

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

While summing up the entire exercise at the end of the dissertation let us recapitulate the entire process of research starting from the days of conceiving of the research design till the writing up of the thesis. As the topic suggests the research design had a methodological concern of identity formation in terms of ethnicity of the Pnar (Jaintia) and the perspective of development in time-space frame. The research exercise was undertaken in about five years of time by the present researcher. It was indeed a laborious academic journey with meticulous aptitude through the area of their habitation to understand a critical problem that had a bearing of identity formation. At the same time, it was about to understand the ethnography of the people in terms of their ethnicity.

While involving in such arduous research acumen, the present researcher has undertaken a prolonged period to collect empirical data through meticulous research that included methodologies as practiced in social sciences like observation, structured schedule, questionnaire, focused group interview and case studies. In addition, the present researcher had the access of understanding the area of study for over a decade by way of its linguistic, cultural and academic affiliation. During this entire phase of both informal and formal association with the land the present researcher has come to an understanding that cultural continuity is a tangible phenomenon irrespective of the changes amalgamated by the people that are decisively and primarily mentionable too. At the same time ethnicity being in the minds of men, the people adhere to their traditional cultural affiliation. It is only a matter of carrying forward of traditions over vertical time and horizontal space. One can apply it as the concept of carrying forward and upward, not only of cultural awareness, but also of cultural contents.

While following the academic tradition of social sciences in general and ethnographic study in particular, the present researcher has followed all sorts of research methodologies: traditional / conventional and modern. As a demand of the discipline utilization of available documents was done to a great extent. It comprised state and central administration and the decadal census records spanning over a period of last decades. This apart, at the empirical level, 407 household schedules were canvassed in six villages having a total population of 2446, comprising both *Niam Tre* (209) and Christian (198) households having a population of 1296 and 1150 respectively. The entire coverage of empirical study was done in two districts having four community development blocks of the larger Jaintia Hills. The schedules depicted an understanding of the demographic profile of the households along with some other associated socio-cultural dimensions of the households. Once the structured schedule was canvassed and data were culled from it, qualitative profile of the same households were collected. This provided the desired feedback as was expected during the days of conceiving of the research design and the acquired result after the pilot survey. In fact, while understanding the area of Pnar (Jaintia) habitation in totality in its existential form one cannot deny the hangover of the both tribal and colonial existence in all its forms. At the same time, it is also observed that there is a superstructure of developmental attributes on its indigenous cultural makeup. Hence, one cannot deny the existence of the past while understanding the present.

II

Ethnic identity searches for identity in two ways: 'self-identity' and 'community identity'. Self-identity evokes an understanding that a person has of himself / herself. Formation of one's identity takes place through self-assessment, personality attributes, knowledge of one's skills and abilities, one's occupation and hobbies. One's personal identity is closely related to his self-image. Identity formation, also known as individuation, is the development of the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity in a particular stage of life in which individual characteristics are possessed and by which a person is recognized or known. Such loss of identity can result

in increased levels of generalized anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, a loss of self-confidence, social anxiety, isolation, chronic loneliness, all of which threaten our ability to connect with other people. One's community identity begins with his / her search in finding the belongingness to a particular group to which he / she became a member by birth. This like the self-identity may be challenging to assert and struggle to withstand.

Tribal identity is inherited through myths and legends, developing early in the social environment and outside the conscious awareness of the individual. It is essential for the well-being of the tribe infusing members with positive self-image. Tribal heritage includes myths, rituals, beliefs, customs, symbols, artistic creations and wisdom. Although there are no written texts, knowledge is preserved and perpetuated through oral tradition, music and visual art forms. Tribal culture implies closeness to nature with manifestation of continuity of traditional knowledge. A tribe regards elements of nature as alive and conscious, revering them as deities to turn to in crisis and to communicate with through rituals and incantations, through song and dance, and through narratives and myths.

Indigenous peoples are ethnic minorities, having their own traditions, cultures and languages, who have been marginalized and pushed to peripheries of the so called 'civilized' societies. The indigenous people have their own ethnicity, cultural identity, distinctiveness and uniqueness that help them to maintain the cohesiveness and corporateness of their society, yet their history is coloured with their own blood, exploitation, discrimination, displacement and alienation (Mappilaparambil, 2015). The term 'indigenous' is an ambiguous term. It relies more on common sense than on any definition that would be accepted unanimously or that could be applied universally.

III

While reviewing the earlier studies in this theme the present researcher has come across a host of references, both conceptual and empirical. It was apparent that most of the studies were undertaken in the western world, many of which reflected global issues. In India, though references are meagre, yet these are not negligible since some of which have dealt upon the core issues of immigration in this sub-continent. Let us re-examine

the concepts and definitions once more to look into the applicability of such phenomenon that has been done in the preceding chapters. It is needless to mention here that this exercise will help in understanding the phenomenon of identity formation of the community in discussion.

The concept of ethnicity is very much linked with the issue of identity and also with the aspects of culture. Thus, identity, ethnicity or culture of a tribal group could be defined as a socially defined category of people who identify with each other based on a perceived shared social experience or ancestry. Ethnicity is not a simple and isolable social phenomenon, rather interrelated to many other complex social issues and it is an important means by which people may identify with a larger group. Many social scientists and anthropologists regard ethnicity as a product of specific kind of inter-group interactions, rather than an essential quality inherent to human groups which remains ridden with a split at its heart. Ethnicity helps in maintaining and conserving the valuable cultural resources of which most important is indigenous wisdom and traditional knowledge. Membership of an ethnic group tends to be associated with various factors such as ideas and ideologies of shared cultural heritage, ancestry, history, homeland, traditional wisdom, language or dialect or any other means of communication, direct or indirect, verbal or non-verbal, which people use with symbolic systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, physical appearance, etc. Members of an ethnic group, on the whole, claim cultural continuities over time, although historians and cultural anthropologists have documented that many of the values, practices and norms that imply continuity with the past are of relatively recent invention.

