Chapter 4

TAMENGLONG DISTRICT: A DESCRIPTION

Tamenglong district is one of the most backward areas in the state of Manipur with several unique features. There are now 194 villages in the District and there is no town except the district headquarters. The district covers an area of 4,391 sq. kms with a population of 1,08,295 as per census of 2001 of which Scheduled Tribes comprise 98%. The district is situated in between 24°30' and 25°30' latitudes and 93°0' and 94°0' longitudes. The district Headquarters is 150 kms away from Imphal and the Tamenglong Head-Quarters is at the latitude of 1,280 mts. above Sea level (Oriental Rural Development Organization 2000:3).

Tamenglong district is inhabited pre-dominantly by the Zeliangrong Naga tribe (Zemei, Liangmai, Rongmei & Puimei) and it occupies the north-western part of Manipur, which lies amidst the picturesque hills of Manipur. It is an outlaying district bordering Nagaland in the north and Assam in the west, on the other sides; this district is surrounded by other parts of the districts, i.e. Senapati district in the north-east, Churachanpur district on the south, and Jiribam sub-division of Imphal district on the south-west. Tamenglong district is considered as one of the most beautiful districts of Manipur. Its' mysterious caves such as Tharon Caves, splendid waterfalls, Buning valley (also called as Inpuilong valley), deep gorges and exotic orchids are unique attractions. Tamenglong district is full of natural resources such as bamboos, medicinal and aromatic plants, etc but the Zeliangrong people hardly have an opportunity to join and compete with the rest of the world.
Tamenglong District indicating its four sub-divisions viz, Tamenglong sub-division, Tousem sub-division, Nungba sub-division and Tamei sub-division.
According to Kamei (2000), Tamenglong is a Meitei (Manipuris) word, corrupted from the Rongmai (Inrianglong-village of bamboo forest) name of the biggest village, popularly known as Tamenglong Khunjao. He holds that this village has a long history of two thousand years. He also mentions that, after the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919, the government of Manipur established two sub-divisions, the north west and north east. The head quarter of the North West sub-division was located at Tamenglong village and that of the north east was at Ukhrul.

Kamei affirms that, the head quarters of northwest sub-division was shifted to the present site known as Tamenglong headquarters as different from Tamenglong village in 1923. Later the sub-division was renamed as Tamenglong Sub-Division after the bifurcation of the erstwhile northwest sub-division into several sub-divisions like, Churachanpur, Mao and Sadar. He states that the sub-division was up-graded into a district, called Manipur west district in 1969, which was later on changed to Tamenglong.

RAINFALL AND CLIMATE:

Tamenglong district has a temperate monsoon climate with variations in temperature depending on rainfall and elevation. Rainfall is generally heavy in the district with a precipitation of 3,264.10 mm. recorded in Tamenglong Headquarters in 1983. As a result of the high altitude and heavy rainfall, there are mild summers and cold winters. The two important resources of the district are its forests and water. The district is traversed by two rivers viz the Barak (the biggest river in the state) and the Irang. Other important rivers are Jiri, Tupul, Makru and Leimatak.
SHIFTING CULTIVATION:

Agriculture is the mainstay of the people's economy as 95% of the people are engaged in this pursuit. Shifting or slash and burn cultivation is popularly practiced among the people in the district. When shifting cultivation started, there was no population pressure. Hence, the cycle of cultivation rotates for almost twenty years and the soil revives its fertility easily. Now, the recuperation period has been cut down because of population on land and the cycle of cultivation is reduced from five to eight years.

Since the area is covered as an Autonomous district, it is administered by the village councils under the Sixth Schedule. The Zeliangrong Nagas owned community land in their respective villages. All the village members including those landless people and women have rights to practice slash and burn cultivation in the hill slopes adjoining their villages. The influence of modern technology and other challenges of this 21st century do not change the pattern of cultivation with the Zeliangrong people. N.Saha (1978) opines that magico-religious beliefs are associated with agriculture in the tribal society and it is more so in case of shifting cultivation. He observes that most of the tribes have many ceremonies and festivals associated with jhuming. He asserts that in most cases ceremony ruins the household economy.

