Education and Society in a Changing Mizoram

The Practice of Pedagogy

Lakshmi Bhatia
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**Glossary**

*Abeipho* Chiefly clans  
*Aggarbatti* Hindi word for incense sticks  
*Ahiiah* Chillies  
*Ahtlas and Adeuna* Post-marriage dues  
*Ahtneiphapa* Mode of acquiring a mate through negotiation  
*Ahtrei* Axe  
*Aika* Verandah  
*Aitla* A long platform leading to the chief’s house  
*Amakia* Marriage procession to the bridegroom’s house  
*Ana* A central term in Mara religion; denotes that which is forbidden  
*Aoh* A central term in Mara religion; denotes rest after important sacrifices  
*Aphei* Adultery  
*Apiapa* Wrestling  
*Arakhei* Elopement  
*Artui* Eggs  
*Asi* Chestnut wood  
*Asia* Trial by ordeal  
*Athila* Mourning dance  
*Athipa* A dead person  
*Atu* Iron hoe  
*Awdua* A coop for setting fowls  
*Awhchari* Hen’s basket  
*Awhsa* (Mizo: *Arsa*) Chicken  
*Avopatopatla* A sacrifice to the skies  
*Avyu* A type of tree (*Gmelia arborea*)  
*Beihruual* Special Gospel camps  
*Beikypacha* (Mara) Blessed by God  
*Bia* Arum  
*Bidi* An indigenous cigarette  
*Bochhi* The Indian fig tree worshipped by Maras  
*Burma-mi* People of Burma  
*Chahry* Tying  
*Chaiphiapa* Metal belts
Chakeichakana A marriage due for crossing the threshold of bridegroom’s house
Chapu Jhum house
Chasipaw (Mizo: Thlasik) Winter
Chava Spirits of river
Chemsenbawi A slave who acquires this status after committing a murder
Chhamai Maize
Chhimtuipui lit. The big river of the south; also the name of a former district
Chhipa Month of June
Chholothyupa Putting the weight
Chhonchonpipa (Mizo: Pu Pawla) A person in the traditional Mara religion who was believed to send towards right those bound for athikhi and to the left those bound for sawvakhi
Chhitiku A festival celebrated in October after the collection of vegetables from jhum
Chynapa Upper garment for men
Chysapathaipa A saintly man who served as a cook
Dua a Ceremonial garment for men
Dua-kalapa Lower garment meant for casual wear
Duhljan The Mizo dialect that serves as the lingua-franca in Mizoram
Eimano A form of address for persons of the speaker’s grandmother’s generation
Eimapaw A form of address for persons of the speaker’s grandparent’s generation
Eima satha paw A form of address for men who are unrelated but are of speaker’s parent’s generation
Eima satha no A form of address for women who are unrelated but are of speaker’s parent’s generation
Eiruk Duhlho Khawmpui Anti-corruption rally
Eiunaw A form of address for a close friend
Fathlun Youngest son
Hakaholh The Lai language
Hawlipyaka A path through which all spirits were believed to pass
Hazopano Pentecostal Day
Hmiatla Atonement price
Hnamchaum The common people
Hnora Lower garment for men
Chakeichakana A marriage due for crossing the threshold of bridegroom’s house
Chapu Jhum house
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Hnora Lower garment for men

Hrakhei Metal belts
Hrokei Brass hairpins
Hrupalthei Hasala Insanity
Ilu A ceremony performed after a successful raid in which heads of the slain were taken
Isua Krista Kohhran A denomination of southern Mizoram
Kahmi Ladder
Kahmikiana Marriage price for climbing the ladder of bridegroom’s house
Kahri-tla Name of a mountain peak
Kaohreit Upper garment for women
Karaoti Nicotine water
Karo Women’s pipe
Keimach, keihauvi Formal friends
Khaoh-lai A big hole near a place, Leisai, from which Maras trace their origin
Khapia Crossbeams
Khazanghra The great darkness
Khazopano Easter Sunday
Khazopina A sacrifice to God, the giver and preserver of life
Kheibu Bee’s nest
Kheithlu Bee’s wax
Khichhaipa A form of address for strangers
Khireipa (Mizo: Khawchhiar) A village writer
Khiso High mountains
Khothlahba The most sacred and precious objects consisting of household goods and sacrificial implements
Khrisma Christmas
Khuthi Impotence
Khutho A turban
Kohhran Upa Church elder
Kraws-Phesai (Mara) Soldiers of the Cross
Kristian Nu Pawl Christian Women’s Association
Kristian Thalai Pawl Young Christian Association
Krithypa hla bu Christian hymn book
Kuei Prominent citizens
Kuhva Betel
Laisa (Mizo: Nula) Young girl
Laizo (Mizo: Tahani) Categories of migrants from Myanmar
Lal Chief
Lalsiama God’s creature
Lapino ma (Mizo: Mak) A form of divorce
Lengdawn Courting of Girls
Leurahripas Spirits of mountains, pools and forests
Loparo Spirits of rocks
Lo-siam-mi Cultivator
Ly fine
Lyu-chapa A representative
Lyumei Burning of jhums
Lyumo Selection of site for cultivation
Lyurah Spirits of the forest
Lyuvakhutla Cutting of jhums
Machas Elders
Machhipho Plebian clans
Maluso A woman who has outlived three husbands
Maophao Obligation
Mara reih Mara language
Masia-a-cha A game of elephant hunting
Maulitla The peak of Mauli
Mei-mei and Poilo Denote a carefree attitude
Mi-anglo To be unlike other fellow beings due to mental deficiency
Miapali A sacrifice performed for the newly-weds to wish for their prosperity
Miesa (Mizo: Kelsa) Mutton
Mipui People
Mithun Bisons
Inpuichhung bawi Slave
Mizo Tawng Mizo language
Nano Father’s sister
Nga (Mizo: Sangha) Fish
No-chyu Mother’s price
Nochyu Aunt’s price, akin to Lushai nimas
Nopi Summer
O Spirits of house
Okia (Mizo: Manpui) Main marriage price
O-mabei Mán’s pipe
Pacho A bamboo rack on which meat and pork are smoked
Pako Special doors of a chief’s house
Pala tipa Name of a lake
Lalsiana God’s creature
Lapino ma (Mizo: Mak) A form of divorce
Lengdaum Courting of Girls
Leurahripas Spirits of mountains, pools and forests
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Lyurarah Spirits of the forest
Lyurarakhullu Cutting of jhum
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Machhipho Pribian clans
Maluso A woman who has outlived three husbands
Monphao Obligation
Mara reih Mara language
Musa-a-chha A game of elephant hunting
Mauli The peak of Mauli
Mey-mer and Polo Denote a carefree attitude
Mi-ango To be unlike other fellow beings due to mental deficiency
Mipabi A sacrifice performed for the newly-weds to wish for their prosperity
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O Spirits of house
Okia (Mizo: Manpui) Main marriage price
O-mabe Man’s pipe
Paicho A bamboo rack on which meat and pork are smoked
Pako Special doors of a chief’s house
Pula yipa Name of a lake

Pana A central term in Mara religion; denotes a period of seclusion
Parapa Father’s sister’s husband
Pathiam Sunday, ie, the Day of the God
Pazo Long bamboos
Peira Paradise
Phipahripa Flying white ants
Pho Clan
Phophapo, Phosiapa Patrician clans
Phipi Blue Mountain
Piali Fence
Puan Mizo women’s dress
Puma (Mizo: Lushum) Marriage price paid to bride’s mother’s brother or pupa
Pumtek A highly valued black and white bead
Racha Beer pot
Rakho (Mizo: Khumpui) The main bed
Ramsaw A type of bamboo
Ramthangmi People of a different land
Ramthual Agricultural experts
Ramrilehko A boundary paper
Rapaw Another type of paddy tax
Raso/Rahna Sub-types of long bamboo
Rinawna Honesty
Ru Death due
Ruuhlo do Anti-drug campaign
Sabai (Mizo: Fathang) Paddy tax
Sabaw (Mizo: Sachhia) Meat tax
Saheb A white man
Salma (Mizo: Zu) Rice beer
Salmapui/Salmahei Types of rice beer
Sahria A bag
Sahriaka Harvest festival celebrated in December
Saiza (Mizo: In-hrang bawi) Slaves who lived in a separate house
Saraihrea Harvesting
Sakhei Rice subscription for public purposes
Sakia A female tutelary deity
Sande Sikul Sunday School
Sande sikul zirtirtu Sunday School teacher
Sapha Rice
Satbie (Mizo: Tlangval) Young boy
Satu Sowing
Sathi A village feast to entertain a visiting chief
Sato Millet
Savo (Mizo: Zawngling) Name of a village
Saw Spirit of the slain
Sawleipa The state of a woman’s barrenness
Saunpakua (Mizo: Sumchhuah) A form of divorce
Sauna Granary
Sawvakhi Abode for all those who have died an unnatural death
Seipawchyu A marriage due of the chief’s sister or daughter paid
to the chief’s favourite slave
Sialycha Bean game
Sikisa A ceremony
Sisazi A constituent of the main marriage price, Okia
Sokhao A mortar for pounding rice
Sokhais A pestle
Syudaipa (Mizo: Thirdeng) Blacksmith
Tako A dao
Thaira Firewood
Theithaipa Village priest
Thirdeng Blacksmith
Thlakai A shelf for pots, pans and plates
Thlalo A memorial stone
Thlapa Spirits of the jhum
Thlapha Kind of soul that is believed to be benign
Thlazo Month of August
Thobia/Thohy Types of edible roots and tubers
Tholaipa Big tree
Thopi (Mizo: Thingpui) Tea
Thyuheino Easter Saturday
Tikho (Mizo: Tuikhur) Local water point
Tini A marriage due payable to paternal aunt
Tipani Marriage ceremony
Tipo Lake
Tla-Awpa (Mizo: Tlangau) Village crier
Thlachhi A kind of soul that is believed to be mischievous
Tlaih Mountain
Tlapi The general public
Tlangval Young man
Tlaraihrina (Mizo: Hnatlang) Community work
Santu Sowing
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Tlah Mountain
Tlapi The general public
Tlangval Young man
Tlarahirna (Mizo: Hmatlang) Community work
Preface

My engagement with the subject spans over a decade when I undertook intensive fieldwork from the mid-1990s to 2007. I first became acquainted with the northeastern region as a student in the Department of Sociology, at the Delhi School of Economics. In the University hostel, I made friends with some girls from the region. Later, family commitments happened to take me to Mizoram and to Chhimiutupui (now Saiha), the southern-most district of the tongue-shaped state. This was to be the beginning of my academic engagement with Mizoram. I studied two state-run middle and high schools, one in an urban setting and the other rural. The task ahead was Herculean as I was totally new to the field and its socio-cultural specificities. However despite all trials and tribulations, I am content that this work has finally been accomplished.