Anthropologists or anyone who study the human history will agree that ethnicity is one of the important factors in culture. Every human community may it be advanced or primitive has its own tale of ethnicity to share with other communities. Human beings can express themselves in a society, which give shape to ethnic identity. Ethnicity finds expression in material culture, in human behaviour, and in value systems, morals and ethics. It interacts with systems of family and clan organizations, marriage, law and

politics. The factors of ethnicity and cultural identity have been attested in the works of earlier anthropologists, ethnographers, and sociologists like Sir James Frazer (1890), Baines (1891), Enthoven (1901), Ernest Crawley (1902), Gait (1911), Marten (1921), Tallents (1921), Hutton (1931), Elwin (1942), Majumdar (1961), Ananthakrishna Iyer and Bala Ratnam (1961), Ghurye (1963), Nirmal Kumar Bose (1971), and Vidyarthi (1976). However, some scholars believe that the term 'ethnic' is based on the concept of pure race is a myth. It can be understood as relating to large groups of people classed together according to common traits or customs or a social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is defined primarily by descent. Some others state that term ethnicity is still more used to denote marginal, disadvantaged, excluded and minority communities who are confronting with the dominant majorities. However, ethnicity is basically an issue of 'ours' and 'others'. It can be construed here that imaging 'other' and 'otherness' is the root of ethnic differentiation.

The importance of anthropological approaches to understand the course of development of anthropology in the country along with different facets of the study of ethnicity is emphasized in many universities over a century. Mention may be made of Sarat Chandra Roy (1921), Dharendra Nath Majumdar (1950, 1956), Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1956), Shyama Charan Dube (1956, 1962), Nirmal Kumar Bose (1963), Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi (1966, 1975, 1978) Gautam Kumar Bera (1995), Vijoy S. Sahay and Pradeep Kumar Singh (1997), who made significant contribution in the journey of anthropology into Indian Universities and other academic institutions as has been elsewhere attested by Bera (2013). To a great extent, anthropology is the locus where ethnicity is created and re-created. Ethnicity emerges and is made relevant through ongoing social situations and encounters, and through peoples' ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life. Any change in ethnic components would constitute an ethnic process. Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi has given in length all the details of the contribution of the aforesaid scholars in two of his monumental books, *viz. The Tribal Culture of India* (1976) and *The Rise of Indian Anthropology* (1977). However; study on ethnicity had very significant momentum even in the remote past, though, the initial study on ethnicity, religion and culture were mainly made by the travelers, missionaries, merchants, pilgrims and freelance scholars who either made textual analysis, or discussed

the diverse religious beliefs and practices, and peculiar customs on the basis of their empirical data. Gradually elaborate ethnographic study of a particular community or a religion was undertaken on specific communities by Sir James Frazer (1890), Ernest Crawley (1902), Roy (1912, 1928), Elwin (1955) to name a few.

The very idea of ethnicity speaks of certain marginal location of a people. In Northeast India the marginality of ethnic people carries complex meaning in addition to its general nature at both national and local context. Danda (1991) considered ethnicity as a process whereby the leaders of an ethnic group try to mobilize its group members by utilizing the ethnic sentiments for some economic and political goals.

Ethnicity along with the factor of formation of ethnic identity may be examined from various angles. It may be viewed from structural attributional interactional points of views. From the social-structural angle, 'ethnicity' is about 'social and cultural differentiation' which has reference to 'identity projection'. From attributional point of view ethnicity is a process in which 'ethnic awareness' and 'ethnic consciousness' plays the most vital role. Whereas from interactional point of view, ethnicity is the outcome of relation and interaction between we and they or 'self and others' in the day-to-day social affairs. It is a subjective experience and beliefs of a particular group but manifests through several objective criteria.

IV

India's Northeast traces its formation as a region to the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the gradual reorganization of international borders around it both before and after it. As a result, it remains tenuously connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor, the 'chicken's neck' or 'Siliguri Corridor'- as it is popularly known, in northern West Bengal, with an approximate width of 33 kilometers on the eastern side and 21 kilometers on the western side. This constitutes barely one per cent of the boundaries of the region, while the remaining over 99 per cent of its borders are international – with China and Tibet to the North, Bangladesh to the South West, Bhutan to the North West, and Myanmar to the East. Presently the region comprises eight Indian

states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura – also known as ‘Seven Sisters’ and Sikkim, a small brother. The region accounts for one of the largest concentrations of tribal people in the country - constituting about 30 per cent of the total population - though with a skewed distribution of over 60 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland taken together. Within this small stretch of land the Northeast accommodates 213 tribal communities and 175 languages and many non-tribal communities. The region presents a unique cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious profile not to be found in any other region in India.

The abode of clouds ‘Meghalaya’ has a very picturesque landscape and an excellent natural beauty. It lies in the northeastern part of the country located between ‘25⁰1’ to ‘26⁰5’ North Latitude and ‘85⁰49’ to ‘92⁰52’ East Longitude with the total area of 22,429 square kilometers and the state has a population of 29,66,889 and is the 23rd most populous state in the country. It is carved out of Assam and converted into a full-fledged state on 21st January, 1972. Meghalaya shares boundary with Assam in the north and east, and Bangladesh in the south and west. There are three matrilineal communities residing in Meghalaya with their own rich cultural heritage. They have their own history, tradition, customs, beliefs, etc. The division of the districts of Meghalaya is based on the tribal inhabitation. The districts are split into three major divisions, the Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills based on three main tribal communities occupying these places. Our focus area is in the districts of Jaintia Hills, both East and West districts, which lies in the east of Meghalaya.

The Jaintia Hills district was created on 22nd February 1972. It has a total geographical area of 3, 819 square kilometers and a population of 3,95,124 as per the 2011 census. It stretches from ‘25⁰3’ to ‘25⁰45’ North Latitude and ‘91⁰59’ to ‘92⁰45’ East Longitude. Jaintia Hills has two civil districts, West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills, with Jowai and Khliehriat as its headquarters. It has one civil Sub-division at Amalaram and five Blocks namely Thadlaskein, Khliehriat, Laskein, Amalaram and Saipung. There are twelve *elakas*, under these two districts. Jowai is sixty-six kilometers away from the state capital, while Khliehriat is 101 kilometers away (Lhuid, 2006: 1). The area has the largest producer of coal in the state. Coal mines can be seen all over

both the districts. Limestone production in the state is increasing, as there is high demand from cement industries.

The area is predominantly occupied by a large number of tribal populations known as 'Synteng'. The 'Synteng' known as 'Jaintia' or 'Pnar' is a Scheduled Tribe of Mongoloid ethnicity, speaking Austric language belonging to the Mon-Khmer group who are believed to be migrated from the East Asia. The name 'Pnar' is an endonym (used by the community members), while 'Jaintia' and 'Synteng' are exonyms (used by the outsiders). The word 'Jaintia' is derived from the name of a former kingdom, the Jaintia Kingdom whose rulers were Syntengs. One theory says that the word 'Jaintia' is ultimately derived from the name of the shrine of *Jayanti Devi* or *Jainteswari*, an incarnation of the Hindu goddess *Durga*. The Pnar (Jaintia) are one among the many tribal communities of Northeast India who do not have a script of their own. The very little we know about them was handed to us through the ancestors orally being shrouded with myths and mystery. In fact, nothing is known about their ancestral lands, their origin, migration, etc. They have a very strong oral tradition, which is being handed over till today.