For the Zeliangrong Nagas, agriculture is deeply rooted with the custom, tradition, belief and social-economic life. It is observed that their lives revolve around jhumming cultivation which manifests an intermeshing between culture and economy. Occasionally, they organize cultural and harvest festivals wherein rites and rituals are accompanied with the jhumming cultivation. Traditional dances are also performed during such cultural and harvest festivals.
A huge majority of the Zeliangrong Nagas in Tamenglong district have been converted to Christianity. Thus, with the advent of Christianity most of the traditional rites and rituals associated with slash and burn cultivation have ceased as the Church condemn such practices. But, Zeliangrong Nagas still practice jhumming cultivation as it continues to be the main source of their livelihood.

We need to understand the shifting cultivation practices and its impact on the forest ecosystem. The usual process starts with the selection of a plot on or near the hillside or jungle by the entire villagers. During the dry winter months from November to February, the forests on the selected patch are cut and left to dry. The dried debris is burnt during March and April before the onset of the monsoon. After a shower or two, the ash settles down and the field becomes ready for sowing.

After raising the crop twice or thrice, cultivation is shifted to another place due to loss of soil fertility and the old one is left for years to revive. Das (1986) asserts that usually a hut is constructed near the fields to store the produce. It also serves as a recreation centre. The tribals chat and sing at the end of the day’s work. Their philosophy of living is a simple one to work for their daily bread and to relax completely when the chores are over.

The main risk factors that are responsible for adaptation of jhum cultivation by the people are the geographical situation of the land, socio-economic milieu in which the family operates and land use policies. The jhumia families were continuing this method of cultivation unabated, as there is no alternative means of livelihood. It is essential to explore new avenues for jhumia families working in the jhum cultivation to save eco-system and natural resources to restore ecological balance.
D.N. Borthakur, (2002: 124-125) states that, “the system of farming was the only alternative to sustain the people in the physical environment that prevailed in the hill slopes and when scientific technology was also not known. The system was also not harmful initially when it started and up to the time when the cycle of rotation was 10-15 years.” However, things have changed nowadays. The soil fertility has not only declined but several species of wild life, plants, orchids and trees are lost during the process of slash and burn cultivation.

Further, Borthakur pointed out the merits of the system as follows:

- All crops required by the people could be raised in one operation.
- The intimate mixture of crops provided a favourable crop canopy to check the torrential rains.
- The soil was not much disturbed during planting as well as harvesting so as to reduce soil erosion.
- The area available for shifting cultivation was abundant due to scanty population and the virgin soil was fertile enough to ensure good yield.
- Rotation of 15 – 20 years (jhum cycle) provided adequate time gap for rehabilitation of soil. However, with growth of population and development, the jhum cycle has now come down to 3 – 5 years and production from jhum land has gone down due to loss of fertility in soil.

On the other hand, he asserts that the life style of the people has changed greatly with growth of civilization and other factors. He holds that deforestation with related effects such as soil erosion and removal of fertile top soil with useful microbes, disturbance in soil and water balance, floods in plains, loss of biodiversity, etc. have led to ecological imbalance and degradation of the production base. And, these ecological disturbances will very adversely affect sustainable agriculture as jhum is not as productive (in terms of crops yield per
acre) as settled agriculture. Thus, he pointed out that it is absolutely essential to replace this system of farming so as to stop degradation of soil and water base, other related problems of environmental pollution, improve production and standard of living of the people and their economy.

At present, there is some concern amongst the population that the practice of jhum cultivation is detrimental to the environment and inappropriate for their own livelihoods. Yet, it is still practiced and the main reason for the prevalence of shifting cultivation in Tamenglong district over the years has been the lack of capital and the difficulties in establishing permanent fields for paddy crops as most of the land is not a plain area favourable for terrace cultivation. Undoubtedly, slash and burn cultivation is also labour intensive and unsophisticated but the Zeliangrong Nagas do not want to change their traditional practice of cultivation even if they acquire modern technology. Besides, it is also a tradition and way of life for a huge segment of the total population.