After several years of being marginalised, the northeastern region has finally started getting its due share of national attention. The present study may be seen as an effort towards understanding the region better through the lens of education. It does not deal comprehensively with all aspects of school education but it does give a glimpse of how one can understand a society through the medium of education.

The introductory chapter begins with an overview of literature pertaining to the subject and then goes on to analyse the two key concepts of education and society. It also delineates the theoretical and methodological underpinnings through which the study can be contextualised, besides a brief introduction to the field setting and a note on the fieldwork.

Chapter 1 provides an outline of the historical and socio-cultural background of the people: their origin, migration, language, general habits and the folklore. It also describes the early relations with the British, the new socio-religious order and the administration of education in the pre-independence and post-independence period.

Chapter 2 then presents a picture of the Mara social structure in the past and present with parallels drawn from the Mizo society. This has been done to ascertain what Malinowski calls ‘the firm skeleton of the tribal life’ (1966: 11). If we were to limit ourselves
to the analysis of the process of schooling alone, it would imply 'cutting an artificial field of enquiry' (Malinowski 1966). Keeping this broad perspective in mind, the chapter carries a description of the village life and administration; social stratification; marriage, family and kinship; economy and religion. In order to analyse the changes in society following the introduction of British rule, we must first look at 'what' changed and to 'what extent'.

Next, Chapter 3 puts education in a historical perspective. It gives an account of childhood and socialisation in the pre-British Mara society and goes on to trace the emergence and development of formal education under British rule.

The process and experience of schooling is delineated in Chapter 4. The chapter deals with teacher–pupil interactions in the classroom and outside, interaction among teachers as well as teacher and pupil cultures. The chapter also focuses on the values purported to be transmitted by the school curriculum with special reference to gender, nationalism, citizenship and religious values. I also discuss the perusal of science and mathematics education as these have been identified as problem areas of education in Mizoram.

In Chapter 5, my attempt is to understand the school in the context of its linkages with wider society. Therefore, the chapter analyses the relationship between home and school, and between community, state and the school.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides general observations and the broad conclusions reached through the study, after a long association with the field and sustained academic interest. While much of the fieldwork was carried out for more than two years in the mid-1990s, I was also able to revisit the area in 2007. This was an exhilarating experience. The nervousness and anxiety of the earlier fieldwork situation was replaced by a sense of assurance and confidence that comes with familiarity. As I alighted, I was once again deeply impressed by the spontaneity, spirit of cooperation and cheerfulness of the Mizo people.

Much has changed in the society since my last visit. With the advent of the information technology revolution, young and old alike are using mobile phones in a big way. The computer has made its appearance too. Fashion shows and reality TV shows such as the Mizo Idol, on the lines of the Indian Idol, are popular; luxury cars with loud music whiz past on the roads of Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram; and the interactions between young people of opposite
sexes are much more open now. Desires are being shaped in tune with the times — the dream of many a young men and women is to become rich, possess a Master Card and to travel around the world. One can find the latest gizmos in the market like digital cameras, handycams and LCD and Plasma TVs (see Figures Ia and Ib). However, these changes are not specific to Aizawl or to Mizoram. They reflect much of that which is happening elsewhere in India and the world. Moving southwards in Mizoram towards Lunglei, Lawngtlai and Saiha, these transformations are not as sharp and rapid, but muted. It may take a few more years for the changes to reach these destinations.

A notable development has been the expansion and further strengthening of the position of the urban middle class — a product of Christianity, western education and economy — as the producer, articulator and transmitter of the ideology of ethnicity, including the development of language and literature; incorporation of new ideas in religion; and in the political and other areas of the public sphere, including education. This middle class reflects a process of nationality formation from below or 'little nationalism', which is markedly different from the composite 'great nationalism' of the Indian mainstream as I have highlighted in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, there are some nascent signs of resentment among people against the middle class, especially the political elite, thus eroding its legitimacy to some extent.

New civil society organisations such as the People’s Right to Information and Development Implementation Society of Mizoram (PRISM) are now active along with the earlier organisations such as the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuikhawm Pawl (MHIP) or the Mizo Women’s Association. During my visit, the PRISM had organised Eiruk Duhlo Khawmpui, an anti-corruption rally, against what it believed to be the cornering, by some of the political elite, of the lion’s share of resources which should rightfully accrue to the people at the grassroots. The YMA, for its part, has been pressing for some time for the return of the migrants from Myanmar due to the common perception that social problems such as drug addiction, thefts, burglaries and murders were rising due to the population influx. The number of migrants from Myanmar is estimated to be around 50,000. However, the positive contributions of the teachers from Myanmar in science and maths education and in the revival of art and culture are generally recognised, as I have pointed out in
Figure 1a. Mizoram: Society in transition
Source: Courtesy of the author.

Figure 1b. Mizoram: Technology touching life
Source: Courtesy of the author.
Chapter 4 of this book. The mild resistance towards the Myanmarese migrants is a new development. But the feeling of fraternity among the Chins and Mizos and the recognition of the broader Zo identity prevents an open conflict as compared with the open resistance to Chakmas and the non-Mizo population.¹ The ways in which these attitudes reflect in education and how they influence the school have been dealt with in the relevant chapters.

The other significant issues besetting the contemporary Mizo society are drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. These issues are being taken up by the YMA and other voluntary organisations. For instance, the major theme of the Annual General Conference of the YMA in 2007 was the anti-drug campaign (Ruishlo do). These substantiate my earlier observations related to the case studies pertaining to pupil culture (see Chapter 5). Indeed, these trends have become stronger with the passage of time. Thus, the need for moral education as emphasised by the eminent sociologist Emile Durkheim is as much relevant today as it was a decade earlier.

In the Mara area, the Mara Chano Py (Mara Women’s Association) has begun to play a significant role in public life along with Mara Thhy Py (MTP) and Mara Students’ Organisation. In 2007, the Maras celebrated the centenary of their church. In the realm of faith, besides the Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM), the largest denomination among the Maras and other denominations that are found in the area, the oldest denomination viz., Independent Church of Maraland (ICM) which later acquired the nomenclature of Congregational Church of India (Maraland), has for sometime now, been divided into the Saiha group, which is more accommodative, and the Serkawr group, which retains its old ways and worldview. The socio-religious transformations have been instrumental in shaping people’s perceptions about their ethnic identity, including the students’ views about their self identity (see Chapter 6).

People in general are much more fluent in Hindi now as compared to a decade earlier. This can be attributed not so much to schooling and the education system, though Hindi is now taught in the primary school too, but to the increased viewership of Hindi news channels and TV serials and programmes. The significance of Hindi in forging national unity is being realised.²

Significantly, classroom practices have remained much the same since the mid-1990s, except that a few senior students now carry mobile phones to school, especially in the urban set up. Computers
are also being used, though not extensively. The nature of interactions of the students across gender, ethnicity, rural-urban residence have not changed much. However, the increasing gap between the rich and poor students is much more visible now. The themes that I noted and probed in the curricular knowledge pertaining to gender values, citizenship in and nationalism and religious values run through the new textbooks and the new textbooks of higher secondary education have emerged. It is now being emphasised in primary education that the State Council of Education and Training (SCERT) from the Mizoram Board of Education and Training (MBSE). It was also being argued that to ducting of examinations at these stages must also be transferred to and in order that the MBSE could concentrate on High School and Higher Secondary Examinations.

Meanwhile, in the past decade or so, the significance of education as a contested terrain has increased tremendously, not only in Mizoram but in other parts of the northeastern region as well. For instance, in September 2007, the Nagaland Board of Education (NBSE), through a notification namely, the Nagaland Board of School Education Rules, 2007, attempted to bring the schools in the Naga-dominated hill areas of Manipur — in the Senapati, Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Chandel districts — into its fold and to introduce textbooks prescribed by the NBSE in them, alleging that the Manipur textbooks had distorted the history of the Nagas. The Manipur government interpreted this as a move towards the formation of Greater Nagalim.

The society in Mizoram and other parts of the region is poised to undergo far-reaching changes in the twenty-first century with the development of transport and communication and massive investments in the education sector in the Eleventh Five Year Plan which has been termed as the Education Plan. Connectivity is being viewed as a precursor for development of trade and investment in the northeastern region is thrown wide open as a gateway for South-East Asia as part of the Indian government’s ‘Look East’ policy with the development of Sitwe port in Myanmar by India and the setting up of the Asian Highway which will pass through the northeastern region of India. As the borders become more irrelevant, the entire region is set for a metamorphosis unless caution is exercised to take into account people’s perceptions, their culture, aspirations, views on security and right to development. Though the prime focus of the North-East Vision-2020 including the ‘Look-East’ policy is economic, it can be safely said that that the impact would not be merely economic. Wide-ranging changes can be expected in the political, environmental and socio-cultural fabric of the region. This poses a challenging task ahead for social researchers of this region.

Notes

1. In the context of citizenship, Samuel P. Huntington has recently remarked: ‘Who is a citizen and who is not, come to the fore when autocracies democratise, and when democracies confront many new claimants on citizenship’ (2004:16). This observation is apt for the Mizo situation as well, with increasing trends of both internal and transnational migration.
3. This project includes making The Kaladan river (which also passes through southern and south-eastern Mizoram and is called Chhimtuipui) navigable, rebuilding of Sitwe port and developing highway connectivity from the border in Mizoram (see The Hindu, 8 January 2008).
4. The Asian Highway is a network of 1,41,000 kms of roadway connection between 32 countries. Conceived in the 1960s, the project was accepted only in 2004. The AH 1, a principal route, shall pass through the north-eastern states of Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur and would have wide-ranging effects on the region as a whole.
Map 1: Map of India showing the location of Mizoram

Source: www.mizoram.nic.in (accessed 15 April 2005); adapted by the author.
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Map 2: Map of Mizoram showing the districts

Source: www.mizoram.nic.in (accessed 15 April 2005); adapted by the author.
Map 4: Map showing the distribution of Mara sub-tribes in Myanmar

**Settlement**
- Lautu Group
- Mara & Lai (mixed group)
- Mara & Matu (mixed)
- Miram (Mara) Group
- Zophei Group

Source: Prepared by S. Lianhununga. Map not to scale.
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I am also grateful to my father, who though being physically away, has stood by me like the Rock of Gibraltar, and to my late mother who included me in her silent prayers. My thanks are also due to my elder son, Sharanya, for being my constant companion in the field and younger son, Aranya, who in his own sweet and innocent ways spurred me on. Both of them are as much a part of this work, of the associated trials, tribulations and triumphs, as I am.
Introduction

The Problem

Mizoram, the land of the highlanders, is a tongue-shaped state in the northeastern region of India (see Map 1, p. xxviii). Sharing international boundaries with Myanmar on the east and south and Bangladesh on the west, it is an area of immense geopolitical significance affected by both external and internal factors. Along with the other states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura in India's North-East, Mizoram is a society in transition. Its tribal peoples entered the twentieth century confined to remote and obscure hilly tracts, practising an animistic faith, and completely unlettered. Today, Mizoram has the distinction of being the second most literate state in India. Modernisation — chiefly Christianity, urbanisation and political awakening — has swept the land of the highlanders, and in recent decades, the forces of globalisation are all set to further transform Mizo society. At such a historic juncture, it is important to understand the role of schooling in Mizoram and to contextualise this understanding in the microprocesses within the school system and in the linkages of school education with wider society.

