with its Bengali script never made a real dent into the tribal society due to certain historical reasons. In this context it is pertinent to make a quick reflection of the history of the tribal people of Manipur. Prior to the coming of the British the tribal people had an exclusive and independent political existence of their own. They had never been within an integrated political structure or a unified administrative network of the kings of Manipur. In spite of various successful military

expeditions against the hill tribes, the Meitei kings were unable to institutionalize their political domination over the former. While some of the subjugated hill tribes owed mere allegiance to the Meitei kings and paid tributes, much of the tribal pristine mobility remained unaffected. They lived an independent way of living. It was only after the arrival of the British and the subsequent establishments of their foothold on the soil of Manipur, the tribal people were brought under their political domination. While in history of the world imposing forces impose their language and culture, tribes in particular are at the receiving end of all major languages and culture. Nevertheless, the tribal people of Manipur irrespective of the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin continue to maintain their distinct identity for ages without being affected by external forces. Despite the absence of their own script, the tribal people did not adopt the Bengali scripts, which has been widely in use among the Meiteis of the valley.

Tribal Oral literature: Oral literature of the tribal people has many wise sayings, proverbs, fables and folk songs. It is rich in adverbial phrases and idioms. Proverbs in their wide range provide moral and ethical idea. Oral or folk literature, served as one of the most interesting insights into the lives of a community. It encompasses the valid expression of certain aspects of mythology, history, religion and cultural milieu of the people concerned. These ideas are mostly instructions upon behavioural patterns and others signify corporate ideals upon setting order and discipline in society. Maxims in rambling expressions are addressed in narratives upon the household or a group, sometimes to the accompaniment of harp and drum. There are proverbs, which had been treasured through generations and transmitted from father to son, in a great magnitude and enormity of visualization and thoughts. In the past this vision and thoughts are the testified portraits of the oral literature. The stored memories of listeners were an established form of device. Every night in the traditional tribal village was passed in imparting ethical values in a rich garb of proverbs to young minds in each dormitory. All these ethical lessons, which had profound in nature had a scintillating effect as it instills tastes and passions to the young for adventures and noble deeds.

Christianity on tribal literature: India is a wonderful mosaic. Northeast India is a home to more than 200 languages and about 1000 (one thousand) different dialects are spoken. However, many of them face serious threat of extinction, as they are oral and have no written literature, nor are taught in schools. While the Baptist missionaries patronized Assamese, Garo and most languages of Manipur and Nagaland, the Presbyterian missionaries patronized Khasi and Mizo. Since their arrival in northeast India in 1890, the Christian missionaries both Protestants and Catholic devoted time and energy to the promotion of indigenous languages wherever they worked.

It is to note here that for a considerable length of time the tribal people of Manipur remained unaffected by the progress of modernization. In the very beginning the conservative Kuki chiefs in particular and the tribal chiefs in general rejects Christianity and western education. They simply gave importance and took pride in performing the 'Feast of Merit' (hunter's ritual)- a ceremony for killing a large number of animals in wild games, and several others like a ceremony for a bountiful harvest and – a ceremony related to performing with the heads of enemy as trophy of prowess (Great warrior's ritual). The performance of these ceremonies by a great hunter involved killing of a Mithun and holding of a grand feast associated with the erection of memorial pillars or a stone monolith¹⁹. In fact, Ignorance, superstition, isolation and living a life of constant warfare often leading to destruction of life and property was what it characterize the tribal people in the pre-Christian dispensation.

With the entry of missionaries among the tribal area the scene had began to change. It brought upon the socio-economic and socio-educational transformation and injected a new spirit into the life of the tribal people which was never known before. The art of reading and writing which is generally termed as 'Education' was introduced in the tribal areas by the western missionaries. Thus, the pioneering effort to develop the tribal people of Manipur had started with the introduction of education and health services as part of their missionary activities in the interior part of the hill areas in the state. However, due to numerous problems like ignorance, poverty, communications, traditional belief and rituals, etc., the important tool of

modernization or civilization could not spread fast and it took many decades in the first half of the 20th century to produce a 1% literacy population among the tribal people ²⁰. As of now, there is no doubt that some major tribal groups have made rapid progress in terms of languages and enriched their respective vernacular literature. Despite many inconsistencies and loopholes at present, the major tribal literature generally is moving ahead towards perfection.

Growth of written literature (the Roman Character): The Christian contribution to development of languages in the northeast goes as far back as 1830s. Christianity is largely responsible for providing a script to many oral tribal languages and for the creation of essential linguistic infrastructures such as grammars, dictionaries and basic literature for the development of local languages. Even the major languages of the region such as Assamese were salvaged from extinction by Christian missionaries. In this effort to preserve and promote indigenous cultures, Christian missionaries have promoted the preservation of cultural artifacts, establishments of museums along scientific lines in different parts of the region. In Manipur the diachronic linguistic studies of the tribal ethnic groups revealed that they had no literature of their own. They were reduced to writing in the Roman script.