TAMEI:

The Tamenglong district is divided into four sub-divisions viz, Tamenglong sub-division, Tousem sub-division, Nungba sub-division and Tamei sub-division respectively. Tamei sub-division is around 119 kms via Kangpokpi or I.T. road from Imphal (Capital of Manipur) and the area is one hundred square km. The unique characteristic of Tamei sub-division lies in its natural beauty, its lofty green hillocks, waterfalls, curved landscape, cool weather, exotic orchids, flora and fauna. Rainfall is generally heavy in the district. In 1983, a rainfall of 3,264.10 mm was recorded in Tamei and nearby areas. Because of the high altitude and incessant rains, there are mild summers and cold winters. Sometimes it even rains for more than twenty (20) days continuously.
This small area is enchanting with the presence of small brooks of river and rare species of plants, birds and animals. Tamei town can also be connected by another road i.e. via Tamenglong Head Quarter which is 188 kms from Imphal. Nowadays, the Manipur State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and a few private buses ply between Imphal and Tamei on a daily basis. The area is not connected either by air or railways although a helicopter under special permission of the government can be landed at the hill top with immense difficulties during the times of emergencies.

As shown in the table below, there is no College or government hospital except one Primary Health Centre in the Tamei sub-division. The lone dispensary is situated on the higher level of the hill town. The population of Tamei is predominantly tribal. The predominant religion is Christianity (99.9% of the total population). There were 19,700 people in the Tamei sub-division as per Census of India 1991. But, things have comparatively changed according to the Census of India 2001 report, for it reveals that the total population of Tamei sub-division has increased to 21,829 in which there are 11,200 males and 10,629 females. There are 38 villages in total but the area is relatively under-developed and poorly integrated with the rest of the State.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Educational Institutions in Tamei sub-division:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Institutions:</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Semi Government</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Primary School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior/Middle School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: http://164.100.149.67/cicmanipur/profile/profile.asp)
The local people often complain that the administrative and judicial offices are almost redundant. The postal service moves at a snail's pace and sometimes it would come to a standstill. Regarding communication, telephone exchange service does not operate on regular basis due to various reasons such as lack of staff and technical problem. Besides, frequent landslides during the rainy season often cut-off the area of Tamei sub-division from the rest of the civilization.

The transport and communication system is awfully inadequate. The State highways to Tamei are through I.T.Road and Khongsang road. These roads have potholes and depressions adorning it for the past several decades but they have not been properly repaired or re-constructed for years. A large quantity of bitumen has been siphoned off in the name of black topping the roads.

The local print media reported that the funds allocated by the State government for road repairing and black-topping have been misused. The State government has not taken steps to tackle problems of inadequacies of water and power supply, education and transport and communication in the area. There is also an administrative lapse at Tamei sub-division. Another major problem being faced by the people is the non-availability of doctors, medicines and other related health care infrastructure. Despite the World Health Organization (WHO) slogan of "Health for all by 2000 AD", this area is still lacking in basic health facilities.
LATEST MAP OF
TAMEI SUB-DIVISION,
TAMENGLONG DISTRICT, MANIPUR.
Although official records are not available, it is reported verbally by the local community that several women died during delivery time due to lack of essential medical facilities in the Tamei Primary Health Centre (PHC). The members of the civil society have been raising their voices against the administration, judicial and legislative functionaries. Sometimes, they have been holding strikes (dharnas) and submitting memoranda as well as petitions to successive State governments but their complaints have been ignored. This reality also reveals that the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) are ineffective.

CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND:

Tamenglong district in general and Tamei sub-division in particular have a rich culture and tradition. At present, almost 90% of the total population in Tamei sub-division is Liangmai Nagas. They have rich culture and the local community often exhibits their hospitality and simplicity especially to the outsiders. The predominant language in Tamei area is Liangmai Naga dialect but Rongmai, Zeme, Manipuri and English are also used. The educational institutions have been imparting education in English and Manipuri right from primary to secondary levels. Hindi is taught up to eighth standard only. They speak their own language at home and in the churches but use both Manipuri and English in educational institutions, markets and other places.