There are significant gaps in the existing research in the sociology of school education and on the interface between school and socio-political transformations in society. At present, no study exists that examines the complexities of education and the interlinkages between school and society, especially with reference to the remote hill tribes in Mizoram or elsewhere in northeastern India. This study therefore aims to explore and analyse critical aspects of education and society in Mizoram, using the framework of a ‘political economy of schooling in which important questions of not only agency and structure are considered, but the significant issues of the State, politics and of ideology and culture are addressed’ (Scrase 1993: 51). The work is located in the broad domain of ‘cultural politics’, a much contested and emerging area in sociological research. As has been argued in recent times, schools are not merely social but cultural sites too, where significant battles over ideology, language, land, history, and
religion are waged. I examine not only the numerically dominant tribe, the Mizo, but also take the vantage point of the smaller tribes in Mizoram, such as the Mara and the Lai.

Indeed, Mizoram has been largely neglected in tribal studies. J. Shakespear's *The Lushai-Kuki Clans* (1988) and N. E. Parry's *The Lakhers* (1976) on the Mizo hills are among the valuable early monographs on the northeastern region. Such studies, authored by British scholar-administrators before Indian independence, treat tribes as 'other cultures' and 'cultural isolates' (Danda 1996) and are influenced by the guidelines in 'Notes and Queries in Anthropology' (1951). However, there are pitifully few anthropological studies of these tribal communities in the post-independence period. Surveying the literature on tribal ethnography, Danda (1996) mentions that out of a total of 106 studies on northeastern India in the decade 1979–1989, 28 were undertaken on Nagaland, compared to only three on Mizoram. Not much has changed in the years since then with major tribal groups getting more scholarly attention. However, there have been significant shifts from the pre-independence approach. First, from treating the tribes as 'cultural isolates', scholars have now begun to examine tribal people in their networks with the wider society. Second, the trend is now towards problem-oriented specialised studies, such as B. B. Goswami's *The Mizo Unrest* (1979), which focuses primarily on politics in Mizoram, rather than generalised descriptions of the tribes (Danda 1996).

Sociologists have generally examined the relationship between education and stratification while paying meagre attention to the interlinkages between education and culture, as has been pointed out by the Indian Council of Social Science Research or ICSSR (J. Aikara 1994). As Béteille (2000) and other scholars have emphasised, more attention needs to be paid to the cleavages and contradictions in society. These antinomies are social facts for they have social causes and social consequences and any study of a changing society must turn its attention to these antinomies. The linkages of the school with settings outside the school system such as religion, family, ethnicity and local community and the State, need to be analysed too for these offer arenas where selection and socialisation occur and also amorphous spaces where identities are created, re-created or altered (Bernstein 1977; Woods 1983; Scrase 1993).

My attempt is to show how one can understand a society and culture through the lens of education. My involvement with these
religion are waged. I examine not only the numerically dominant tribe, the Mizo, but also take the vantage point of the smaller tribes in Mizoram, such as the Mara and the Lai.

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My study is to show how one can understand a society and culture through the lens of education. My involvement with these issues spans more than a decade, with intensive periods of fieldwork in the mid-1990s and 2007. I studied two state-run schools (having both middle and high school sections) in the Chhitumput, presently Saiha district. One had a heterogeneous student–teacher population due to its location in the district headquarters town and the other, located in a rural area, had a relatively more homogeneous population and offered a suitable site to observe the process of schooling in a remote corner of Mizoram, closer to border with Myanmar.

Besides, the study also aims to comprehend the linkages between education and culture which is as yet an researched and unfathomed area, though in recent years, culture as an object of enquiry has been gaining prominence. The study assumes that culture and language are not superficial but form the very core of society where politics is played out, for symbol sharing is no less significant than power sharing. Those not sharing the symbols of authority, values and culture of the core group tend to view themselves as a minority. This process can be at different levels — national, regional and state. The assertion of a distinct identity can be on the basis of linguistic nationalism, religion or place. Attachment to a place, which is the site of the exclusive history of a group, is as important as attachment to the group itself. The inclusion or exclusion in school text-books of the regional history, symbols and heroes reflects the relative influence of a particular tribal community. A community may also feel threatened if some of its own members have begun to partake of the symbols of the core group. In this context, the significant questions addressed by this study are: How does the education system function in the frontier region of Mizoram? What are the inherent dynamics? What is the interface between society and education? How does home impinge on school? Are there any cleavages and contradictions in the norms and values imparted by the school and those imparted by the home and community? Further, is the role of the State in education benign and neutral, or is there a ‘politics of knowledge’? Does school education reinforce ethnicity as an ideology and strategy?

In the following section, I discuss a range of conceptual and analytical perspectives on education and society, the two key concepts around which this study revolves. This provides the basis for moving to the theoretical framework and methodological
underpinnings of the study. My purpose here is to enable the reader to locate the study in a broader canvas to comprehend the processes and structures of schooling in a predominantly tribal society, both specifically and in general terms. This is followed by a brief description of the field setting, and a note on the fieldwork.

**Education and Society: Concept and Meaning**

In the social sciences, engagement with the pursuit of education has largely been restricted to the discipline of philosophy. In recent times, however, after the behavioural and social sciences gained prominence, scholars of psychology, economics, sociology and political science have focused their attention on the phenomenon of education as well. Given their diverse orientations, they have examined the concept of education in their own distinctive ways. Broadly, however, all have viewed education as being connected with activities related to learning, usually, though not necessarily, within the context of schools.

In sociological literature, the phenomenon of education is generally explained by ‘what it does’ rather than ‘what it is’. For instance, in the classical sociological tradition, Emile Durkheim, among the first exponents on the subject, notes that education transmits societal norms and values to the individual. For him, education is ‘wholly and eminently social’ — that is, a reality *sui generis*. Those sociologists, who use a Marxist framework, argue that education serves to reproduce the inegalitarian society. The task of examining ‘what education is’ has therefore been, by and large, left to philosophers. From the Chinese philosopher, Confucius in 600 BC to American pragmatist philosopher of 1950s John Dewey, all philosophers have expressed their views on ‘what education is’ and ‘what it should be’.

I now examine the theoretical concerns in education that have engaged the attention of sociologists, focusing on two main perspectives: the ‘positivist approach’, which sees individuals as reacting to social forces beyond their control, and the ‘interactionist approach’ which views the individual as actively constructing social reality. In the former, the functionalists were the first to concern themselves with education. The work of Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and W. E. Moore expressed two major concerns: the functions of education for the society as a whole, and the relationship between education and other parts of the social system. Durkheim noted
underpinnings of the study. My purpose here is to enable the reader to locate the study in a broader canvas to comprehend the processes and structures of schooling in a predominantly tribal society, both specifically and in general terms. This is followed by a brief description of the field setting, and a note on the fieldwork.

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The concern of Marxist scholars has been, first, to explore the ways in which education is shaped by the economic infrastructure, and second, to see how education produces the type of workforce required by capitalism. They therefore focus on the links between power, ideology, education and the relations of production in capitalist society. Louis Althusser's concept of the ideological state apparatus assumes that power cannot be held for long by physical force, and that ideological control is a more effective means to maintain class rule. Further, a technically efficient but submissive and obedient workforce is required for the ruling class to survive. Education, an integral part of the ideological state apparatus, inculcates these values in the students and reproduces a workforce suited to the requirements of capitalist society.

The neo-Marxists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), in their acclaimed work *Schooling in Capitalist America*, pointed out that it was futile to expect too much from the school. In reality, schools were the handmaidens of the capitalist system. Bowles and Gintis wrote at a time when the relationship between education and occupational mobility was being thoroughly scrutinised and questioned. In their view, schools produced workers for the capitalist economy. The labour requirement of the capitalist system was a force, which derived motivation from external rewards such as pay.
and status. Bowles and Gintis drew various parallels: between the authoritative and hierarchical structure of the school organisation and that of the workplace under the capitalist system, where the emphasis on control from the top meant that the worker lacks all control; between the lack of intrinsic satisfaction from school work (as it is based on the ‘jug and mug’ principle where the teacher is knowledgeable and the student merely an empty ‘mug’) and alienation in the workplace; and between the fragmentation of school-based knowledge (whereby the student merely moves from one subject to the other without seeing any connection between the various subjects) and the fragmented organisation of work. They therefore considered the education system as a gigantic myth-making machine which provides justification for the inequalities of capitalist society. The illusion of meritocracy in school creates a belief that the system of role-allocation is fair and just. The unequal and undemocratic aspects of the workplace thus come to be seen as natural. In their words, ‘education reproduces inequality by justifying privilege and attributing poverty to personal failure’ (1976). As for solutions, they do not pin much hope on educational reforms. They argue that a liberating school system can be created only by a radical transformation of society, from the capitalist to the socialist.

These views have met with criticism. According to Karabel and Halsey (1977), several aspects of schooling in America which have been condemned by Bowles and Gintis are to be found in socialist societies too. They cite the case of Cuba, where great emphasis was laid on grades and exams to motivate students and where the mode of teaching was largely authoritarian. Similarly, it has been pointed out that in the former Soviet Union, the most successful students were the offspring of the privileged.

Though not a Marxist, Ivan Illich’s radical critique of education in advanced industrial societies has parallels with the Marxist views. The notion of alienation is central to Deschooling Society (1973), his landmark work. In his view, schools have failed miserably as they merely made ‘futile promises of salvation to the poor of the technological age’ (ibid.: 8). They are in fact repressive institutions which indoctrinate pupils, crush their creativity and imagination, induce conformity, and stupefy them. Schools are based on a hidden curriculum which identify formal education with learning. An individual’s success in school is dependent on the amount of learning he consumes. It also emphasises that learning about the world
and status. Bowles and Gintis drew various parallels: between the authoritative and hierarchical structure of the school organisation and that of the workplace under the capitalist system, where the emphasis on control from the top meant that the worker lacks all control; between the lack of intrinsic satisfaction from school work (as it is based on the ‘jug and mug’ principle where the teacher is knowledgeable and the student merely an empty ‘mug’) and alienation in the workplace; and between the fragmentation of school-based knowledge (whereby the student merely moves from one subject to the other without seeing any connection between the various subjects) and the fragmented organisation of work. They therefore considered the education system as a gigantic myth-making machine which provides justification for the inequalities of capitalist society. The illusion of meritocracy in school creates a belief that the system of role-allocation is fair and just. The unequal and undemocratic aspects of the workplace thus come to be seen as natural. In their words, ‘education reproduces inequality by justifying privilege and attributing poverty to personal failure’ (1976). As for solutions, they do not offer much hope on educational reforms. They argue that a liberating school system can be created only by a radical transformation of society, from the capitalist to the socialist.