V

One of the dominant components of human social formations is the ability to identify oneself with the rest with regard to one's own uniqueness and collective commonalities. The tribal communities of the present day make every effort to maintain their own distinctiveness. The study of the different tribes has not only attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists but also other branches of different disciplines. In trying to understand the Pnar (Jaintia) tribal society, the present researcher is experienced with the major problem in seeing the change in traditional values, customs and systems that got diverted due to the ongoing process of development and economic mobility of the community as a result of inroads of multifarious economic opportunities. Special mention may be made of mining and quarrying that have changed the economic contour of the area and have affected the traditional lives of the tribal people under discussion here who find it as the newest economic intervention. It is important to

analyze the way of life of the Pnar, who had been influenced by forces from within and without, which led to transformation in their society.

Of late, with the impact of large-scale immigration of global forces everything is changing in the fast-moving world. Human society has a tremendous ability to adapt to the situation and environment for his security and survival. Every society adapts to their environment by three means: technological, organizational and ideational. Technological advancement and organizational improvement and ideational development bring tremendous change in the socio-cultural, religious and economic life of the people. Contemporary tribal communities have a great variety and complexity in their cultural practices, both traditional and adopted. However, they share one characteristic feature which binds them by common understanding as to the ultimate nature and purpose of life. The present scenario of the world, calls for greater awareness amongst people about other cultures and ethnicities. There is a growing need, in this world growing smaller every passing minute, to get acquainted with a wider variety of people, their lifestyles, likes and dislikes or the way of thinking. In fact, to sustain better relations and increase our own acceptability, it is important to develop a deeper understanding and respect for other kinds of people. One of such fields whereby a mutual learning and furthering of good will in our country is through the study of Indian culture and history which demands a closer look and introspection through the various human sciences like anthropology, linguistics, sociology, comparative religion and so on. The present attempt to study the Pnar (Jaintia) in their indigenous habitat is a step forward in this direction.

VI

While conducting research of such nature the following research questions were kept in mind keeping the purview of study in the state of Meghalaya focusing microscopically in two districts of Jaintia Hills where the Pnar (Jaintia) have made their habitation since the dim ages of the past. For such understanding the study was further concentrated in six villages located under four community development blocks situated under two districts. Though the Pnar (Jaintia) come under the grater Khasi tribe belonging to Austro-Asiatic family and Mon Khmer sub family, they seem to have made

much effort to retain some elements of their traditional culture such as their dialect, traditional tribal attire, festivals, customary laws or traditional village council to guide and direct their society and worship traditional deities and spirits according to their age old customs. However, the Pnar (Jaintia) society experienced transition due to its contact with the people of the plains and it still continues. Since no society can live in isolation, changes are bound to happen either for better or for worse from one pattern to the other. While studying the Pnar (Jaintia) society in transition the present researcher has kept these arch questions in the back of his mind: (i) How do the Pnar see changes in the society? Can the Pnar society sustain the cultural identity of the tribe against all such factors causing change? (ii) How can we see the cultural changes witnessed in the present Pnar society be called the cultural expression of the Pnar? (iii) What are the traditional systems and values of the Pnar community that are eroded with the passage of time?(iv) What is the cultural uniqueness they possess even at the face of advancing developmental parameters and economic progression and transformation? (v) How does the new generation respond to the traditional values and knowledge with regard to agriculture, religion and social life? Sincere efforts have been made to address the above research questions in the preceding chapters.

These are certain immediate concerns that needed attention to address while conducting the present research. Again, in comparison to the other tribal communities, who have given up their dialect in favor of greater languages like Assamese/Bengali, why did the Pnar (Jaintia) in Meghalaya adhere to their own dialect even amidst the push and pull of modernization? Have they been living comparatively aloof from the other communities so as to protect their tribal dialect, or did they take any other precaution to preserve their mother tongue? These and some other questions raised by the present researcher to unearth the specificities of the Pnar (Jaintia) and what they accumulated over years, so as to say in other words, their tradition, transition and social transformation.

VII

Search for an identity or create own identity is an unquenchable thirst for every human being and community. Various tribal communities down the centuries have made every effort to locate themselves within the society with their own uniqueness and individuality. They were termed as animists or people who follow primordial form of religion in various census reports, gazetteers, books and other periodicals. But due to the awakening of certain tribal communities their religion is accepted and values are appreciated and dignity is restored by the so called 'civilized society'. Ethnic identity is very much associated with the culture, which is the expression of being. Ethnicity relates to identity formation among the group. In a multiethnic situation one is more conscious about his ethnicity. Over the years multi ethnicity has led to different facets of social change. Hence, if one does not understand identity formation, he will not be able to understand ethnicity as a concept and social change as a dynamic phenomenon. In this context the present researcher looked into the Pnar (Jaintia) community with regard to their uniqueness and the commonalities they share with the greater Khasi tribe, their tradition, which influences their culture as a whole and formalizes the conceptions of relations between man and his surrounding environment. In fact, understanding social identity of the Pnar (Jaintia) is much difficult by the presence of variegated beliefs, ritual practices and related intricate mechanisms within the tribal community. Besides addressing the tradition, the present researcher has also tried to consolidate the political, economic and ecological dimensions of the Pnar (Jaintia) society. The researcher also looked into the transition of the Pnar (Jaintia) community from the traditional way of living to modernity, which eventually leads to social transformation.

In order to address the above issues and taking the review of literature into consideration, the present study addressed the following objectives: (i) to acquire an overall knowledge about the Pnar (Jaintia) tribe through an ethnographic understanding; (ii) to analyse the concept of ethnicity, identity and understand the various aspects of the social life of the Pnar (Jaintia) of the studied area; (iii) to examine the changes that took place in the Pnar (Jaintia) community over the years; (iv) to understand the factors causing changes in the society; (v) to understand the uniqueness of the Pnar (Jaintia); (vi)

to examine the impinging factors percolated from the outside world in the religious / social arena of the Pnar (Jaintia); and (vii) to understand the importation of developmental perspectives that have brought in social change and transformation in the religious / social / cultural life of the Pnar (Jaintia) and its impact on their society. The preceding chapters describe in detail the issues raised through the above objectives.

