CHAPTER-IV

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS
Statement of the Problem

This Chapter is devoted to the statement of the problem and presented under the following:
Statement of the Problem

Poverty is associated with the history of mankind. Since the human being came into existence, it also faced the problem of poverty. Right from the ancient times attempts have been made to solve this problem by social scientists and have been trying to develop different kinds of methods and techniques.

Both developed and under developed countries of the world have been facing the incidence of poverty. However, the problem that have been faced by the latter countries are much more serious.

The problem of poverty in India is an old disease. The Indian social scientists, the economists, and the political administrators have been looking foreword in various ways and means in order to escape from the clutches of
poverty. However, the problem is still continues to be a serious one; and more so, in the north - eastern regions, and particularly in the tribal regions.

The scheduled tribes wherever they live, are faced with many diverse problems, which are of social, economic, political and educational. It is a common knowledge how the scheduled tribes suffer from times immemorial for no fault of theirs. These problems have aggravated the situation over years and pushed the unfortunate scheduled tribe mass to total subjugation and exploitation. Almost all activities – economic, political, education and socio-cultural–revolve around the notions of problems. The structural form and relationships of the tribals in rural areas have continued almost intact even in the post–independence India, although a very little change have come about in the urban setting.

In Manipur, it was noted that the tribal economy as basically subsistence in nature. It was an undifferentiated economy. Absence of wealth accumulation and specialisation. Each family is an economic unit in a village. Each family or household tries to procure what it requires without depending on others. No single person or family is supposed to specialized in any of the economic activities. A family is supposed to produce a bare necessity at a subsistence level. Since no one else has surplus, it is more difficult to supplement one's deficit quantity of food stuff. A character of self-contained, self-sufficient and no economic interdependence are a true tribes that prevailed mostly among the Chin-Mizo-Kuki people in Manipur.

The tribal economy was mainly a land-based one ; and the ownership of such land is often subject to some critical questions. Broadly speaking, the land ownership of the scheduled tribes in Manipur may be divided into three types –
land owned by the community, land owned by the chief and owned by the individual. This community ownership system is mainly found among the Naga tribes which is primitive and evolved type. It did not rule out the use-right of the individuals, nor the individual or the chiefs’ ownership did block the use-right of the community at large, while the community ‘ownership is as such one of the archaic forms of tribal economy. Individual ownership or chieftains’ ownership has developed in certain specific historical situations and it was never aimed at the appropriation of surplus. In the chieftain ownership, land is vested with the village chieftain. The village chief is the owner of the village, the village land, and the forest. The society recognised that the village and the village land belongs to the chieftain. In recognition of his lordship over the village and village land, each cultivating family of the village had to pay annual tributes in the form of paddy of six baskets to the chief every year, and one capsule of four-footed animal killed within the village territory. However, this system of compulsory payment now has been discontinued in most parts of the tribal regions.

According to the Draft Eight Five Year Tribal Sub-Plan 1992-97 and Annual Tribal sub-Plan 1992-93 of the Directorate for Development of Tribals and Backward classes; Manipur : the Tribal Sub-Plan area of Manipur covers more than 90 percent of the total geographical areas of the state. The five hill districts comprises of 20,089 Sq. kms. and the four valley districts portion is only 2,238 Sq.kms. The tribal population in Manipur according to 1991 census is 6,32,173 persons distributed over the five hill districts and in the four valley districts.

The main occupation of most of the tribal people is cultivation. 92 percent of the total scheduled tribe families living in the tribal Sub-Plan area are cultivators and about 72 percent of them are still depending on destructive practices of jhumming
cultivation. Out of the total 22,327 Sq.kms. in the state, an area of about 1,800
Sq.kms. is under jhum cultivation. With the increase in population, the jhum cycle has
come down to 3/4 years.

Not only the state as land locked region, it is also marked by lack of
transportation and communication facilities and other amenities conductive to
generating stable economy of its inhabitants to the tribal people. As a result, in
inspite of best efforts by the Government during the past five year plan, 43,348
tribal families out of 76,209 are living below the poverty line. It accounts for 56.88
percent. It was however, 62.42 percent during the 7th five year plan period.¹

The problem of shifting (jhumming) cultivation by the tribal people in the
five hill districts is still practiced as it is mainpart of the tribal economy. The
system of double or multiple cropping cannot be possible because of the natural
environment and monsoon condition in the hilly state of Manipur. Such practices is
one of the major factors responsible for deterioration of the forest resources and
ecological balance. Every year, an area of 900 sq.kms. is cut and burnt for
jhumming cultivation. With the increase in population and reduction of soil-
fertility, the jhum cycle is reduced from six to three years. Subsequently, the
intensity of cultivation is on the increase leading to severe degradation of land and
soil productivity and on the whole degradation of environment itself. And this
practices of jhum cultivation is still continues as a way of life by the tribal people
in the hilly regions.