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Though not a Marxist, Ivan Illich’s radical critique of education and teaching is more valuable than learning from the world. Further, schools are the root of the problems of modern industrial society as they prepare the individual to become a mindless, conformist and easily manipulatable citizen. As the existing school system fails to match his educational ideals, Illich argues that schools should be abolished. They should be replaced by ‘skill exchanges’ and ‘learning webs’. In ‘skill exchanges’, instructors should be drawn from amongst those who use the skills in daily life. The ‘learning webs’ must be formed by individuals with common interests who meet around a problem and proceed through creative and exploratory learning. Deschooling would lead to a society where the individual is truly liberated, and his talents developed to the maximum. Contrary to this view, Bowles and Gintis have asserted that the root of the problem lies in the economic system rather than in schools, and ‘deschooling’ would only produce ‘occupational misfits’ and ‘job blues’.

Mention must be made here of Paulo Freire and his classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1977). Like Illich, Freire too rejects the formal school system. In his view conventional education, which he terms ‘the banking concept of education’, suffers from ‘narration sickness’. It stifles creative and critical thought. According to him:

> Education [...] becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat [...] In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (1977: 58).

In contrast to this, Freire devised a unique method to educate the poor in Latin America. This method involved direct learning of everyday words and phrases. The teachers were to be chosen from among the people themselves. Freire stated that in comparison to conventional education, the ‘critical education’ that he proposes is active, involves questioning and is based on mutual intentions. It is therefore transformational, liberating, consistent, and empowering. Freire’s method has had wide implications for the education of illiterate adults in developing countries, including India.

The ‘cultural deprivation’ theories and the concept of compensatory education that have been proposed as an ameliorative measure have argued that the sub-cultures and value systems of
lower classes and certain ethnic groups affect their performance in the educational system and create a self-imposed barrier to improvement. The cultural deprivation theorists lay emphasis on the difference in the nature of manual and non-manual occupations. These account for differential educational attainment as the former offer few prospects for promotion, little income for investment and future planning, and a lower value on education and on achieving high occupational status. The latter, on the other hand, provide more opportunities to enhance income and status, scope to plan for the future and adequate income for investment. Perhaps the most influential cultural deprivation theorist is Basil Bernstein, who explored the links between class differences in speech patterns and educational attainment. His theory of the two codes has provided the theoretical basis for the ‘new sociology of education’. Bernstein analysed the speech patterns of both middle-class and working-class children, and concluded that social class speech codes have their origin in family relationships, socialisation practices and the nature of manual and non-manual occupations. In his view, middle-class children are at an advantage as they were familiar with the formal, explicit and universalistic ‘extended code’ as well as the shorthand and grammatically simple ‘restricted code’. On the other hand, working-class children could handle just the shorthand, implicit and context-specific ‘restricted code’ (Bernstein 1977, 1996). As a consequence for the middle-class child, who has control over both codes, it was easier to follow the middle-class teacher and the middle class-oriented textbooks. The working-class child, suffering from linguistic handicaps, was more liable to drop out of the school system.

Bernstein’s views have come in for sharp criticism by Labov (1973) and Rosen (1972). On the basis of extensive experiments among working-class and black children in Harlem, a ghetto in New York city, they concluded that the cultural deprivation theories are based on false premises. Rosen held that Bernstein created a myth in the absence of hard evidence, that the ‘elaborated code’ of the middle-class was superior. Labov, in an article entitled ‘The Logic of Non-standard English’, argued that black speech patterns were not inferior but simply different, with their own rules and conventions. Boudon (1974) went a step further in what he calls the ‘positional theory’. In his view, much more important than the sub-cultural differences is the individual’s actual position in the class structure. That people begin at different positions in the class system
lower classes and certain ethnic groups affect their performance in the educational system and create a self-imposed barrier to improvement. The cultural deprivation theorists lay emphasis on the difference in the nature of manual and non-manual occupations. These account for differential educational attainment as the former offer few prospects for promotion, little income for investment and future planning, and a lower value on education and on achieving high occupational status. The latter, on the other hand, provide more opportunities to enhance income and status, scope to plan for the future and adequate income for investment. Perhaps the most explored the links between class differences in speech patterns and the theoretical basis for the 'new sociology of education'. Bernstein's theory of the two codes has provided the speech patterns of both middle-class and working-class children, and concluded that social class speech codes have their origin in family relationships, socialisation practices and the nature of manual and non-manual occupations. In his view, middle-class children are at an advantage as they were familiar with the formal, explicit and universalistic 'extended code' as well as the shorthand working-class children could handle just the shorthand, implicit and sequence for the middle-class child, who has control over both codes, oriented textbooks. The working-class child, suffering from linguistic handicaps, was more liable to drop out of the school system.

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Just at the time when the 'cultural deprivation theories' came under attack by Rosen and Labov, there was also a growing realisation that these theories failed to take into account 'what is to be educated'. M. F. D. Young, an eminent sociologist of education, argued that there is no objective way of evaluating knowledge and if any knowledge is considered superior, it is simply because those with power have defined it as such and have imposed their definition on others. In this sense, all knowledge is 'socially constructed'. In particular, this applies to middle-class teachers and educational administrators. The phenomenological perspective which is integral to the 'interactionist approach' thus tends to look at meanings that are constructed in the process of interaction. It stresses the need to go beyond school knowledge and to take into account the attitudes of teachers and those in the school administration. It is assumed that teachers and school administrators are biased against underprivileged children who fail to comprehend the language in which they are taught, as well as the content of what is taught. The linguistic handicap is mainly due to the dominance of one linguistic code over another. The failure to comprehend what is being taught is largely due to the irrelevance of the subject matter.

These interpretative, phenomenological and interactionist approaches were the turning point in establishing the theoretical approach popularly known as the 'new sociology of education'. The articles contained in Young's Knowledge and Control:
New Directions for the Sociology of Education (1971) is regarded as a vital contribution in this direction. It sets the epistemological and theoretical impetus for later research into the issues of power and dominance in schooling. Scholars like Nell Keddie also emphasised that sociologists must explore the ways in which teachers and students interpret and give meanings to educational situations. The old sociology of education had focused on the social background of the underprivileged child. It believed that education should be considered as an investment for better life chances, rather than as a commodity to be consumed. This came to be called 'the human capital approach' to education, and led to educational expansion the world over. However, when it failed to equalise educational opportunity, the emphasis shifted to compensatory education. The focus of this approach was on making up for the deficient home environment in order to make the working-class child more middle-class. This approach met with failure too, bringing in its wake the realisation that it was not the child or his deficient environment which was in need of change. Instead, as argued by Young and others, it was the education system and the attitude of the teachers which needed to change. Among other things, it was felt that teachers must accept the validity of different speech forms and moral codes.

In more recent times, the resistance theories have gained popularity. Researchers in the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia have emphasised the importance of human agency and experience in analysing the complex relation between schools and dominant society. According to them, the domination of the school is never complete and total but is challenged by the students with their oppositional behaviour. The main protagonists of this theory, H. A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, argue that schools are contested terrains marked by student resistance. In place of the existing systems of schooling, both propose critical pedagogies which take into account the lived culture of the students. The work of McLaren and Giroux has been influenced by Freire's ideas who, as mentioned earlier, argued for the creation of schools as public spaces that respect the lived differences between people.

My study of schooling and society in Mizoram treats the school not only as an externally observable reality impinging on the individual, as emphasised by Durkheim, but also as a reality being constantly created and recreated in the process of mutual
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My study of schooling and society in Mizoram treats the school not only as an externally observable reality impinging on the individual, as emphasised by Durkheim, but also as a reality constantly created and recreated in the process of mutual interaction between various actors. While it delves into the power and domination aspects of education underlined by Marxist analysis, scrutinising the values in educational knowledge and raising questions about ‘whose’ values they are, it also addresses the idea of resistance in education and pleads for assigning significance to critical pedagogies and making education an emancipatory activity. I have used not one theoretical orientation but a multiplicity of approaches to gauge the complex reality of the interface between critical lands and their pedagogies.

**Education: The Indian Context**

In India, the phenomenon of education began to be examined in the 1950s. I. P. Desai’s study on high school students in Pune in 1953 can be considered a pioneering work in this field. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the merit-based approach to the analysis of education in India was popular. An exemplar of this trend is the review by N. V. Tirtha and M. Mukhopadhyaya (1974). Some of the research themes in the studies reviewed by them were: the educational organisation as a social system, education and social change and social problems of dropouts. In another review, Suma Chittnis (1974), classifies sociology of education in India into two areas: first, that which perceives the education system as a sub-system of the social system, and second, that which is concerned with the internal organisation of the education system. These studies were influenced by the structural-functionalist paradigm. In the 1970s, the dominant theme in the studies was to explore the links between education and social inequality. These studies were generally critiques of the education policy. The solutions they offered revolved around the triad of equality, quality and quantity, as enunciated by Naik (1975).

The decade of the 1980s has witnessed the emergence of studies incorporating critical social theory. Notable among them are those by Acharya (1981), Kalia (1986), Kumar (1989) and Thapan (2006). Their studies provide a critical analysis of education as being closely linked to the wider social and cultural structures, where educational inequality is seen as a reflection of various forms of social inequality that are a product of history. In the 1990s, there were a few studies on the role of the State in education, such as that by Scrase (1993) on textbooks in West Bengal.