VIII

Every tribal society has a bouquet of rituals and ceremonies to make their life more colourful and meaningful. Their life is intrinsically connected to various ceremonies in which deities and spirits are propitiated. In their life cycle, ceremonies they perform rituals which help them to pass through that stage of life with conviction and courage, since they believe the supernatural deities have power to do good and also have the power to harm. Therefore, rituals are officiated by the practitioners on various occasions and from time to time. It is known that tribal religion is based on oral traditions. The tribes express their beliefs in everyday language. Their rituals are aimed at solving day to day problems of life. But when we analyze the Pnar (Jaintia) from close quarters we see the transitional phase when they came into contact with the people of the plains at an earlier historical stage and the British at a later stage. Change in a community is inevitable. Every community evolves and gets changed over the years. Many things are incorporated and much more shed aside due to the forces either from within or without. Though the religious customs and rituals are within the protection of the divine yet these too get transformed over the years. Even if one takes such things as endangered and think of preserving these aspects as traditional parameters, he should also look into the newer elements that are being incorporated with the advent of time, modernity and developmental attributes. Are the Pnar (Jaintia) heading towards a finer and modified identity in the face of newer economic opportunities and developmental importations? These needs to be addressed to as research interventions. By the term ritual, which has been interchangeably used with terms rite, ceremony or custom, one implies any non-instinctive behaviour which is repetitive, symbolic and meaningful. It stands for any formal actions following a set pattern which expresses through a symbol which have a

public or shared meaning. These symbols express sacred values which are demarcated from profane or mundane day to day activities of everyday life. The sacred is that which is superior to the ordinary and utilitarian life activities, which fall in the purview of the profane. Tribal world view is grounded in the natural events and life-experiences. Their cosmology is socially effective, i. e., existential, but un-interpretative. The present study on the Pnar (Jaintia) community is significant as it intends to probe various issues related to their religion in the larger context of tribal societies in continuity, transition and change. The significance of the research, therefore, can be as seen as: (i) to acknowledge that the Pnar (Jaintia) as a distinct tribal community in India has cherished their religion and their ritual practices even in the wake of Christian triumphalism in the Northeastern region; (ii) to help the Pnar (Jaintia) to appreciate and be rooted in their tribal tradition and culture; (iii) to have self-assessment on the Pnar (Jaintia) identity and to preserve the traditional values and practices; and (iv) to feel proud about the identity and to promote it in the midst of fleeting changes that have been constantly threatening the Pnar (Jaintia) in the face of development and change.

IX

In social sciences the choice of methodology is determined by the proposed research question and the phenomena to be studied. In methodology, theory and method come together in order to create a guideline that is effective for the research. Use of qualitative method helps in understanding the issues that are being researched, which helps in comparative data analysis in ethnographic research.

At the formative stage primary data collection was done from census records and other available ethnographic documents. This was attested by initiating a pilot study to get a comprehensive idea about the Pnar (Jaintia) living in different villages of the region. The empirical aspect consisted of collection of data through structured schedules and field surveys. For this study both qualitative and demographic data were collected using the methods of observation, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, group interview, case study, survey, census records, and other literary sources. Detailed demographic data were collected from six villages located in four blocks of two districts.

The interview guide technique was used to collect information on total ethnography as people's sense of perception is of great value for such a study. The interview questions were based on what truly needs to be known; in other words, the questions were reality-based.

The present researcher was aware of the ethical issues involved in the research. Confidentiality of the researcher's source of data, the process of collecting the data, the ability to identify one's own biases and finally following a practice acceptable by the community of practitioners were all important, ethically and professionally. The ethics of consequence, responsibility, social justice and care were taken into account while doing the present research.

For the purpose and collection of secondary sources all the available and relevant historical records and published books were consulted in various libraries, all of whom have been duly acknowledged. Relevant information was acquired from books, documents, reports, dissertations, research journals, published and unpublished documents, newspapers, etc. Since the researcher stayed in the locale for a considerable long period of time a close rapport with the population was established in a meaningful way.

It will not be out of place here to mention that the present researcher is exposed to the Pnar (Jaintia) for over a decade where he was professionally attached to an academic institution and a religious center. Owing to constant exposure and personal interest there was an academic urge to collect empirical data whenever he got an opportunity to visit the villages. There were several occasions to stay in the field for a longer period of time and collect data pertaining to the life and culture including rituals and festivities of social and religious importance. A lot of ethnographic details were collected over this longitudinal period. This was one of the major concerns for the present researcher to carry out doctoral research pertaining to the said community. In addition, the scholar had been receiving academic impetus from his present supervisor who is exposed to this land for more than four years and incidentally has also served in this state as a Government of India employee till recently, when he was in direct supervision of the state population both at the administrative as well as grass root level. This academic guidance helped the

present researcher to carry out research in a systematic manner with methodological implications. Hence, the researcher was content with much of the ethnographic details and data pertaining to the research. To ensure a balanced research perspective, both emic and etic views were considered. As this is an ethnographic study with a focused approach on identity formation, in-depth observations were given more importance than mere presentation of meticulous numerical data. However, the empirical research was based on micro level study.

X

While organizing the accumulated data in a systematic manner five chapters followed by the present chapter were contemplated as the final draft to get an evolutionary picture of the research design. In a way the arrangement was so made that a reader has to acquaint himself with the focal theme of the research through an understanding of terms and concepts that were applied for the present study; followed by the delimited time and space of research; methodological aspect of the research; the thrust area of the identity formation as understood through earlier academic exercise and present empirical findings; the nature and trend of transition and change that had taken place in the face of developmental attributes; finally leading to an inference based on research observation and findings.

In the Chapter I (Introduction) an appraisal of the study of identity formation and social change in general defining the terms and concepts along with particular reference to the community has been presented. It also encompassed the area of study, research problem, review of literature, objective of the study, importance of the study, finally the organization of data in a systematic manner. The second chapter dealt with the land and the people with a brief history of Meghalaya with its landscape, ecology and geomorphology and its demographic profile. It also portrayed the ethnographic profile of three indigenous communities of the state and the population dynamics based on the empirical demographic data culled from six villages. The third chapter dealt with the research methodology in theoretical detail as envisaged initially and later practiced for this particular study. The fourth chapter discussed the aspects of ethnicity and cultural

identity of the Pnar (Jaintia) with special reference to their socio-cultural matrix, political organization, religion, economic organization, beliefs related to agriculture, housing building, omens related religious practices, religious calendar and concludes with the Pnar (Jaintia) dialect. The fifth chapter discussed the transition and change in the dynamics of indigenous identity of the Pnar (Jaintia). Changes have been conceived of in terms of socio-economic parameters and socio-cultural parameters that have come into effect in the face of developmental measures undertaken by the government or other agencies as a need of the time. While the former one looks into the exogenous impacts, the latter deals with the endogenous factor. The sixth and the final chapter presents the outcome of the data collected from the field study and scientific analysis, interpretation and discussion with the materials, information and all other findings. The entire dissertation is followed by references that have been used either as citations or as source of understanding.