¹ Govt. of Manipur, Directorate for Devt. of Tribals & Backward Classes; Manipur, Draft 8th five year Tribal Sub-
The techniques and methods for cultivation is very simple. The only implements used in farming are chopping knife, dibbling stick, spade and hoe. And no improved equipments like drought power, tillers and tractors etc. are deployed and possible in the regions. The knowledge of fertilisers, pesticide and insecticides etc. are absent. Irrigation and water management system is totally absent. Generally no scientific technology is deployed. The only inputs used are seeds and human labour. Women are taking major part in this jhum cultivation. They produce crops like maize, beans, yams, arum and bananas etc. which are treated as subsidiary food item but in the lean season they are treated as the main food items.

The unfavourable location and habitation of the tribals does not favoured economic development. The valley compared with the hill areas are much more developed. For example, transport, communication, and agricultural economy, irrigation facilities are access to the valley in the fields of specialisation. The hill regions is lagging. The idea of social–forestry as well as environmental development plans are not known to the chiefs of villages. Moreover, the steep hill slopes, narrow, deep gorges and sharp ridges of the hill does not favour the tribal economy to be develop further. Hence, the hilly region remains as it is, that is living by earning economy.

Moreover, the percentage of the scheduled tribes population in the three valley districts is only 3.68. So, the remaining 96.32 percent of scheduled tribes inhabit in the remaining five hill districts of Manipur, which combats their subsistence economy.

It was also noticed that the total 47.87 percent of main–workers in the tribal economy in the state; a maximum of 44.35 percent are in the rural areas and only
3.52 percent in the urban areas according to 1981 census. But, out of 44.88 percent of total main–workers, 42.69 percent are found engaged in the rural areas according to 1991 census; and only 2.19 percent is in the urban areas. During this decade it was noted that the total percentage of population of main–workers both in rural and urban areas were to be slightly decreasing.

In the case of cultivators, the total percentage in rural and urban found slightly decreasing in 1991 compared with the 1981 census. One may assum that as the general population increases year to year, accordingly the number of working population should also be increased every year. In the same way, the total population of the scheduled tribes also increased by 98,000 in a decade (1981-1991), but the total number of main–workers as well as the number of cultivators are not found to be increased. However, the percentage of agricultural labourers seems to be increased slightly from 1.04 percent in 1981 to 1.05 percent in 1991; but the number of urban agricultural labourers has came down from 0.21 percent in 1981 to 0.09 percent according to 1991 census.

The other sectors like mining and quarrying, transport, storage and communication etc. are found negligibly almost remained intact. The engagement on livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting, plantations, orchards and allied activities – manufacturing and processing, servicing and repairing in household industry, and other than household industry etc. the participation rate in these sectors are not encouraged which is zero percent.

In other service and in marginal workers’ categories the percentage of engagement in these sectors are slightly improving. In 1981, the total percentage of the scheduled tribes participation in other services was 4.12 percent, but there is a
little increases in a margin of 4.52 percent in 1991 census. In the rural areas also it is a slightly increased by 3.62 percent in 1991 from 2.94 percent in 1981. The same conditions happened in the case of marginal farmer's sector.

The number of non-workers, on the other, has been increasing extensively. They includes — childrens of below 14 and the old men and women of above 60, students, unpaid household duties, roamers and wanderer fallows, Jailers, singers, some youth jungle walkers, and educated unemployed persons. These persons have not worked any time at all through the year in connection with economic activities and income earning activities. They accounted about 51.07 percent in 1981 and 53.33 percent in 1991 census, respectively. The theory behind it is that the burden of poverty of the scheduled tribes in Manipur is extensively supplemented by the non-worker groups.

Problems faced by the small and marginal farmers is lack of finance: as it is noted that, most of the tribal cultivators are small, sub-marginal by nature who do not have resources of their own adequately enough to go on for agricultural development works. They have depend for finance and assistance on the land owners or money-lenders of higher categories. This dependences forces them to part with half of the produce and even the remaining half cannot be enjoyed by themselves fully because of indebtedness to be the big landowners/mahajons in terms of paddy they borrowed from the former during the lean period of agricultural season. The consequence has been that the bulk of the cultivators do not have any prospects of their own to be filled with enthusiasm in introducing improved methods of cultivation on their own farm lands or on the lands they cultivate they cultivate under crops-sharing system. This condition is terribly handicapped both due to utter lack of resources and uneconomic size of holdings.
One of the major issues, is the growing imbalance over the regions, areas and within the tribal villages; because, land settlement system which has grown since the British rule, the old zamindars were turned into private landlords, possessing most of the land, of the rights of private property in land including forest. For one, the bulk of the rent they derived from the tenants was to be turned over to the government. At the same time, they were made complete master of the village communities. In some state like Andra Pradesh the British made an agreement with the local chiefs and restored to some village which were leased out to the Muttadars who in turn collected rent for the chiefs. After the death of chiefs, their successors begun to exploit the tribals in various ways. So on, there arose landlords, intermediaries, money-lenders or mahajans, and chiefs at the top and the peasant cultivators were transformed into tenants-at-will, share croppers and agricultural labourers at the bottom. Hence, there arose a problems of imbalance over the regions throughout the tribal areas.