More recent studies, notably Kumar (2000) and Bhagavan (2003), incorporate resistance theories. Tracing the educational history of
Banaras in the period 1840–1940, Kumar examines British state-control over education and the challenge it posed to the accepted and indigenous educational systems of the three occupational groups of Pandits, merchants and weavers, and ‘creative resistance’ offered on the part of the latter. On the basis of her research findings, Kumar concludes that the Pandits lost their power over Sanskrit teaching to the formally structured Sanskrit college. Though the ‘mahajani’ system of education among the merchants, initially withstood the onslaught of English education, it later adopted certain modern pedagogic structures. On the other hand, the Muslim weavers, who traditionally had a system of vocational and ethical training, continued to be under the control of their Sardars, Mehtos and other community leaders. Bhagavan’s study analyses the education system in the princely states of Baroda and Mysore in British India. He unearths the ways in which colonial authority was challenged and negotiated through direct political action and also by indirect and subtle efforts towards social and cultural reform. Spaces in which the ideology and institution of colonialism could be challenged were produced due to the contradiction between good governance and western education on the one hand, and the denial of future parity on the other. Another theme in the contemporary studies of education has been the application of the symbolic–interactionist perspective to comprehend the process and experience of schooling. For instance, Sarangapani’s (2003) work, written from an interactionist perspective, examines the process of schooling in a government primary school for boys in rural Delhi. It reveals how padhai (learning) was perceived as an avenue for future employment, a way of becoming a bada aadmi (big man). In line with the ‘critical pedagogies’, scholars in India have also examined the prospects of emancipatory education, that which is free from the regimentation of the formal school system and treats both the teacher and the pupil as learners positioned at different levels. Krishna Kumar’s (1996) study, for instance, asserts that conflictual situations offer moments which can be seized for pedagogic purposes. In a similar vein, Avijit Pathak (2002) looks at a particular private school in Delhi to explore the possibility of critical and emancipatory education. Scholars have also devoted attention to the significant issue of a child’s right to education in South Asia. For instance, Kabeer, Nambissan and Subramanian (2003) seek to provide answers to the perplexing question of the
possibility of conflict between the rights of the child to education and
the economic needs of the family in the context of child labour in
South Asia. The focus in the most recent researches has been on the
role education can play in nation building and ushering peace. The
work of Kumar and Oesterheld (2007) examines the role of education
in forging understanding, peace and cooperation in the countries of
South Asia, just as it did in war-torn Europe after 1945.

To sum up, it is evident that the analysis of the concept of edu-
cation in India has moved away significantly from the structural–
functional paradigm of the 1960s and early 1970s to examining
the mutual interlinkages between education and inequality. In the
1980s and 1990s, the focus shifted to critical studies of education,
‘resistance’ and critical pedagogies. This study takes these themes
forward and also seeks to develop deeper insights, especially with
regard to the hilly areas of North-East India. The region’s responses
to the transitions in the wider society, economy and polity range
from simmering discontent, to guerrilla warfare and open conflict.
The study also examines the role of the state in education, as also
resistance and the scope of critical pedagogies in promoting peace,
understanding and harmony between the people of the northeastern
region and those in the rest of India.

Society

For the purpose of the present study, the term society refers to ‘tribal
society’, since the majority of communities inhabiting Mizoram
are tribes. The Anthropological Survey of India in the People of India
project (1995), enumerates 15 tribes in Mizoram.¹

It would be useful to examine the various meanings and ram-
ifications of the category of ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal society’ in academic
writings before we proceed further. The study of tribes has been an
integral and distinctive aspect of anthropological studies although a
consensus about the definition of the term ‘tribe’ is difficult to find.
This is best exemplified in the work of F. Boas, R. H. Lowie and
and B. Malinowski in the UK in the first half of the twentieth
century. Béteille (1992) argues that divergence of opinion on the
subject can be attributed to the preoccupation of anthropologists
with the study of a variety of topics and also a range of societies.
They are no longer confined to the study of simple, pre-literate soci-
eties. Since the 1940s, there has been a shift of focus from ‘tribe’ to
'civilisation', as evident in the study of peasantry by Robert Redfield (1956). The emphasis now is on the study of 'wholes' and tribes begin to be examined in their relation to civilisation.

There are, broadly, two approaches to the study of tribes — the ‘evolutionary’ and the ‘historical’. The former stresses the ‘succession’ of social formations over time while the latter focuses on their ‘co-existence’ in a given framework of space and time (Béteille 1992). The evolutionary approach sees the tribe and civilisation as disjunct, as in the study of societies in Australia, the Pacific Islands and North America. The historical approach emphasises the co-existence of tribe and civilisation rather than their disjunction, and is employed in the study of older civilisations such as those of India, China and the Islamic world.

In anthropological literature, L. H. Morgan’s concept of ‘tribe’ and Durkheim’s idea of the ‘poly-segmental’ society are among the first instances of the evolutionary approach. The work of later scholars, such as Marshall Sahlins’ (1961) conception of tribe as ‘a segmentary system’ and Maurice Godelier’s (1977) notion of the tribe as ‘a stage in the evolution of society’, also exemplify the evolutionary approach. However, Honigman (1966), views the tribe as ‘a whole society’ which is homogeneous with respect to government, language, culture and customs. For Morton H. Fried (1975), the tribe is ‘a kind of secondary phenomenon’ which acquires its form and identity from some external source.

The crucial aspect of Sahlins’s definition of the tribe is the distinction between state and non-state societies. According to him:

A tribe is a segmental organisation. It is composed of a number of equivalent, unspecialized multifamily groups, each the structural duplicate of the other: a tribe is a congeries of equal kin group blocs (1961: 325).

Although the notion of the segmentary system has been in use since the 1890s, especially in the work of Durkheim, it became popular among anthropologists only in the 1940s with the publication of Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) The Nuer, and M. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) African Political Systems. It has served to enrich our understanding of the tribes in the Islamic world including the Swat Pathans, presently in the north-west frontier of Pakistan. Yet, we do not gain much by its application in the understanding of tribes in other parts of the world. First, Sahlins himself cautions
‘civilisation’, as evident in the study of peasantry by Robert Redfield (1956). The emphasis now is on the study of ‘wholes’ and tribes begin to be examined in their relation to civilisation.

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Set in the evolutionary framework, Godelier puts forth his Marxist conception of the tribe both as ‘a type of society’ and as ‘a stage of evolution’. These two notions are interlinked in that each stage of evolution is organised in a specific mode of social organisation. For Godelier, the tribe and the chieftain are fundamentally different. A tribe has no inequalities of class, while a chieftain does. The idea underlying this argument is that chieftains are inextricably linked to a division of classes. When we subject these notions of tribe and chieftain to critical scrutiny, we find that this is not always so, as ‘distinctions of rank, status or occupation operate independently of differences of wealth’ (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). If this is true of African chieftains, it is equally true of the tribes in the present study. Further, there is not much evidence of the uniform co-variation of mode of livelihood, kinship structure and political system as posited by Godelier, due to the presence of various modes of livelihood among tribes.

Fried (1975) not only rejects the evolutionary approach, but also finds the very notion of ‘tribe’ ambiguous and amorphous. Early scholars like Morgan, as well as later ones like Godelier, have viewed the tribe as a ‘completely organised society’. Implicit in this view is the assumption of clear-cut and easily demarcated boundaries between the tribes themselves, and between tribes and other types of society. This is owing primarily to the tribes being considered as ‘breeding populations’ and distinct ‘speech communities’ that limit their boundaries. However, this argument does not find favour with Fried. He asserts that first, there are not just sexual unions but also socially sanctioned marriages crossing the boundaries of tribes, and second, there are tribes which speak the same language, yet form several endogamous groups. At the same time, there are several endogamous groups that speak different languages. The boundaries between tribes are therefore amorphous. Besides, the role of language in defining the tribe is also dependent on the
extent to which a tribe is influenced by the civilisation under whose shadow it exists.

After demolishing the above arguments, Fried advances his own notion of the tribe. He argues that one can understand the true nature of tribe only if one considers it a secondary phenomenon that acquires its character from an external source. A critical examination of Fried's conception of the tribe shows that it is applicable to certain tribes, such as the Makah Indians and the contemporary African tribes, as these groups are delineated as such by political definition for administrative purposes. However, this is not applicable to all tribes in the world. First, historically, not all tribes are of recent origin or secondary phenomena; second, it is not always true that state has always enjoyed pre-eminence over the tribe. For instance, among the Pakhtuns in the erstwhile North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of pre-independence India, it was not the 'tribe' but the 'State' which occupied the periphery.

**Tribe in the Indian Context**

The western notions of the tribe set in the evolutionary framework do not hold ground in the case of societies in India, China and the Islamic world. The historical approach is applicable here, as our experience of history provides us with strong evidence of the co-existence of tribe and civilisation for several centuries (Béteille 1992). Significantly, in India the concern has been not to define the tribe, but to identify tribes for political and administrative purposes. Therefore, here the administrative conception of the tribe holds sway over the anthropological conception (Béteille 1992; Xaxa 2003). Indeed, Sahlins' notion of the tribe as a segmentary system is disproved by Indian history. Historical evidence, according to Niharranjan Ray (1972), suggests that the category of jana in Indian history, with its emphasis on egalitarian principles as against the jati or caste, is somewhat similar to the modern notion of tribe. However, jana is by no means homogeneous. On the one hand, while there were janas at lower levels of socio-economic organisation, there were others which were at a relatively higher level. We can neither treat the former as similar to a segmentary system, nor treat the latter as 'tribal chiefdoms' though there have been tribal dynasties such as the Ahoms in Assam.

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Godetier’s emphasis on the co-variation of mode of livelihood, social structure and political system, when applied to the Indian scene, does not yield much. N. K. Bose (1940) has classified the tribes on the basis of modes of livelihood into hunters and gatheringers, animal herders, shifting cultivators and settled agriculturists. Bailey (1961) defines the tribe in terms of its segmentary features. For him, tribes are small in scale and limited in their social, legal and political relations. They also represent a definite structure. As already mentioned, Bétéille (1992) rejects the evolutionary approach and prefers the historical approach to study tribes, especially in India and the Islamic world. He believes that we find the co-existence of tribe and civilisation in the crucible of the history of these societies. Xaxa (2003) concurs with Bétéille that in India, the tribe is a ‘colonial construction’ and that in the pre-colonial period there was no general category of tribe, but local and regional nomenclatures such as Naga, Santhal and Lushai existed. He is of the view that the general notion of the tribe entered the modern consciousness through the efforts of the colonial state (as is also for caste though to a lesser extent) and was firmly established by the Indian government after independence.

The crucial aspect is that tribes have existed outside the pale of State and civilisation, either out of choice or necessity. Despite the State’s designation of certain erstwhile hunting and gathering tribes as ‘ex-criminal’ and ‘criminal’ tribes, they do not represent a definite stage in the march of evolution from a simple to a more complex society. Indian tribes in general cannot be treated as a secondary phenomenon in the Friedian sense for our history goes entirely against this.

It was through the decennial census, and the establishment of specialised institutions like the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874, that the notion of the ‘tribe’ entered our consciousness. In the censuses, several names have been used for tribes to distinguish them from castes. It is the usage of the term ‘animism’ and later ‘tribal religion’ which has served to make this distinction prominent. In the Census of India 1891 the term ‘forest tribe’ has been used, with ‘animism’ becoming their distinguishing feature in the 1901 Census of India. The term ‘hill and forest tribes’ has been in use in the Census of India 1921, while the term ‘primitve tribe’ acquires precedence in the Census of India 1931. In the Indian context therefore, the usage of the term ‘tribe’ is beset with problems as there is no one way of defining the tribe (Xaxa 2003; Chacko 2005). After independence, the Scheduled Tribes were designated
as such by virtue of their inclusion in Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. As the enlisting of tribes is linked to the provision of administrative and political concessions, it is no surprise that this reflects political mobilisation to gain benefits rather than being based on any scientific or neutral criteria. This explains why, in the case of India, it is the administrative conception of the term ‘tribe’ that is significant compared to the anthropological definition (Béteille 1992; Xaxa 2003).