XI

In the previous section an appraisal of the entire dissertation has been summarized to get an understanding of the content of the thesis. At the analytical and descriptive levels the researcher has made an attempt to enter into the Pnar (Jaintia) world with all methodological issues comprising its myths and magic, ethno-history, social organizational parameters bearing all major concepts and understanding and so on. While analyzing the Pnar (Jaintia) world, it is noticed that the members of the community experienced tremendous changes over the years. Their contact with the people of the neighboring states, Hindu religious influence during the princely rule, colonizers, missionaries and ascription of special status to Meghalaya as a tribal state having two tier administrative systems after the independence of the country made considerable changes in the lives of the Pnar (Jaintia) as an indigenous group.

Changes happen and that keeps the society alive and updated. It may swing either for positive or towards negative. However, one can be sure that change is the only unavoidable feature of society. Earlier social change was understood as any kind of change that effects the society bringing in transformation. Later social scientists and

anthropologists made it clear that social change refers to changes that alter the underlying structure of an object or situation over a period of time. Hence, it can be said that change is a dynamic process over a range of space and time.

Thus, it was understood that social change refers to deviations which transmute things basically. Such transformation has to be both intensive and extensive: bringing effects and impact over a large section of society. Individual changes may not be considered as social change; however, many individuals over the years get influenced by the force of change and adapt the new method as a part of their life. Such a large number of subscribers is necessary for a change to qualify as social change.

The Pnar are one among the three matrilineal tribes of Meghalaya who mostly inhabit the eastern part of Meghalaya in two civil districts of the state. From the history one could draw the conclusion that they are the early settlers of Meghalaya. They lived in hilly forest terrains. Nevertheless, they kept contact with the people around especially the people from the plains during the princely rule for market purposes. They lived in concordance with nature, worshipping their supreme God (*U Tre Kiro*). They manifested their love towards their creator God and whose nature they have placed in through their songs, legends, folktales and myths. However, over the years they are well exposed to the modern society and experienced changes that touched the very fabric of their existence. Their religious tenets and deposits of faith were challenged by the external forces during the feudal rule and later with the arrival of missionaries. Due to the exposure to the foreign culture and their penetration in the traditional Pnar (Jaintia) ethos a great threat in the cultural identity of the people took place. One could easily notice the breakdown of the moral order and alienation of the educated from the cultural nuances and traditional values that created a vacuum in the Pnar (Jaintia) society. Bridging these gaps remains a big task for every enlightened member of the Pnar (Jaintia) community.

One can easily come to the conclusion that the Pnar (Jaintia) society today is greatly influenced by the urban cultures in many ways like dress, food, and customs and so on. This study into the Pnar (Jaintia) world is to comprehend the Pnar (Jaintia) world and the changing trend in their lives. The study is the result of an elongated stay of 12 years, by the researcher, both informally and formally, in the Pnar (Jaintia) habitat and

based on observation and analysis of data collected from six villages. Such a lengthy stay in the villages helped the researcher to comprehend the philosophy of life, concept of God and supernatural powers, cultural ethos, customs, problems of life and challenges and social change and transition that the Pnar (Jaintia) community is experiencing currently. No one will have a second opinion in stating that the tribal community in the world is going through a transition period. For the emancipation of this the researcher set certain objectives in studying the community. For a comprehensive and holistic understanding the researcher leapt into the socio-religious, politico-cultural and financial life of the community. It is to reveal the real situation of the Pnar (Jaintia) today with all their ideas and changing realities with education that geared the transition faster.

The Introduction (Chapter I) is a presentation of the subject of study, i.e., identity, developmental perspective and social change among the Pnar (Jaintia) of Meghalaya. After giving an introductory note on identity and concept of 'indigenouness', the researcher presented the area of study at full length with all geo-coordinates and other socio-cultural parameters. It was followed by the statement of problem that is sorted out after going through the available literature on community pertaining to the concept of research problem about the Pnar (Jaintia) community and a pilot survey, after which the researcher set his objectives for study as: (i) to acquire an overall knowledge about the Pnar (Jaintia) tribe through an ethnographic understanding; (ii) to analyze the concept of ethnicity, identity and understand the various aspects of the social life of the Pnar (Jaintia) of the studied area; (iii) to examine the changes that took place in the Pnar (Jaintia) community over the years; (iv) to understand the factors causing changes in the society; (v) to understand the uniqueness of the Pnar (Jaintia); (vi) to examine the impinging factors that percolated from the outside world in the religious / social arena of the Pnar (Jaintia); and (vii) to understand the importation of developmental perspectives that have brought in social change and transformation in the religious/social/cultural life of the Pnar (Jaintia) and its impact on their society.

After presenting the significance of study the researcher briefly explained the methodology of the study. Since social sciences give utmost importance to field study to substantiate the concept of study the researcher undertook it as primary source of data for study. From presenting the methodology the researcher moved to the overview of the

study of each chapter that led to the final findings and conclusion as change has to take place if not the society or community may remain fossilized. No one ever could predict the result of change as it can either be better or worse. Many tribal communities over the years are faced with tremendous confusions and conflicts due to the transition from tradition to modernity. It is important to preserve the values of every tribal thought before it gets eroded in the push and pull factors of modernity. As our universe was the Jaintia Hill districts, the researcher wanted to enquire into the uniqueness of the Pnar (Jaintia) community on the one hand and contribute our share of the knowledge to the academic disciplines for its posterity.

The Chapter II (Land and People), being lengthy, is presented with detailed description of the state of Meghalaya with its physical features. Moving from there to the Pnar (Jaintia) community, the researcher described their origin, migration to the present habitat, with all their external features. A large portion of this chapter is dedicated to the microscopic details of the six villages where the researcher spent collecting data to substantiate his concept. The demographic data have been presented here through tables, pie charts and illustrations.