Indebtedness is also another related phenomenon causing tribal poverty. Every year the tribal peasants were able to clear off their debts. A well known saying; "born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt" is exactly a true term to the tribal economy in the state. Hence their debts goes on increasing and at last, they fall at the clutches of the local mahajans and rich money lenders. This system of tribal economic nature not only worsen their subsistence earning but also creates imbalances in the economic possession of wealth, poverty and land extensively.

The two types of alienation among the tribals are also another factors which are commonly responsible for the tribal poverty in the state. That is, alienation

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2 Asok Kumar Ray, Article – 'why tribal poverty –some tentative remedies', presented at a 'seminar on tribal poverty; its cause & remedies', organised by the Directorate for devt. of tribals & backward classes, govt. of Manipur, August 1987, p. 4.
from the land, and alienation from the product. Alienation of land (a) from tribal to non-tribal (b) from tribal to tribal. In point, alienation of land means concentration of land in some hands possibly to the rich money-lenders, businessmen and mahajans etc. However, alienation from the product is much more serious. So, the tribal peasants are to produce productions much more gross subsistence value which is more than what he/she consume.

So, from the foregoing discussion it is known that the problems associated with the social economy of the scheduled tribes in the state, particularly in the hills and rural areas are multidimensional. Right from birth their lives are accompanied by different types and layers of problems. Almost all activities in their social, economic and political involvements including demographic characteristics, caste and sub-caste composition, educational background, residential pattern, occupational structures, in their daily economy, political consciousness and awareness of constitutional benefits etc. there are problems of the problem.

Most of the tribals inhabiting the remote hill areas have been facing the problem of road communication extensively. Some Tangkhul, Rongmei Kabui and Houkip Khongsai tribes prefered to settle on the top of the hills and mountains by nature. This people had been facing the problem of road transport and communication socially, economically and politically. And the construction of roads and bridge for transportation is also not possible on these top and steep hills to reach the tribal inhabited areas. Even government is unable to maintain the roads and bridge constructions economically. Due to these reasons agricultural goods produced by the hill tribes remained totally immovable. Even the transportation of forest products almost remained stagnant even cooking fire-woods.
Hence, the developmental processes of the tribals remained unchanged. On the other hand, the tribal economy with the forest economy, therefore, have tended to drift apart with adverse implications in both. In some case, the forests have suffered tremendous loss while in others, the tribal economy has been settered. In some cases, the loss of the national economy has been sizeable and, to the extent it has adversely affected the weakest groups. So, the imbalance in the socio-economic structure among these community has tremendously increased.

The continuance of primitive form of land-use in the tribal area offers very little scope for the introduction of modern technology. This along with the loss of fertility has led to such low productivity that the jhumias live in near famine conditions. For a particular period during January to July, they have to live on certain root crops, jack fruits etc.

Hence, even after 45 years of economic planning in India the economy of the scheduled tribes in Manipur remains relatively low. Besides, the shifting cultivation remains the only hope for survival under development inspite of the fact that forest economy appears to have a bright future. The technology for all economic activities remains labour intensive and less scientific. The occupational multiplicity, the non-monetized sector and factor immobility remains high. Thus, the poverty of the scheduled tribes in the State, by and large remains acute.

Research Methodology

(A) The study is undertaken with the methodology given hereunder:

1. Data collection by sample survey covering 53.57 percent of villages and 53.18 p.c. of population; (15 out of 28 villages and 1750 population out of 5274).
2. Discussion and interaction with the selected groups.

3. Processing of data collected.

(B) Information is collected from the secondary sources - published documents and literatures.

Objective of Study

The study of the poverty aims at analysing Kom economy in the light of the problems and contraints faced by them in their economic pursuit and making an assessment of their developmental needs and the level of fulfilment of these needs. This study is particularly aimed at offering solutions to the socio-economic problems faced by the Koms particularly in the Churachandpur and Chandel Districts. The scope of the study is purposefully kept limited in order to focus on certain aspects which are the outcome of economic endeavours. Of course, developmental issues relating to the tribals of the state will ultimately come up.

The present study is primarily intended to highlight the link, direct or indirect, between economy and development and specially poverty level in the contact of a specific tribal group.

The main objective of the present study is to examine the existing pace of poverty and economic conditions of the Koms in respect of their socio-economic activities, occupational patterns, source of livelihood and the present agricultural system. And to put forward an alternative developmental path in general in its other aim.