The notion of tribes as ‘indigenous people’ has been quite popular in recent years, owing primarily to the declaration of the year 1993 as the International Year of the Indigenous People by the United Nations. However, in India, it has existed in spirit for a long time. One can find the use of the terms ‘aborigines’ which roughly corresponds to the idea of ‘indigenous people,’ ‘so-called aborigines,’ ‘backward Hindus,’ ‘tribes in transition,’ the ‘Fourth World,’ ‘ethnic minorities’ and adivasis, i.e., ‘original inhabitants’. But there is no easy consensus among scholars on this issue. Dube (1977) and Béteille (1998) hold that the term ‘indigenous people’ is an inappropriate description of tribes in India, because historically, there have been waves of migrations of tribal populations into the country. But B. K. Roy-Burman (2002) has argued that the term ‘indigenous people’ is not a conceptual definition in the Indian context but emerges from a concern for human rights and a quest for justice, and that notwithstanding the co-existence of tribes with non-tribes, many tribes in India have always maintained their identity as indigenous by virtue of having their own self-regulating economic and political systems. Sengupta (1982) holds that the term ‘indigenous’ must be used to avert the increasing threat, posed by the process of globalisation, to the exploitation of natural resources in the ‘Fourth World’.

It is no easy task to distinguish between original settlers and migrants. Moreover, tribes and non-tribes have always co-existed. Further, the oral traditions of the tribes themselves, such as those of the Mizos and the Maras, speak of spatial movement. The concept of tribe in India acquires much more clarity if examined in relation to the related concepts of civilisation, caste and peasant. In India, tribes have co-existed with state and civilisation. Surajit Sinha holds tribes to be an aspect of the ‘Little Tradition’, not amenable to understanding without reference to the ‘Great tradition’. Béteille (1992) perceives tribes as existing outside the state and civilisation.
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When the term ‘tribe’ is examined in relation to caste, the category of jana comes closer to the modern category of ‘tribe’, in contrast to jati which is akin to ‘caste’. It has been argued that the governing principle underlying jana is egalitarianism while that underlying jati is hierarchy. However, Béteille, Roy-Burman and Singh hold that the jana was amorphous and often overlapped with other categories that could be subsumed under the category of non-tribes.

In the literature of the eighteenth century, ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ were used almost interchangeably and, later, even as cognate terms. In the Census of India 1891, tribe was spoken of as ‘forest tribe’ under the broad category of agricultural and pastoral castes. The distinction between ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ is much more marked in the later censuses, the ambiguous criteria notwithstanding. Tribes were conceived of as those practising animism, as against the Hinduism of caste society. The distinction was understood more in terms of ethnicity and expressed in the form of different administrative set-ups, such as ‘Non-regulation Tracts’, ‘Scheduled Areas’, ‘Excluded Areas’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’. This was done in order to focus on the difference between tribes and non-tribes.

In academies, the dichotomy between ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ found expression in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, the former studying caste and peasant society, and the latter tribes (Xaxa 2003).

In the post-independence era, there were serious attempts by sociologists and anthropologists to distinguish tribe from caste. Noteworthy among these is Mandelbaum (1970), who thought of ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ as different types of societies. Caste society came to be associated with heredity, occupation, hierarchy, purity and pollution, and civic and religious disabilities, while the tribe did not have any of these features. Besides, the two have also been seen as governed by different principles. Tribal society being governed by the principle of kinship, its hallmark is egalitarianism. Caste society, on the other hand, is characterised by inequality, dependency and subordination. Again, they differ in psychological habits. Tribes have been conceived of as pleasure-seeking, while the perception of castes has been ambivalent on this count. Further, the village in caste society has been seen as heterogeneous, while it has been seen as homogeneous in the tribal society.

When tribal society is examined with reference to peasant society, it becomes evident that besides being seen ‘in opposition to caste’,
tribe has also been seen 'in opposition to peasant'. Though 'tribe' and 'peasant' represent two different principles of social morphology, they coincide with each other. Occupation ally, several Indian tribes have been practising settled agriculture. However, scholars have by and large overlooked this kind of overlap between tribe and peasant and have overemphasised their opposition. Beteille (1992) and Sinha (1965) are critical of this dichotomous view of tribe and peasant that compels us to turn a blind eye to the political, economic and social linkages between tribal and non-tribal groups. Therefore, they prefer to examine tribal society in the tribe–peasant continuum, rather than the tribe–peasant dichotomy.

To sum up, this brief survey of the spectrum of scholarship shows that there is an enormous range of views as to what constitutes 'tribe'. Can we look at it as a 'segmentary system', as 'a stage in the evolution of society' or as 'a secondary phenomenon'? In the context of India, I believe that the evolutionary approach has little relevance. It is the historical approach which holds the key to a meaningful analysis. The tribe–caste and tribe–peasant continuum/dichotomy also needs to be taken into account.

**Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings**

This study uses multiple approaches to comprehend the complexities inherent in the relationship between the micro-reality of the school and the macro-reality of the society. As the aim is to analyse not only the processes of schooling but also the interface between the school and society, no single 'exclusive' approach can do justice to it. Different perspectives are required. This is in keeping with the eclectic approach advocated by Woods (1983: 182). Writing about the future prospects of the symbolic-interactionist perspective, Woods asserts that the second stage in the growth of this approach must 'bring interactionism and other approaches closer together'. He also emphasises the need for 'a greater flexibility' and 'a greater openness' in order to reap the benefits of various approaches. This is not 'a facile eclecticism' but would in fact bring 'greater vigour in the exercise of the sociological imagination' (ibid.: 183).

Foremost amongst the approaches is Durkheim's which exhorts us to examine the school as an externally observable social reality that exercises constraint over its members. This is done through both explicit rules and implicit norms. However, the school is much more than a social fact to be treated as a 'thing'. It is also
constitutive of different motivations, goals, values, attitudes and ways of acting, which the actors bring to the situation. Here the significance of Max Weber's *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) cannot but be emphasised. For Weber, it is a necessary part of causal explanations in social science. *Verstehen* is not merely a method but also the way data of the social or human sciences present themselves to us.

Since the 1970s, with the 'new sociology of education', the focus shifted from the external observation of the 'social fact' of education to the 'social construction of knowledge'. This necessarily implied that the 'meanings' attributed by the individuals to their actions, in the process of interaction, be taken into account. The phenomenological perspective underlying symbolic interactionism was thus pressed into service by sociologists in general and the sociologists of education in particular. In a landmark study of working-class children in a Hammertown school, Willis (1977) made brilliant use of the symbolic–interactionist perspective. Writing in a radical framework, Willis showed how working-class identity is recreated through the counter-school culture of 'lads', i.e., working-class children. These children oppose the authority of the teachers, look down upon the obedient and conformist students as 'ear oles', and have a 'laff'. In these and numerous other ways, these 'lads', in an act of 'self-damnation', prepare themselves for manual labour in their adult life.

Woods (1983) has underlined six main concerns of the interactionist approach to the school. These are: contexts, perspectives, cultures, strategies, negotiation, and subjective careers. 'Context' refers to the way in which situations are constructed and interpreted by the participants. Here, the 'front regions' and 'back regions' acquire significance. The front regions of visible individual behaviour may accord with formal expectations, but the back regions may indicate the dilemmas and tensions inherent in the situations. Back regions also help to manage the role better, acting as a 'safety valve'. 'Perspectives' refer to the framework of the teachers and the pupils, through which they construct the reality of the school. These perspectives may be both culture-specific and context-specific. By 'cultures', is meant the background against which perspectives are made and articulated. Perspectives do not exist in a vacuum; they are derived from culture transmitted through the process of socialisation. 'Strategies' refer to the links between perspectives
and action, between the internal and the external. In the context of the school, teachers and pupils come up with blueprints for action, to deal with difficult situations and to achieve their goals. 'Negotiation', which is a key feature of the interactionist approach, refers to the act of choosing wherein each side seeks to maximise its own interests. Implicit in negotiation is also the element of power as not all parties to the interaction have equal power to define the parameters of acceptable social reality. Lastly, 'subjective careers' refer to the way in which an individual's experience is linked to the formal careers and society at large. Commitment and development of identities are two important dimensions of careers.

In the context of India, the symbolic–interactionist approach pertaining to school, as laid down by Woods (1983), has been put to use by Thapan (2006). Though Thapan draws on various approaches, she has predominantly applied the symbolic–interactionist perspective in her ethnographic study of Rishi Valley School which is modelled on J. Krishnamurti's ideology. Similarly, Sarangapani (2003), building upon the symbolic–interactionist approach, has used Piaget's model of a child's construction of knowledge in her study of Kasimpur Boys Model Primary School, a government school on the outskirts of Delhi.

The need to link the analysis of the micro-school processes with macro-societal context in which they occur has been strongly emphasised in recent scholarship (Woods 1983; Scrace 1993; Thapan 2006). This is primarily due to the issues of power, dominance and control in the school processes and several aspects of school culture. It is being increasingly realised that the symbolic–interactionist perspective in its first stage has made significant strides in 'charting the school processes', and analysing the contents of the 'black box' of education. In the second stage, the interactionist approach must go beyond 'the first rough mappings of the hitherto dark unknown of the 'black-box' interior of the school 'to the further mapping of uncharted areas of school life, formal theory and macro-links' (Woods 1983: 180). It is believed that the roots of what goes on in the 'black box' of the classroom and the school lie in the broader societal context. The importance of such an effort can be well understood if we take cognisance of C. Wright Mills's assertion in this context that the core of the sociological imagination is 'to connect the specific milieux to conceptions of social structure' (1959: 38).
In order to understand the principles of the distribution of power and social control in the domain of education, the ‘structur- alist sociologies of school’ (Bernstein, Foucault and Bourdieu) are significant too. For Bernstein (1977, 1996), the central focus of the theory of cultural reproduction is ‘the matrix of transmission’, i.e., the structures and processes by which the principles underlying the social order are transmitted and realised through various institutional forms such as the family, and education. This transmission process has both micro and macro dimensions. For instance, it is affected by the class structure, polity, division of labour and the dominant cultural principles or codes through which social order is regulated. It is also realised through linguistic and other social codes in specific social contexts and the mental structures of our consciousness. Bernstein has drawn upon multiple perspectives, such as the interpretative and the functional approaches and also the work of Marxist conflict theorists. He writes, ‘Essentially, I have used Durkheim and Marx at the macro level and Mead at the micro level’ (1973: 196). From Durkheim, Bernstein tries to grasp what the term ‘social’ entails. From Marx, he endeavours to gauge the social significance of society’s productive system and the power relationships to which the productive system gives rise. He notes, ‘It is not only capital in the strict economic sense which is subject to appropriation, manipulation and exploitation but also cultural capital in the form of symbolic systems through which man can extend and change the boundaries of his experience’ (1977: 196). His focus is on the underlying rules shaping social construction of pedagogic discourse and its practices. He also emphasises the role of language in the reproduction of class relationships. Bernstein’s method thus logically follows from the aims that he has set for himself. He moves from the micro to the macro level of analysis. By doing this, he has ‘tried to develop a way of thinking which integrates structural and interactional categories so that a theory of transmission might be possible’ (ibid.: 32).