Research Methodology (Chapter III) comprises various methods used as tools for collecting data for study as is the convention in social sciences. Research is a very general term for an activity that involves finding out, in a more or less systematic way, things one did not know earlier. Research means searching knowledge and finding applications of knowledge to make it information for common understanding of tools and figures. Research is defined as scientific and systematic study of specific information to investigate problem and analyse the situation. It is essentially a systematic enquiry seeking facts through objective verifiable methods in order to discover the relationship among them and to deduce from them broad principles or laws. The main objectives of every study could be seen as: to discover new facts; to verify and test important facts; to analyze an event or process or phenomenon; to identify the cause and effect relationship; to develop new scientific tools, concepts and theories; to solve and understand scientific and nonscientific problems; to find solutions to scientific, nonscientific and social problems; and to overcome or solve the problems occurring in our everyday life. For every research study data could be of primary and secondary in nature. Keeping these in

mind the researcher employed the conventional methods to collect primary data like Observation, Pilot study, Interview, Focus group interview, Personal/ Semi structured interview, Questionnaire, Census and Survey, Ethnographic survey, Ethno-historical method, Conversational method and so on. Apart from these the researcher also collected sufficient data from secondary sources as review of literature. It helped the researcher to understand identity and social transition that evokes in human thinking a thirst for knowing the causes of developments making further amendments for advancing in comprehensive understanding of the society and culture. It also safeguards the community feeling as perpetuation of traditional cultural heritage through the continuity of knowledge. The factor of identity relates to the issues of 'we' and 'they' in a multi-ethnic situation and there are occasions when borrowing and sharing of cultural markers take place for maintenance of a community's existence. In the parlance of social sciences, one calls it formation of 'identity' and in anthropology it is called 'ethnicity' where cohesiveness and corporateness of the members of the society are of paramount importance.

Ethnicity and Cultural Identity (Chapter IV) is presented in social sciences categorization of people as of normal necessities, which are mostly based on social attributes, cultural traits, language, religion, territory and so on. Here one takes cognizance of all such factors either collectively or singularly. The term ethnic group fits in almost all societies across the globe as an accepted term and can be considered as having a better appellation. It can be defined as 'a category of people who identify themselves and are also identified by others with a distinct cultural tradition based on religion, language, province, or any other common cultural heritage'. In the Indian context different language groups existed over centuries in common geo-political entities maintaining their own ethnic identities based on occupational pursuance or otherwise. The most important feature of any society is its stable social organization, which regulates the inner dynamics of the society maintaining the stability and solidarity of the society, in turn safeguarding the identity and ethnicity of the community.

While analyzing the Pnar (Jaintia) society, the researcher, started with language as the first quality that separates them from the rest of the tribal groups in the northeastern region. The important dimension of the Pnar (Jaintia) social organization is clan. As a

matrilineal tribe since they believe that the children belong to the mother, they usually bestow the clan of the mother to the children. There are a host of clans among the Pnar (Jaintia) tribe. The institution of marriage describes that the community endogamy through monogamy with prescription of clan exogamy. However, in the event of death of either of the spouse or divorce, a person can remarry.

Marriage between members of the same clan is forbidden and is considered a taboo and a punishable offence. Hence, clan exogamy is the strict rule. Negotiation is the normative pattern of the society. However, self-choice is also allowed, which sometimes results in elopement. However, in such form of marriage by elopement is regularized through settlement at the level of council of elders.

Family (*chi yung*), like any other communities, is the smallest unit of the social organization. A traditional Pnar (Jaintia) family consists of mother, grandmother, sisters, brothers, maternal uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Sometimes one could see grandfathers and fathers may also reside in the same house. It resembles like an extended family. Among the Pnar (Jaintia) divorce (*ia pyllait kurim*) may take place due to adultery, barrenness, incompatibility of temperament and issues with genuine cause. Divorce could be effective only if it has the consent of both the parties.

The Pnar (Jaintia) society is purely matrilineal. Mothers play an important role in every family. She is the custodian of the family and domestic affairs. The husband remains as a progenitor while the uncle becomes the 'cultural father'. For Pnars (Jaintia) the inheritance and hereditary is drawn through the mother. However, it is noted that the religious and secular powers are being vested with the male. The women in the Pnar (Jaintia) society play an important role in bringing up the children and looking after the household chores of the family. The Pnar (Jaintia) kinship system is mainly drawn from the mother's clan.

Rites of passage consists of rituals associated with puberty (*pynheh rngu*), marriage (*chongkha chongman*), child bearing (*pun khon*), child birth (*ka syip syin*), naming ceremony (*pyrtuit khon / nechadlanei*) and mortuary (*iap briew*) rites. Each of these is performed with elaborate rituals and rubrics.

The traditional economy of the Pnar (Jaintia) is *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivation. Later adoption of low land area for cultivation is also noticed during the study. Though there are many clans in one village one could easily identify a leading clan in all the villages. Now a days one can find many outsiders in the villages that are sharing boundary with neighboring states. Houses are built up to the plinth level using stone and cement, walls usually with matted bamboo in remote villages and bricks and cement blocks. House roof are often made with GI tins. However, it was easily noticed that concrete roofs are being built as per the financial condition and availability of resources. The traditional houses have one single room with a hearth at one of the corners; nonetheless, modern houses are built with many rooms each with a separate purpose.

Rice being their staple food, they cultivate it in *jhum* fields. Where ever water is available wet cultivation was also seen. Apart from these they cultivate chilly, pumpkin, cucumber, radish, cabbage, carrot, tomato, potato and so on. Traditionally they consume boiled food. However, they use spices these days. Of late, cutlery, modern utensils, use of Gas for cooking replaced all the old and traditional methods. They have modern gadgets and electronic devices for their daily use. Their houses are decorated with beautiful curtains, comfortable furniture and lovely flowers. They keep their house clean and tidy that gives a welcoming sign to the people.

They use a head gear (*ryndia* for males, *muka* for females) and a special chain of thick red coral beads (*paila*) on special occasions especially during religious ceremonies. The Pnar (Jaintia) women wear a *sari* like long cloth called *thoh khyrwang* which is wrapped around the waist. It is worn with a matching sweater and an under-blouse, short-sleeved in the summer but available in long sleeves as well. These are worn with a long cotton skirt. These dresses are adorned with shiny gold highlights or with sequins or beads or with ornate embroidery. The dress pattern has undergone significant change. All whether educated or uneducated prefer to wear pant, shirt, T-shirt, *salwar-kameez*, etc. Today one can hardly see people using head gear except on festive occasions that also barring women.