Earlier, they followed their own tribal religion called Animism but majority of the people in this area have converted to Christianity. Historical evidence reveals that Christianity is approximately eighty-five (85) years old among the people. Today, every village has a church and it is related to the social organization of the local community. In spite of their conversion to Christianity, they have been preserving their traditional tribal customs, norms and laws that govern the people with changed mode of Christian principles and values. They have assimilated the
Christian way of life but retained their traditions. In other words, they do not restrict their traditional festivals although they have become Christians. For instance, the people celebrate traditional harvest festival and Blessing Ceremony (Chaga) before the fall of winter. Besides, they also celebrate festivals such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and New Year. Hence, they portray a perfect picture of tradition and modernity.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND:

The mainstay of the people at Tamei sub-division is agriculture. They practice slash and bum or jhumming cultivation as mentioned earlier due to lack of other alternative livelihoods. In addition to poverty, systematic and scientific methods of agricultural practices are not used in the area. Several schemes have been initiated as per records by the government. Another important fact is that, due to unemployment and lack of income opportunities, majority of the people live below the poverty line. The problem of unemployment has a serious repercussion as many youth live in discontentment. So far, government claimed that various schemes have been implemented for economic growth but is not visible to a large extent. It is important to note that several programmes and schemes, which have been initiated as per records by the government, exist only in paper.

As such, there have been no impressive successes achieved by the government. There is no progress made to the extent to assess the impact of the programmes implemented by the government. Moreover, against the popular perception, the lack of development in the past decades was not only because of shortage of funds. Even if sufficient resources were provided to Tamei-sub-division, it is found that a substantial portion of these vast funds earmarked for various schemes often go into the pockets of the bureaucracy and local oligarchy. It is obvious to say that till date, no serious attempt has been evolved to take into
account the sentiments, habits, practices, or the traditions of the tribal communities of the Tamei sub-division while formulating policies.

There is a weekly market in Tamei bazaar wherein women farmers from the neighboring villages sell their produces directly. The weekly market is predominantly used and managed by women of surrounding villages. However, a facility for these women farmers to commercialize their produces on daily basis to receive higher incomes and profits are not created. Vehicles rarely ply on the village roads to transport commodities. Hence, women farmers are compelled to carry their products on shoulders or backs in a traditional basket and walk for several miles on foot to reach their common weekly market place.

The area remains unvisited, unexplored and undeveloped. Nothing concrete was done for the improvement of the socio economic conditions of the local ethnic community under the said local oligarchy. To a certain extent, the State has lost its vision for the poor. They are interested in strengthening its vote banks only. Such is an unfortunate scene in the area. The government has largely failed to achieve their goal of improving the condition of the poor at Tamei sub-division because the poor could not participate effectively or benefit substantially from the government-sponsored programmes.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY INFORMATICS CENTRE (CIC) AT TAMEI HEAD QUARTER BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT:

In 2001, the Ministry of Communications & Information Technology under the Department of Information Technology, National Informatics Centre: Manipur State Unit established a Community Informatics Centre (CIC) at Tamei Head Quarter and it provided a few computers with internet facility for public consumption. CIC centre is located at the Block Development Office (BDO) in the
heart of Tamei town. In spite of frequent power failure, this centre manages to render services to the general public. The CIC offers services in internet browsing, e-mail, chatting, typing and printing at low rates. Occasionally, the CIC encounters problems because of the limitations of infrastructural facilities at their disposal. However, they have managed to conduct three computer awareness camps so far.

During such awareness campaigns, they are able to communicate to the local community about the tremendous significance of Information Technology in our contemporary globalized society. The consciousness of opportunities by connecting to the outside world gradually has crept into the people in a powerful way. Through CIC, people keep instant contacts with others especially in times of emergencies as the postal service is extremely slow and the area telephone exchange service is non-functional most of the time.

The government employees also browse internet to access necessary information for official purposes. Instead of traveling all the way to Imphal for getting their mark-sheets when the Matriculation results are announced by the Manipur Education Board, the students have begin to download their results from the internet and take prints-out of their mark-sheets from CIC itself. The CIC could also assist Block Development Office (BDO) in computerizing their Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census for official record.