The relevance of Bourdieu’s work too is immense for India, as well as for the present study. In India, where the inequalities are not only of class but also of caste, gender, ethnicity and rural–urban residence, it is significant to analyse how existing societal structures are maintained and legitimiated by ‘symbolic violence’ through the generative principles of the ‘habitus’, the two key concepts in Bourdieu’s work (with J. C. Passeron), especially in *Reproduction in*
Education, Society and Culture (1990). According to Bourdieu, class structures are maintained and legitimated by ‘symbolic violence’. Symbolic systems are described as structuring phenomenal reality through their own internal structures. They are thus ‘structured’ and ‘structuring’ Further, these systems also perform a political function as ‘instruments of domination’ in the maintenance of class dominance. The effectiveness of this symbolic power lies in the recognition of its legitimacy. This is done by the concealing or meconnaisance (misrecognition) of the real, unequal power relations on which it rests.

Bourdieu argues that dominant symbolic systems or ‘cultural capital’ is produced, distributed and consumed in a set of social relationships that are relatively autonomous, being independent of those which produce other forms of capital. This autonomy is due to the control of the owners of ‘cultural capital’ over the education system, the major instrument of cultural reproduction. Just as there is competition over the distribution of economic capital, there is struggle too over how reality should be symbolically defined. According to Bourdieu, education is a process of ‘symbolic violence’ as it involves the imposition of a ‘cultural arbitrary’ by an ‘arbitrary power’. Schooling is biased in favour of those who by virtue of their class habitus have acquired the appropriate dispositions, attitudes to language, and other preconditions for educational success. To quote Bourdieu and Passeron from their classic work, Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture:

Indeed, among all the solutions put forward throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there surely does not exist one that is better concealed, and therefore better adapted to societies which tend to refuse the most patent forms of the transmission of power and privileges, than that solution which the educational system provides (1990: 88).

In a predominantly tribal society, hitherto egalitarian but presently emerging as a differentiated one, it would be interesting to see how symbolic violence works in a context where students are drawn not only from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but also from various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

Another sociological perspective that contributes to our understanding of the school is that provided by McLaren. Drawing upon the work of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, McLaren has
Education, Society and Culture (1990). According to Bourdieu, class structures are maintained and legitimated by ‘symbolic violence’. Symbolic systems are described as structuring phenomenal reality through their own internal structures. They are thus ‘structured’ and ‘structuring’. Further, these systems also perform a political function as ‘instruments of domination’ in the maintenance of class dominance. The effectiveness of this symbolic power lies in the recognition of its legitimacy. This is done by the concealing or misrecognition of the real, unequal power relations on which it rests.

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In a predominantly tribal society, hitherto egalitarian but presently emerging as a differentiated one, it would be interesting to see how symbolic violence works in a context where students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but also from different educational backgrounds, contribute to our understanding. Drawing on Giroux, we can see how emphasised ‘understanding schooling from the perspective of culture and performance’. He aims to provide ‘liminal glimpses into everyday school life’ through the analysis of rituals, a neglected field so far. The term ‘ritual’ has so far been limited to activities in the religious context. Contemporary ritualists have argued for dissolving this mystical halo around the term ‘ritual’ as, according to them, rituals are constitutive of everyday human life. For instance, SkorusSki asserts that we need to be set free from the straitjacket of ‘ritual-sacred-symbolic’ versus ‘practical-profane-instrumental’ (1986: 173). For McLaren, schools are rich repositories of ritual systems, which play a crucial role in school culture. He writes, ‘Rituals may be perceived as carriers of cultural codes (cognitive and gestural information) that shape students’ perceptions and ways of understanding, they inscribe both the “surface structure” and “deep grammar” of school culture’ (1986: 3).

Central to McLaren’s notion of ritual are the concepts of power and domination. He takes the position that ‘the categories of ideology, culture, ritual and the symbolic must compete with those of economic sphere and class to understand present day domination and struggle’ (ibid.: 4) Therefore, schools are not mere ‘instructional sites’, reproducing common values, skills and knowledge, but also ‘cultural sites’ which selectively order and legitimate specific forms of languages, reasoning, sociality and daily experience. McLaren’s concern is therefore not just with the product of domination, but also with the process. According to him, domination is not simply reproduced but is being constantly ‘worked up’ through ongoing rituals and practices of school life. Such rituals discipline, administer and limit the activities that students bring with them to school.

Although there are significant differences in their theoretical formulations, there is an underlying common thread in the approaches of McLaren and Giroux. This thread is ‘the discourse of possibility’ which argues for the development of critical pedagogies. McLaren holds that teachers must develop modes of curriculum and teaching that appropriate and utilise the cultural capital of the students whom they serve, i.e., those forms of lived and popular culture that provide raw material for student experiences. Giroux, on the other hand, is concerned with the way the curriculum functions as an internal discourse. He sees it as a principal language of the theory of education, which makes its ideology intelligible. There is an element of hope in Giroux’s approach for he views the school as
a terrain of contestation rather than as a mere ideology machine like Apple (1982) and Willis (1977). He seeks to offer a ‘counter hegemonic’ programme which sees ‘school as a site where cultural capital may be wrested from those who hold it under lock and key’ (McLaren 1986). By doing so, he (like Dewey) aims to make pedagogy an emancipatory activity. However, unlike Dewey, he wants to empower students and teachers to enliven their cultural sensibilities and thus have options for change.

Writing in 1979, Ahmad dwells on the role of education in social change in India. She observes that much was expected out of education, especially after independence. But education, on its part, failed to come up to these expectations. Following Mannheim and Young, Ahmad asserts that education is a social product, and argues that the sociology of knowledge can illuminate our understanding of the perplexing aspects of the relationship between education and social change. Therefore, we must go behind ‘the charades, the pageants and the masquerades of play-acting to see whether institutional education, as much as politics, or religion, is an attempt to initiate students into the rituals of a dominant culture (Davies in Ahmad 1979: 163).

Given the enormity of such a task, this study draws upon varied sociological traditions and multiple approaches — from Durkheim’s ‘social fact’ and Weber’s *Verstehen*, to the symbolic-interactionist and phenomenological approaches. It endeavours to take interactionism to the second stage by linking the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro’. Whether we speak of Young’s (1971) conception of the ‘social construction of knowledge’, or Bernstein’s emphasis on ‘the inner logic of pedagogic discourse and its practices’ as a fundamental social context (1996: 3), or Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of ‘praxeological knowledge’, clearly an eclectic approach which attempts to ‘look through a microscope and a telescope at the same time’ (Woods 1983: 181) is most suitable. Though these approaches may appear to oppose each other at a manifest level, we need to establish communication between them to enable sociology to progress (Bourdieu 1993).

**The Field Setting**

The data for this study was collected from two schools in Chhitmuipui district of Mizoram through intensive fieldwork method. The choice of the urban school in Saiha (hereafter School A) was guided by two
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The Field Setting

The data for this study was collected from two schools in Chhimgui district of Mizoram through intensive fieldwork method. The choice of the urban school in Saiha (hereafter School A) was guided by two factors. The first factor was that being the only state government-run higher secondary school in Saiha, it attracts students from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, ranging from the wards of agriculturists to those of government servants. Besides, the teachers in School A also form a heterogeneous group. Being a state-run school, teachers from different backgrounds are posted here. The heterogeneity in the student and teacher population was what I was looking for. The second factor was that School A was under the state-run Mizoram Board of School Education, it offered me an opportunity to see how state policies are put to action. The choice of School B — in the rural set up of Serkawr — was primarily due to my interest in studying a school in a village in order to gauge the similarities and differences between the two settings, the rural and the urban.

School A was established in 1957 and had both middle and high school from the beginning. It was also the first high school in the erstwhile Pawi-Lakher Regional Council area (now Chhimgui district). In the beginning, it was run on public contributions. The people who played a pioneering role in setting it up were political leaders and public figures. School A was provincialised on 1 October 1964.

It was given the status of a higher secondary school in 1990. The post of Headmaster was changed to that of Principal after the school acquired the status of a higher secondary school. The change in status was however nominal as the school does not run higher secondary classes. The same is the case with other higher secondary schools in Mizoram, as higher secondary (+2) classes are with the North-Eastern Hill University, Mizoram Campus (now Mizoram University). School A has classes from V to X. The middle section does not have a separate person who is in-charge of it, though a senior teacher looks after it.

School B is a government-aided, coeducational institution. It has classes from V to X. The middle school (classes V–VIII) is overseen by B. Thago. But for all administrative purposes, this section falls under J. Chola, the high school Headmaster. Officially, the medium of instruction in the middle school section is Mizo, and English in the high school. Prior to 1991, when the Government of Mizoram introduced the Comprehensive School Scheme, School B was not one but two schools, viz., the middle school and the high school, and were at different locations.
The middle school in Serkawr was established in April 1948. It was the first middle school to be established in the Mara area. At the time of fieldwork, there were four teachers in the middle school section. Besides the four teachers, there were two non-teaching staff members. The present high school section of School B was first started as Mara High School, Serkawr, on 1 February 1969.

**A Note on the Fieldwork**

My fieldwork resulted from an attempt to decipher and understand school education in Mizoram. Though essentially a personal experience for every fieldworker, it must be made explicit and 'public', if its resultant product — i.e., the research — is to be presented to society at large. Rivers, one of the first major exponents of the intensive fieldwork method, distinguishing it from the 'survey' method, writes: 'A typical piece of intensive work, is one in which the worker lives for a year or more among a community of perhaps four or five hundred people and studies every detail of their life and culture in which he comes to know every member of the community personally, in which he is not content with generalised information but studies every feature of life and custom in concrete detail and by means of the vernacular language' (1913: 6).

Now to spell out my own 'experiment' with the fieldwork method. Landing at Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, was like discovering a whole new world — a lush green cover over the mountainous landscapes, the hills resonating with the melody of guitars and the solemnity of church bells. Further, its equally vibrant people added colour to the whole ambience (see Figure 1c). I was full of enthusiasm about exploring this new world, but anxious at the same time.