Christianity took a fairly long time to come to North East India, but it took unassailable lead to change the region for the better. The growth and development of literature among the tribal society beginning from the 20th century is one of the greatest impacts of Christianity. With the switch-over from traditional religious beliefs to Christianity the outlook of the people had also began to change. This changed outlook and attitude in its turn produced enormous literary publications. The new religion has done so much for the shaping of the tribal social structure.

Since Ukhrul became the first Mission centre or station of William Pettigrew, the Tangkhuls had the advantage of being ahead in many respects especially in literature when compared to their tribal counterparts. The establishment of mission schools, churches and the running of Sunday schools is a case in point. Pettigrew introduced the Roman script and translated initially the scriptures of the Gospel of Mathew and the Epistle to the Romans in Tangkhul dialect. The former is printed and sufficient copies were also made ready for the study of the Intermediate Bible lessons for the year 1910. The Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Corinthians were also kept ready for distribution to the people in 1911. Even the second edition of six Tangkhul Naga school textbooks has been issued at the expense of the state. Then in 1918 Rev. William Pettigrew had made great achievement in terms of literary work when his book on Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary and the whole chapter of New Testament translated in Tangkhul dialect by himself got published. It was only in the late 1960s the complete Holy Bible in Tangkhul was published after translating the scripture by R. Ningatei. Rev. William Pettigrew left indelible footprints especially in the field of literature for the Tangkhuls in particular and for the tribals in general ²¹.

While Dr Grozier introduced Roman script among the Thadou-Kukis and Rev. Watkins Robert did it among the Vaipheis. In 1917 Rev. W. Roberts with the help of Pastor Thangkhai published the Gospel of St. John in Vaiphei. In 1926, the Tangkhul Testament was published through the effort of Rev. W. Pettigrew. Today almost all the different communities living in the hills and valley of Manipur have their New Testament in their own dialects and the complete Holy Bible minus Apocrypha. They can read and write in their own dialect using the Roman alphabet. Looking back to tribal villages in the hills few literates voluntarily imparted education even among the adults by way of running night schools at their own expense and accommodation in their own house after the normal and usual day's work. People began learning the basics of reading and writing. It was a new experience which they never felt before. When the translated Bible scriptures were printed out people can read and understand easily in their own mother tongue. The impact was great. Thus, there was a tremendous change in the tribal's world view.²²

Further, it is pertinent to note that the missionaries even learnt the local dialect and devised the first grammar books. They introduce western music and prepared song books for the use of church service, gospel related gathering and other social function and programmes. The simple tribals did not find it difficult to adjust and mould themselves to this new environment and situation. It also appears that they did not suffer from this transition syndrome. Christianity and English education thus proved to be a boon for

the tribal literature. Today the Christians of different denominations read, understand and receive the word of God in their respective dialects and languages, which they can easily understand. The beginning of tribal dialects and languages in written form is therefore traced to the arrival of western missionaries. The seeds they planted and watered down by our own people precisely the earlier converts bore fruits and today almost all the tribal people enjoy the taste. Thus, Christianity created tremendous changes on the socio-economic life of the tribals.

Introduction of western education undoubtedly stands as the pillars of changes. The translation of scriptures in the respective dialects of the tribal communities has laid down the basis of literature. Followings are some of the points that is to be put in the nutshell.²³

- The tribal people have forshaken the cultural practices of 'Heathenism' and began to worship the true living God;
- The art of writing and reading eventually began to be practiced with the setting up of schools;
- The early educated converts started publishing school text books alongwith the assistance of the missionaries. This was the sign of progress in literature.
- As education progress and thrive into the tribal society it enables them to enjoy the taste of having effective communication among themselves. People began to involve in literary works. They would also write letters and sent to their distant relatives. Inter and intra-tribal communication as a whole took a new beginning.
- Education has brought enlightenment and empowerment. It created white-collar jobs, which enabled the tribal to articulate their fears and made demands on successive governments both of the state and the country for their well-being. Christianity has raised the backward tribal people to the level of international standard in certain respects.