Often, CIC serves as the medium for extracting news items from the relevant sites for the local weekly news “Pawancham” that has been operating as a unit under an NGO called Social Educational Cultural and Economic Development Society (SECEDS). Thus, the editor downloads news from various sites with the help of CIC and would translate it into local dialects for publishing it in the weekly newsletter that is circulated widely among the Liangmai Naga tribe not only in
Manipur but even in Assam and Nagaland. The CIC has given one-month Computer Literacy training to eleven individuals (ten males and one female) consisting of the staff of Sub-Divisional Office (SDO), students, teachers and unemployed youth during 15th October to 15th December 2004. A handful of young professionals have been recruited on a temporary basis to do administrative work at CIC. The salary of the staff is supported by the National Informatics Centre, Manipur State Unit.

**THE ZELIANGRONG NAGA PEOPLE:**

The Zeliangrong tribe belonged to the Naga community and are scattered in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. There is a lack of historical evidence to trace the origin of the tribe. It is safe to assume that the history of the Zeliangrong people can be studied by using the roots of folklore and archaeology. Prakash Singh (1972:9) holds that the Nagas have no recorded history. Even sketchy details in respect of the pre-British period are not available.

According to J.H.Hutton (1921:352) “the tradition goes that their ancestors came from the direction of Japro Mountain in Nagaland and spread towards the south. They have been connected with the head hunters of the Malay and the races of the Southern sea on the one hand and traced back to China on the other”. Another western scholar Verrier Elwin (1969:421) asserts that the fact of their not being a wandering race, like the Kacharis and Kukis, and rarely, except for some pressing reason, changing the site of the village, and even on these occasions, never moving more than a mile or so from the old location, would lead one to conjecture that they are descended from the earliest inhabitants of the parts they now occupy.

Today, both the outsiders and insiders mostly write about this tribe. Ethnically and linguistically, the Zeliangrong belong to the Tibeto-Burman of
southern Mongoloid who for a considerable period lived in southwest China and migrated to northern Southeast Asia and northeast India around 1000 years before Christ. G.A. Grierson in his linguistic survey of India has grouped the Zeliangrong dialects and languages under the Naga Bodo sub-family. We do not have historical documents to show their migration or their origin. But, people have myths and legends in which they have firm belief that they are factual. Hence, the Zeliangrong sense of the past is a mixture of myths, songs and oral tradition. History to the ancient Zeliangrong people is the oral tradition handed down through generations (Kamei: 1997).

The Zeliangrong is the combined name of the Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei including Puimei. The British know the Zeme and Liangmai as Kacha Naga whereas the Rongmei and Puimei are popularly known as the Kabui, name given by the Meiteis of Imphal valley (Kabui 1996: 16). The legend reveals that the term “Kacha Naga” is derived from an Angami word “Ketsa” which means thick forest. The oral tradition asserts that when the British came to Kohima in Nagaland, they asked the Angami people, pointing towards the Liangmai and Zeme area, whether any tribe lives in those hills.

The Angami people responded as “Ketsa” stating in their local dialect that it’s only a thick forest area where human beings do not reside. Later, the British found out that tribes inhabited the area beyond the thick forest. Since then, the British called the tribe beyond the forest as Kacha Naga. Hence, the British coined the term Kacha Naga and later recognized by the government of India. The tribe is enlisted in the Scheduled list although the concerned tribe likes to disown its corrupted name today.
In tracing the historical background of the tribe, Hunibou Newmai (1995) opines that the only difference of these cognate groups is their distinctive dialects. In his view, these cognate groups have common origin, ethnic, cultural and linguistic affinity. He asserts that there are different perceptions about the origin of the tribe. And, some believed that their ancestors came out of a mythical cave known as Taobhei, which cannot be evaluated in an authentic way. Yet, he observes that the origin of the tribe can be traced back to the oldest village of the tribe named ‘Makuiluongdih’ or ‘Guangphungning’ which is now in Senapati district, Manipur.