When I went to Mizoram, the only thing I was clear about was that I wanted to study the relation of school and society. However, I certainly did not proceed with any fixed research design because I did not have any hypothesis to be tested. During the first few weeks after my arrival, I frequented the various offices and met officials in the state government's Department of Education and other government departments in Aizawl, as well as the academics. Whosoever I met in Aizawl advised me to study the Lai community of Mizoram and not the Maras. The informants thus tried to influence the choice of the community to be studied and whom to avoid, much like in Minocha’s (2002) Study of the hospital inmates in Delhi. M. N. Srinivas, the doyen of sociology in India, has aptly
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After this initial acquaintance, I proceeded to Chhitmuipui district, where my study was to be conducted. For the first few days after arriving (at the district headquarters town of Saiha), I used to take casual rounds of the town, though it was a real ‘uphill task’ in the true sense of the word for a person from the plains! Soon, these walks enabled me to prepare a map of Saiha town and to form a rough idea of the things around me. Since all that I saw was new, I preferred to remain ‘a friendly and curious outsider’ (Srinivas 2002) with my ‘eyes and ears open’ (Béteille, 2002: 100) for the first few weeks.

After obtaining basic information about education in general in Chhitmuipui district from the District Education Officer, Adult Education Officer, etc., and visiting the schools in Saiha, I decided to study School A. There were broadly three kinds of schools: private, deficit or government-aided and government schools. School A exemplified the third category. Simultaneously, I also decided to study a school in a village in order to see the rural/urban patterns and differences in education. I finally zeroed in on School B, which
was the only high school in this village of historical importance for the Maras. My aim to study a school in this village was guided by two factors: first, the observation of the process of schooling in a remote interior village; and second, the opportunity it offered me, due to its relatively homogeneous clientele, to observe the similarities and contrasts between the two school settings.

Having obtained the permission of the Principal to study the school, I started visiting School A on all working days. Getting an entry into the school was not very difficult, as the Principal kindly gave his consent. However, building rapport with the students and the teachers and gaining their acceptance took a considerable amount of time. It was a daunting task, for after all I was a vai-nu (an outsider woman), who wore salwar-kameez and had not even a smattering of the Mizo language. For the first few weeks, I just visited the school, and would often sit with the teachers, talk to them in a casual manner or observe them. In a staff meeting, the Principal introduced me to both the middle and high school teachers, and explained to them the purpose of my visits. Though this helped break the ice, the response of the teachers towards me was varied.

Some were encouraging, and others became more friendly, while many still remained reticent and apprehensive of my presence in the school. Some time elapsed before the teachers were convinced of the genuineness of my intent and efforts, and accepted me. This, I must say, is an essential precondition for anyone studying tribal folk, though it also holds true for other fieldwork situations. As K. N. Sahay (1977) observes, once the people are convinced of the honesty of the researcher, a certain threshold is crossed in forging a relationship with the members of the tribal community.

Soon, many teachers allowed me to accompany them to the class-rooms. They would introduce me to the pupils. I just sat quietly, so that the pupils and I could at least get used to each other’s presence. Later, I started taking some Hindi classes for the middle school students. This facilitated my understanding of the school processes, helped me a great deal to learn the Mizo tawng (the Mizo language), and went a long way in building rapport with the pupils. I would give a Hindi word for an object, and the students supplied me with a Mizo word for the same. However, some ambiguity remained about my position, primarily because of my taking up teaching, albeit occasionally. The ambiguity was more in the minds of the teachers than those of the students, for I was
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Soon, due to my interaction with the pupils, listening carefully to Mizo being spoken around me in the market and elsewhere, and then practising it, I started getting a grasp of the language. In addition, I also switched to wearing puang (the local Mizo dress). These small steps greatly helped in building a rapport with the people.

I conducted a number of classroom observations. I used to sit at the back of the classroom, and tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. However, I admit that it may have obstructed the normal flow of classroom activities. Whatever caution one may exercise, ‘the very presence of the fieldworker does have an influence upon the field’ (Srinivas 2002). Most of the pupils and teachers took to my presence sportingly. I did not use any of the conventional aids like the tape recorder. My main method of data collection was sustained and intensive observation of the actual behaviour of the participants in the school situation. In this technique, I followed Malinowski, who reiterates that ‘behaviour is a fact, a relevant fact and one that can be recorded’ (1966: 20).

I also distributed questionnaires to all teachers and a significant number of students prior to undertaking the classroom observations. The purpose was to elicit information on their social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, and their perceptions of the different facets of school life. This helped me to develop a broad overview of the field.

In addition, I conducted group discussions and intensive interviews with some teachers and pupils to capture the ‘spirit’ or ‘the views, opinions and utterances’. This, according to Malinowski, constitutes the ‘third commandment of fieldwork’. These ‘ideas, feelings and impulses’, he writes, are ‘conditioned by the culture in which we find them, and are, therefore, an ethnic peculiarity of the given society’ (1966: 22–23). Through the discussions and interviews, I could ascertain the views of the participants on several significant issues
pertaining to the school, curriculum and self-identity. Besides, I visited the homes of about 50 students, as my aim was not only to study the school but the home situation too. On these visits, I interviewed the parents as well. Seeing the students both at school and in the home setting helped me to evolve a comprehensive view of their lives. These visits gave me enriching insights into the personal life of the students, and into several facets of the social life of the people in general. This I could never have aspired to have, had I limited myself only to observing student behaviour at school. I also attended the meetings of the Mara Student Organisation and other student organisations, including their annual conferences, and was even made a judge for a competition at one of them. Apart from the school, I observed teachers in the meetings of the Saiha Teacher’s Union. In addition, I carefully observed teachers and pupils at church services and in the Sunday Schools. Sustained and intensive observation led me to decipher the manifest as well as hidden dimensions of the participants’ lives, what Malinowski calls ‘the imponderabilia of actual life’ which do not lend themselves to comprehension unless observed in their full actuality.

I examined several documents — relating to the two schools, the Mizoram Board of Secondary Education (MBSE), the student organisations, the church records, and the Assembly Debates — and also conducted textual analysis. Let me confess that the most challenging task was gaining access to the official documents which contained what Srinivas calls ‘the green room data’, i.e., the data ‘concealed behind the screen’ (2002: 13). The officials were generally suspicious of my research motives and it was not before several persuasive attempts that they would part with any piece of information. For instance, it was after more than half a dozen visits to the office of the MBSE and a visit to the Secretary, Education, Government of Mizoram, that I was allowed access to the minutes of the Textbook Committee meetings of the MBSE. The same was the case with the other official documents. Thus, I had to be ‘an active huntsman’ and trace this greenroom data to its ‘most inaccessible lairs’ (Malinowski 1966: 8).

The fieldwork situation in the village was slightly different from that which prevailed in the town. I stayed at the Inspection Bungalow which was atop a steep hill, and offered a panoramic view of the village and River Chhimituipui. The first few days were
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I examined several documents — relating to the two schools, the Mizoram Board of Secondary Education (MBSE), the student organisations, the church records, and the Assembly Debates — and also conducted textual analysis. Let me confess that the most challenging task was gaining access to the official documents which contained what Srinivas calls ‘the green room data’, i.e., the data ‘concealed behind the screen’ (2002: 13). The officials were generally suspicious of my research motives and it was not piece of information. For instance, it was after more than half a Education, Government of Mizoram, that I was allowed access to the minutes of the Textbook Committee meetings of the MBSE. The same was the case with the other official documents. Thus, I had to be ‘an active huntsman’ and trace this greenroom data to its ‘most inaccessible lairs’ (Malinowski 1966: 8).

The fieldwork situation in the village was slightly different from that which prevailed in the town. I stayed at the Inspection Bungalow which was atop a steep hill, and offered a panoramic view of the village and River Chhitmuipui. The first few days were spent in conducting a village survey, collecting other vital details from the Primary Health Centre and other departments, and drawing a map. I took long walks round the village in the morning and saw various scenes, such as women and young girls cleaning rice for the day in large trays, boys cutting firewood, young boys cleaning the village paths, small girls and women on their way to the tikho (tuikhur in Mizo) or the local water point to collect water, and the mithuns (bison) roaming around the village and the pigs being slaughtered. It helped a great deal to understand the everyday life of the people. After a quick meal, I used to resume my school observations for the day. For instance, I observed the school processes in the classrooms, the staffroom, and the activities during the interval, besides walking down from the school with the teachers, the Headmaster and the students. Here too, I distributed questionnaires to obtain preliminary information on the socio-economic and ethnic background of students and staff. Though my main method of data collection was participant observation, I also conducted interviews with a few teachers, students and their parents besides conducting discussions with the pupils on significant issues, such as the school, their aspirations and their sense of identity. Here too, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible in my classroom observations and would occupy the backseat. It was only once that a teacher asked me to leave, as he was feeling nervous in my presence.

Though my primary focus was the study of education and society, I never missed an opportunity to observe customs and rituals relating to birth, marriage and death, church services, Sunday Schools, special gospel camps such as the Beirual and meetings of the student organisations, as observing just the school and the home would have implied ‘cutting an artificial field of enquiry’ (Malinowski 1966). It was also because of the cultural distinctiveness of the field that every aspect of the social fabric had a special fascination for me. Though ‘a plunge into the unknown’ (Bétéille and Madan 2002) is a feature of all scientific endeavour, for me it was so in more ways than one. The respondents, especially in the village, expressed a desire to have a wall clock for the church in return for the information they provided me. However, other fieldworkers have encountered similar situations. Such experiences have been chronicled by Srinivas (2002) as well.
There were some amusing aspects of the fieldwork too. Initially, the students in School A used to have a hearty laugh at my pronunciation of Mizo names which, needless to say, was a ticklish task for me. Many teachers and others even suggested that I should become a Christian if I wanted to study Mizo society and should change my name to Lahlmingliani if I required any information. One of the teachers often used to tease me saying, ‘You Hindus are fools, you worship animals, while we eat them,’ and would further ask me, ‘Kapi, Bawngsa ei em?’ (Madam, would you eat beef?). All such remarks made in a lighter vein helped to forge close bonds with the respondents. In this, my experience was like those of many other fieldworkers who have learned that ‘the people who are being studied like feeling superior’ to the researcher, and like to treat the fieldworker as ‘an ignoramus, fool or child’ (Srinivas 2002: 6).

The birth of my younger son during the course of fieldwork heralded a new relationship with the field. The students and the Headmaster of School B came with gifts of eggplants (brinjals) and artui (eggs) for the newborn. My Mara respondents bestowed on him a Mara name, Beikypacha (Blessed by God), and my Lai and Mizo respondents gave him the name Lalsiama (God’s Creature). This incident was to forge lasting bonds with my respondents and the field. To conclude, my enthusiasm combined with a keen sense of curiosity and compassion finally earned me the reputation of a cultural ambassador, though the journey from being a vai-nu to becoming a cultural ambassador was a long and arduous one.

Note
1. The figures show a total of 461 tribal communities in India. These constitute 8.01 per cent of the total population.