Though agriculture is considered to be the prime source of income for the Pnar (Jaintia), yet it has undergone tremendous changes with the arrival of modernity. Organic

manures and traditional implements are replaced with chemical fertilizers and tractors and tillers. Many blacksmiths gave up their profession due to cheaper availability of the tools and materials in the market. *Larnai* pots that was famous throughout the district and state is at the verge of extinction. Modern day youths have not learnt the art of making traditional implements and tools for their use.

The Pnar (Jaintia) of Meghalaya are very well aware of the political powers of the MDCs, MLAs and M. Ps; thus, elections are contested with real competition. Huge amount of money is spent for campaigns and rallies. In some cases, votes are being bargained by the candidates irrespective of their political affinity. Many a time the village head directs the people whom to vote for based on the promise the candidate makes for the welfare of the people of the village. Constant living with the non-tribals in the small townships and villages, growth of education, growth of political consciousness and work of missionaries have brought great a deal of changes in the lives of the Pnar (Jaintia). This chapter also gives the traditional practices and changes in the social life of the Pnar (Jaintia). Both family and social life experienced sweeping changes over the years. Nuclear families have replaced the old joint / extended families. Kinship bond and relationships are weakened due to migration, education and exposure. Traditional values are reclining and role of important persons are coming down. Those who have received education from prestigious institutions of the land and also from many foreign nations, are not bothered about following the traditional practices, the kinship relations, and much more the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the traditional Pnar (Jaintia) society. Some of them conveniently follow only those elements that suit them. According to their life standard, positions in the society, relationships with the people outside the Pnar (Jaintia) society make them to appropriate only those elements that befit their standard in the society. It is also observed that the rich and elite in the society are more lenient in bypassing traditional practices than the vast majority of the people living in the villages, who adhere to the traditional teaching of their forefathers.

Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum (seven huts) here below and *Kyndai Trep* (nine huts) above the heavens and the basic concepts of the origin of both Khasis and Jaintias and all the sub-groups associated with it. However, in the recent past one could observe that there is a very strong feeling created among each group who subscribe this belief to

be more self-oriented, introvert and exclusive. Growing ethnocentric feeling among the various groups is much evident in the life style that the inhabitants exhibit. The Pnar (Jaintia), who reside in the eastern part of Meghalaya feel that they have their own exclusive ethnic distinctiveness, in the way they dress, their food habits, their dialect and other specialties. Each one considers that they are superior to the other, therefore, their beliefs and traditions have to be protected, nurtured and promoted. The division of the districts in Meghalaya is by and large is based on the ethnic identity of the people residing in those areas. Out of the eleven districts four each districtis created for Khasis and Garos, two for Jaintias, and one for Bhois and each of them having their own autonomous district administrative units. However, one can see that the Pnar (Jaintia) community also witnessed communalism, anti-national elements at work in the society on many occasions.

Developmental perspective: Socio-cultural and economic dimensions of the Pnar (Jaintia) (Chapter V) gives a detailed description on the economic profile of the Pnar (Jaintia), where one can find a changed situation in the recent past. It also accommodates the aspects of economic mobility caused as a result of development. Pnars (Jaintia) are passing through an economic change. Their agrarian economy is almost replaced with industrial economy. Of late, companies and mining became a part of their life. Both East and West Jaintia Hills districts have huge deposits of natural resources. Extraction and marketing became the right of the owners than the government. Thus, companies are built and mining is done leaving the places impossible for human habitation. Lack of drinking water, environmental hazards, depletion of natural landscape, heaping up of extracted coals and lime stones, unfilled chasms after the extraction of the resources, draining of rivers, pollutant filled natural water sources and so on are experienced by these districts. Apart from this increasing number of vehicles for human and material transports keep the people exposed to dust and noise pollutions. Due to these hazards the Pnar (Jaintia) of these districts are vulnerable to various kinds of sickness, which were not heard off in the earlier days. Human respiratory and nervous systems are easily affected due to this polluted atmosphere. The immune system of the body is so weak that they succumb to their illness quickly.

Since these two districts are the hub of natural resources, people from all over the country flock here in search of livelihood. This led to value erosion, immorality, human trafficking, and child labour, inter-cultural and inter racial marriages and so on. Untold miseries which the people in these districts are facing cannot be measured. Their innocence and less farsightedness are really exploited by the rich from different parts of the country to establish factories and other heavy industries in this land. This is affecting the land ownership pattern too. Many a time they frame deals in such a way that it favors them in case of any eventualities. Thus, one could see upheavals in the society between the companies and locals. This is a concern of economic transformation that has brought changes in their social life.

Through education and enlightened people of the districts transformation in the society took place rapidly. Though there were schools in the state before the arrival of the missionaries, yet it grew considerably after the arrival of missionaries in the Pnar (Jaintia) habitats. The government has taken initiatives to start primary and upper primary schools in every village. SSA schools, Ad-hoc Schools and deficit schools are seen in many villages. In these schools, education is free of cost and mid-day meal is served practically every day. Many of the Pnar (Jaintia) students are pursuing their higher education elsewhere in the country. This is one of the main reasons for social transformation among the Pnar (Jaintia) of Meghalaya. New ideologies, philosophy of life, outlook on life and other realities and varied experiences make them to think and act out of the box and creatively respond to the needs of the society. Their saving mentality has improved and formation of various non-governmental organizations yielded the result they dreamt of. Once they are exposed to the urban way of life, they stick to it and it provides them not only occupational mobility but prepares a platform for social mobility. Educated Pnars (Jaintia) always aspire for better socio-economic positions and greater role in the political arena by searching for good education, better job, health and sanitation.

When analyzing the tribal social life, the Pnar (Jaintia) respect the traditional office bearers of the society life village head, clan and tribe. Their orders are respected and obeyed generally. Most of these leaders are elected democratically. At the village level village head (*Rangbah Shnong*) is responsible for all the affairs of the village. He will be contacted by the government officers in case of any emergency. He takes care of

the village based on the customary laws and oral traditions of the community. He has the right to convict and acquit the accused in consultation with his council. Many Pnars (Jaintia) are actively involved in party politics. They bargain their franchise even for benefits and power.