Newmai writes that, according to the popular legend of the tribe, ‘Chabangcham’ (meaning genesis), the Naga as a whole migrated from the extreme north and finally settled down in Makhiang or Makhel village (now in Mao Naga area) for the long period. Further, he affirms that as time went by, the village became overpopulated. Hence, different clans decided to leave their original villages and before their departure, they erected a huge stone which is popularly known as ‘Tadmaratu’ (‘tad’ means go; ‘mara’ means disperse or scatter and ‘tu’ means stone in Liangmai dialect) or a stone of dispersal. He maintains that after the migration from Makhing or Makhel village in Mao Naga area, Zeliangrong people settled down in Makuiluongdih village for several years. He states that this particular village consisted of 7777 (seven thousand seven hundred and seventy seven) households. Previously, the Zeliangrong people were known as ‘Hamei’ and they spoke only one common dialect, i.e. most probably the present Liangmai Naga dialect.

Further, Newmai (ibid) continues to expressed his view that as per the popular legend, ‘Chabangcham,’ the three brothers (i.e. Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei) were separated after a conflict over chieftainship between the eldest brother Manu-Magangtubou (son of the village chief’s second wife or nouniabopui) and his younger brother Manu-Kading (son of the first wife naodunbopui). He
narrated that the eldest brother Manu- Magangtubou was disqualified in the ordeal for chieftainship given by his paternal uncle the Meitei (Maikimai) king. Interestingly, in desperation Magangtubou left the village along with his followers to settle down in Barak (Buiki) river valley. Apparently, the youngest brother Manu- Rengbangbou also went along with his group in search of fertile land and settled in the southern part of the present Zeliangrong Naga area where there were no inhabitants. And, this group later came to be known as ‘Maruangmai’ or ‘Rongmei’ in modern days.

In his perception, the literal meaning of the word, ‘Maruang’ means empty or unoccupied and ‘mai’ means people. And, he holds that it refers to those who have gone settled down in the southern part of the unoccupied land. On the other hand, he states that the Liangmai were those who stayed back in their original village along with Manu-Kading. Newmai opines that the word, ‘Liangmai’ is derived from the word, ‘Liangkhatmai’ meaning ‘one group’, referring to those who stayed back in their original village. He regarded Puimai tribe to have been separated from the Liangmai sub-tribe much later. Moreover, he asserts that they originated from Liangmai villages, viz Phumjeng and Puichi, also a Puimai village from Liangchi (Makui) village. Nonetheless, he declares a lack of evidence to substantiate this claim and states that nothing is clearly known about the derivation of the word, Puimai.

On the other hand, we have interpretations of other scholars who have been working on the origin of this specific tribe. One of them, Kamei (2000) opines that at Kakuilongdi, the basic feature of the Zeliangrong society was developed. It was a lineage society in which patrilineal social structure had been in operation. He affirms that the village council organisation like, the chiefship, succession to it, the village council, the dormitories, the village festival and lineage structure had been
developed. He holds that when the Zeliangrong people moved into their habitat, they brought a lineage based, shifting cultivation based and a village based political system.

**TYPE OF FAMILY:**

Undoubtedly, there have been loud claims that joint families are on the decline and nuclear families are preferable in our contemporary society. The nuclear family is conceptualized by the younger generation as the best type of family in spite of the fact that there are complaints about the breakdown of the traditional family. With the rise of nuclear family, the importance of lineage system is reduced to a certain extent among the Zeliangrong Nagas. In my sample, 64% of the Liangmai Nagas in Tamei sub-division have adopted nuclear family. The nuclear family is defined in terms of a family consisting of a man and his wife with their children.

The clan and lineage play a significant role in the everyday life of the Zeliangrong Nagas. Kamei (2000) emphasized that the clans such as Moeteis, Pamei and Niumai were split into lineages and sub-lineages. According to him, the Pamei lineage was divided into seven sub-lineages or families viz, Pamei, Kamei, Phaomei, Singongmei, Kamson, Malangmei, Daimei and their totem is green wild pigeon (ahiun) except Malangmei who has paang (black monkey) as the totem. He opines that the Niumai came to be more stable but between the Zeme and Rongmei, it was split into several lineages like Gonmei, Rongmei, Gonthangmei, Niumai and their totem is Loingao (a local bird). He asserts that among the Rongmei, a family known as Gangmei has tiger as their totem.