Case of Tribal Languages in Manipur: According to 2011 census (Economic Survey Manipur 2020-21, the Scheduled Tribe population constitutes 40.88% of the total state population of Manipur,²⁴ speaking 37 tribal languages or dialects. In a population of 28,55,794 according to 2011 census, around 9,50,000 people speak 35 languages, at an average of 25,000 people speaking one tribal language. According to 2011 census, the total Thadou population in Manipur was 1, 90,595. The Thadous are the second largest tribe in Manipur preceded only by the Meiteis or Manipuris while some tribal languages are spoken by few hundred only. Despite a number of languages, the Government of Manipur deserves to be praised for offering highest number of tribal languages in schools. Even then, 25 languages are left out. It is a case of 'too few people speaking too many languages'. So these endangered languages in Manipur need to be saved from extinction. As for saving these languages, the community's interest in safeguarding its linguistic heritage - which implies the language and other cultural symbols of the community enumerated through its language - is cited as the most vital factor by most scholars. A Krishna Murthy, secretary, Sahitya Akademi, says: 'The primary issue is not that of the language but of its speakers. If a community and its way of life are preserved, its language will automatically survive. Sindhi, for instance, is a stateless language yet it thrives due to its speakers'.²⁵

English language has swayed into tribal areas. English undoubtedly, has empowered the tribal people, but in many cases the children not able to construct their own knowledge if education is given in the languages not familiar to them. This might lead to children's dropout from the school system or they are not able to attain the expected level of achievement. English also is a 'killer language' tending to wipe out the indigenous languages. A balance needs to be struck between these two. Folklore, cultural festivals and competition, etc. need to be arranged by the Government to preserve and promote the tribal languages.

The recommendations of the Report of the Commissioner Linguistic Minorities need to be implemented by the Government. As suggested by the CTLLSM, Manipur State Policy of Tribal Languages, a bill adopted by the Hill Areas Committee, needs to be passed and the policy should be implemented. Sufficient fund for the development of tribal languages through Education Department, TRI must be made available. The Tribal Languages Literature Societies have to be taken into confidence in fund allotment to different languages.

More tribal languages need to be approved for school education. Literature Societies have to be formed. Government should not give recognition to schools if either Manipuri or tribal language is not taught in the schools. The onus for development of tribal language lies not only with the Government, Language Literature Society, but the common people. The tribal people tend to opt for English language. They feel that the tribal language is not able to carry ideas and concepts. Often, mother tongue is used in teasing, joking, quarrelling and in slang speech. Speaking in vernacular seems lowering their image. Conversing in English or majority language is seen as a sign of empowerment. This attitude must undergo change if tribal languages are to be promoted. Government should encourage original work, translation from other languages and award prizes to scholars. The students offering tribal language in Board exams, Higher Secondary exams and Under Graduate exams do it only to increase their percentage of marks in the aggregate and not for any love of their language. The concerned examiners also are very liberal in giving marks. Motivation by the teachers could change this attitude.

In this regard the role of the linguist and literature societies of different tribal groups in the state is very crucial. They should take steps for documentation and make aware of the community to prevent the process of occurring language loss. Otherwise, it will lead to loss of human knowledge in the process. In this context Community self awareness is also important. Language codification, standardization and modernization of all the tribal communities in the state should be done at the earliest.²⁶ For instance, Chakpa, Chairen and Pailang were the three languages which ceased to be spoken in Manipur. In order to prevent further loss of the language of some minor tribes where a few hundred are only speaking the language that comes under the category of 'definitely endangered', individual, community and the state needs to be addressed in accordance with the constitutional provisions and safeguards. A strong incentive needs to be given to the concerned community. The state government should be supportive and encouraging to rebuild an endangered native language especially in this age of globalization. It must be involved sincerely in the rebuilding of these languages and make conscious efforts to reverse language shift. Many tribal languages are yet to be preserve and promoted despite the progress and advancement of their neighbouring tribal brethren.

Concluding remarks: While the dominant language Manipuri is well developed with its script under the state government patronage, the other languages in the state too needs proper protection. Languages are not just words and sentences, grammar, phrases and idioms. They are much more these. They are expressions of our lives, customs, culture, traditions, history etc. Language is our identity. No language should face death. No language, especially the tribal languages some of which face extinction, should be abandoned for whatever reasons, whether for better social identity, upward mobility or for economic or political reasons. Tribal languages need to be codified, standardised and modernised. Pictorial dictionary and language encyclopaedia should also be prepared. Spellings should also be standardised. Language documentation should be done with the support of State, Central Governments and other stakeholders. If we lose our language, we lose ourselves and our political legitimacy. It is to note here that a nation or a society's development is also measured in terms of literature and its language. As such there has to be concerted efforts of people, government and scholars to preserve and promote the tribal languages as they are threatened by various factors more so in the age of globalization. It is to say that literature can do many things within a short span of time what politicians cannot do in a century or more. The existing literature of the tribal people of Manipur needs to be re-written on the line of the new generation. A comparative study may be made of what is written today and what was written in the past few decades. Our life at present and in the past provides us many materials and clues which should be translated into words. Their literature should ensure or prove their identity, history and culture. In order to trace one's originality the tribal people have to go to the past by way of folktales, folksongs, myths, legends, etc. More importantly in the age of globalization, very often there is a need to challenge cultural colonization to safeguard themselves within the parameters of the emerging cultural imperialism.

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