The Pnar (Jaintia) believe in the existence of supernatural powers. *U Tre Kirof*, the creator God creates and controls everything. Religion being the center of their life, every stage of their life is full of celebrations with rubrics and rituals. Though God is not visible form for their deity no temples or any special place of worship is seen around. This situation is changed today because many have embraced Christianity, some Hinduism and an insignificant number took to other forms of religion. They sacrifice pigs, goats, fowls to appease spirits. *Beh-dein-khlam* being the highest festival of the Pnar (Jaintia) they try to celebrate it with greatest vigor and valor. The pleasant and unpleasant experiences of life with sickness, suffering leading to agony and death and inexplicable experiences of life made them to think beyond material world in the invisible world of the spirits and super powers. Their world view surrounds their locale, antiquity and resources. They believe in harmonious living of natural, spiritual and human spheres. Thus, one can easily find that their world view permeates every aspect of life: social life, religious life, economic life and even political life.

The advent of Christianity toppled down the traditional beliefs and teachings. This not only touched the belief system of the Pnar (Jaintia) but also to every aspects of their life. Apart from education they introduced modern medicine that cured the people faster. The traditional medicine man could not influence the people as the missionaries could do. Mortality rate reduced in the villages due to the medicine and health care given by the missionaries. This reduced the use of traditional medicine to minimal. The traditional medicine men were acting as an intermediary between man and the Divine. The new converts to Christianity never sought their help and medicines, rather they preferred to get it from missionaries.

The Pnar (Jaintia) moves and never remains static. They adapt and imbibe components that suit them for faster growth and development. Through various economic activities they make themselves felt among other citizens of the country. Adapting new

dress code, food habits, health consciousness and awareness on hygiene makes them modern. However, the remote villages still lack basic facilities like hosing, drinking water, sanitation, health and so on. The process of transition and transformation from older to new has established the Pnar (Jaintia) with various developments and still it is moving towards greater changes.

While analyzing the modern society one can notice the presence of an enlightened and educated group that is trying to assert their cultural identity. They also like to discuss issues relating to the very ethno – cultural identity and the customary law relating land, forest and ancestral property. Thus, one who watches the community closely will see a new awakening among a small set of people among the Pnar (Jaintia) for a greater change.

XII

The study was designed with five research questions that aimed at understanding: (i) How do the Pnar see changes in the society? Can the Pnar society sustain the cultural identity of the tribe against all such factors causing change? (ii) How can we see the cultural changes witnessed in the present Pnar society be called the cultural expression of the Pnar? (iii) What are the traditional systems and values of the Pnar community that are eroded with the passage of time?(iv) What is the cultural uniqueness they possess even at the face of advancing developmental parameters and economic progression and transformation? (v) How does the new generation respond to the traditional values and knowledge with regard to agriculture, religion and social life? While addressing the above issues both individually and collectively two important chapters were written. The chapters numbering 4 and 5 have dealt upon the issues in a detailed manner.

Let us consider the question number one which seeks to address the aspect of change *vis-à-vis* cultural identity. This aspect along with the factors of development has been dealt upon in chapter number 4 (Ethnicity and Cultural Identity) and chapter number 5 (Developmental Perspective: Socio-Cultural and Economic Dimensions of the Pnar). The second question asks for the cultural expression of the community as portrayed through cultural identity and the third question looks into identity crisis among the Pnar

(Jaintia), if any. This aspect has been dealt upon in chapter number 4 (Ethnicity and Cultural Identity). The fourth question seeks to address the cultural uniqueness of the community in the face of advancing developmental measures and the fifth question tries to find out continuity of traditional knowledge, values and community feeling at the present day. Both these aspects have been addressed in chapter number 4 (Ethnicity and Cultural Identity) and chapter number 5 (Developmental Perspective: Socio-Cultural and Economic Dimensions of the Pnar).

XIII

Now let us again review the entire study in the light of seven research objectives that were initiated at the beginning of the study. The objectives were: (i) to acquire an overall knowledge about the Pnar (Jaintia) tribe through an ethnographic understanding; (ii) to analyse the concept of ethnicity, identity and understand the various aspects of the social life of the Pnar (Jaintia) of the studied area; (iii) to examine the changes that took place in the Pnar (Jaintia) community over the years; (iv) to understand the factors causing changes in the society; (v) to understand the uniqueness of the Pnar (Jaintia); (vi) to examine the impinging factors percolated from the outside world in the religious / social arena of the Pnar (Jaintia); and (vii) to understand the importation of developmental perspectives that have brought in social change and transformation in the religious / social / cultural life of the Pnar (Jaintia) and its impact on their society.

In order to address the above issues, it is reiterated here that five chapters were designed. The objective number one was addressed through delineation of aspects laid down in chapters numbering one, two and four. All these chapters both individually and collectively contributed to the understanding of the Pnar (Jaintia) in totality in respect of their history, culture, religion, demographic character over decades and so on. The objective numbers two, five and six were addressed through chapter number two and four particularly the aspect of demographic transition and change. While addressing such issue, the present researcher has duly taken into consideration the review of literature substantiated through empirical findings culled from 407 households comprising 2446 individuals delineating both quantitative and qualitative profiles of the covered

households. These households comprised both the traditional religion of *Niam Tre* (209 households with a population of 1296) and Christianity (198 households with 1150 individuals) being accommodated in six villages located under four community development blocks of two districts of Jaintia Hills. The objective numbers three, four and seven were addressed through chapter number five where a detailed description of socio-cultural and economic dimensions of the Pnar (Jaintia) has been delineated along with the developmental attributes.

XIV

After conducting the study, the present researcher has come to an understanding that the most compelling reason for studying the implication of identity formation and ethnicity of a community provides an academic impetus in the contemporary society from a holistic perspective as a requirement in this postmodern era. Every individual community not only tries to assert themselves but making every effort to find the roots of their being. Hence, the present researcher believes that the most compelling reason for studying the ethnicity / tradition that is cultural identity today is to reach a better understanding of contemporary society. Ethnic diversity of the Northeast enables one to feel, enjoy and appreciate the existence of the other with their uniqueness. Without a proper understanding of one's own tribe and community, ignorance can rule every one, which would create more global conflicts and prejudices. There is still a great need for more research into the cultural aspects as there is still a lot of ignorance in the subject in today's society. Understanding the other with his / her cultural background is the key to a cultured social wellbeing. There are still too many racial and cultural prejudices in the world through lack of vital knowledge in this subject. While making a micro study on six villages; from both East and West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, the present researcher expects to bring to the fore the in-depth understanding of the Pnar (Jaintia) society with special reference to their uniqueness and distinctiveness. This study is also envisaged to throw some light on the Pnar (Jaintia) society, which meticulously adheres to the traditional kinship structure, role of village council and life cycle ceremonies that are handed over to them with a devotional precision, their ethnicity, and transition.