In Horam’s view (1990), a Naga clan is composed of families that are a group of agnatic kin. He holds that it occupies a definite portion of the village and is
strictly exogamous. Moreover, he states that the members of a clan are believed to have descended from a common ancestor by whose name it is called. Basically, the clan name serves as a surname in most cases. He mentions that the relationship of the wider kinship groups is the extensions of consanguineous families. And, the child learns from his early life that he belongs to this family and clan and the fact that the village community into which he is born is a part of this larger clan group. It is obvious that the Zeliangrong Nagas belongs to patriarchal social system wherein each clan enjoys equal status. Clan exogamy is strictly observed.

**STATUS OF ZELIANGRONG WOMEN:**

Initially, women play a low profile role in the new family. They tend to comply with the commands of the elders and perform various duties of the household religiously. Assertion of their rights is not encouraged. Women, after marriage are curtailed from involving themselves in social activities to a great extent. After a lapse of many years when the parents of her husband pass away, the wife definitely becomes powerful in the house and assists her husband in administration of her family.

There is considerable gender-based discrimination. Although women make up 49% of society they are excluded from the village council and do not enjoy decision-making powers. The women of the village do not have right to property or even to claim her children after being divorced from her husband. Women in many villages have no access to health services but do most of the home and farm chores. With the slight growth of literacy rate in the district, some women are employed in the modern jobs which enable them to move out of their homes, express their views, exchange their problems and evaluate their position vis-à-vis men in many areas of life. Traditionally, the status of Zeliangrong Naga women is placed under men.
It is obvious that, women share the responsibility of maintaining the family affairs. A woman is bogged down with many duties to attend. As the husband is engaged in several external activities in the village and social affairs, almost the whole responsibility of the family falls on the woman. Traditionally, the place of women is at the base since all the hierarchy is occupied by their men. In the Zeliangrong Naga culture, men have always been privileged to be decision-makers. By tradition, women are considered housewives while men are to be heads of the family.

Today, the conventional marriage practices among the Zeliangrong tribe underwent certain significant changes due to the influence of the Christian religion and modernization. Marriage became strictly monogamous among them. Few employed women also began to abstain from jhumming cultivation because of their jobs and the awareness regarding consequences of jhumming cultivation. Gradually, women became conscious of their position in society and they feel the urge to do something about it. For instance, a few concerned Zeliangrong women formed women’s organization called “Zeliangrong Tanpui,” (Tanpui means sisters) based at Tamenglong Head Quarters with a vision to cater to the needs of women’s issues and also fight against social evils in the society. They began to assert their rights, roles, and status. Consequent to the expansion of their knowledge and awareness of social issues, new possibilities were opened up for the Zeliangrong Naga women to realize their aspirations and visions through several avenues.

Change is a natural phenomenon and it is an inevitable part of our human existence. We are living in an era of dramatic change, in a world that is being transformed by complicated financial systems and technological revolutions into a huge global system. Amazing communications between different tribes, castes, races, ethnic groups, states and nations have created by globalization, promising
unprecedented privileges for material prosperity in larger freedom, but also threatening to compound several existing challenges of those most vulnerable.

In such a complex scenario, it is essential to point out that the Zeliangrong Naga society in the past was a simple one confined mainly to the village in which women played their sub-ordinate role assigned to them completely in the political and religious affairs wherein they manifested their simplicity and ignorance but the whole social set up has undergone a huge transition in the present society. Women's life does not confined absolutely to villages alone, as the village society has transformed into a complex one.

FACTS ABOUT TAMENGLONG DISTRICT

Black Topped Roads

Figure 4.1: The condition of roads in Tamenglong district.

- None at all: 36%
- Black Topped Roads: 16%
- Fair weather roads: 34%
- All weather roads: 14%
The total number of villages in Tamenglong district is two hundred and seven only. The condition of roads in these villages is the most crucial problem. Only 16% of roads are black topped and 14% are the all weather roads. The diagram below shows that 34% are considered as fair weather roads whereas 36% are extremely small roads, hardly viable to travel in the hills.

As can be seen in the table, Tamenglong district suffers from lack of electricity or power. Not even half of the villages are electrified in this area. Just 48% of villages are electrified as per the government record. However, it is essential to point out that these electrified villages do not have regular current due to technical problems at the electricity department.

Table 4.2: Power in Tamenglong district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-division</th>
<th>No. of villages</th>
<th>No. of villages electrified</th>
<th>% of villages electrified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>78.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamei</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tousem</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nungba</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the graph below, there is only one college at Tamenglong Head Quarter with three higher secondary schools. The district has fifteen high schools, thirty four junior high schools, fifty private schools and a huge number of one hundred and sixty primary schools. The State Government has been emphasizing on improving the quality of education at all levels.
Figure 4.2: Educational Institutions in Tamenglong district.

Table 4.3: Demography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population growth</th>
<th>Decadal growth rate of Tamenglong district (%)</th>
<th>Manipur’s decadal growth rate (%)</th>
<th>National’s decadal growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>33,519</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>37,667</td>
<td>12.38</td>
<td>35.04</td>
<td>21.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>46,034</td>
<td>22.21</td>
<td>37.53</td>
<td>24.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>62,289</td>
<td>35.31</td>
<td>32.46</td>
<td>24.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>86,278</td>
<td>38.51</td>
<td>29.29</td>
<td>23.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,08,295</td>
<td>25.91</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>21.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Government of India, the Census Directorate, Imphal, 2001)

Population growth trend says that it is on the higher side than the national average. A recent survey conducted in the District has shown the below poverty line (BPL) is around 65%. It may be stated here that the growth rate from 1991 to 2001 shows 25%. In fact, it would have been around 36% if the Kukis had not been
displaced to other districts due to ethnic strife which hit the State in 1992 and lasted till 2002. It is estimated that about 10,000 Kukis left the district owing to ethnic crisis. Now, they are slowly re-settling in the area with the help of the opposing ethnic community i.e. Nagas as both the ethnic communities have reconciled.

TOURISM POTENTIAL IN THE DISTRICT:

Tamenglong is a small district stretching along the western fringe of Manipur bordering Nagaland and Assam. Tamenglong is a gem in the brilliant necklace of Manipur. Though very tiny, less explored and less visited, the district has great charm as well as a long tradition and history of the land and the people. The district has picturesque hills; flora and fauna, the colourful variety of its ethnic life and culture invite the tourists.

Tamenglong district is a land of lovely spots. The tourists especially the foreigners and the Indians who have been settled abroad for several generations and who do not have Indian passport cannot enter this district without a special visa from the Government of India (GOI). The district can vie with any state or territory of India as a tourist’s attraction. Notable spots of tourists’ attraction are:

- Tharon cave
- Buning valley (Inpuilong valley)
- Old Kunphung, a prairie land
- Barak waterfall
- Zailat lake

Unfortunately, most of the tourist spots are inaccessible. One of the most ancient and popular Tharon cave is located 27 kms away from the district HQ. Archeologists conducted an excavation work at the cave and discovered that it have
close resemblance with Hobinian culture of North Vietnam. On the other hand, Barak river is a very beautiful spot nestled in the deep cool forest and along this river, there are seven waterfalls. Transport as well as a communication bottleneck is the main irritant to enrich the tourist industry in this district.

Endowed with nature’s varied gifts, the scenic Buning valley, otherwise known as Inpuilong valley has its pristine state and it is situated at the imposing height of 1410 meters above sea level. The valley has a charming landscape and it has its sheer enchantment. The valley is also blessed with ground orchids and beautiful wild Lillies. There is a waterfall appealing for attention on the way to Buning valley, and a beautiful stream called Agaki is gently running in the heart of the Buning valley similar to a river on the deserted city of Hiroshima of Japan. Such a stream, which runs gently in the dale, had added another bonus of attraction to the tourists. Some tourists have aptly described this Buning valley as a second Dzuko valley in Manipur.

Endowed with natural prairie, elegant streams, lakes, a deep gorge, a land of the eternal zephyrs, old konphung village situated on the peak at 1380 meters above sea level which is fondly described as a veritable paradise, all-embracing greenness of prairie is a point of attraction to the tourists especially the foreigners. In 1924, a British officer paid a visit to this village and when first set his eye on the prairie and peak, named it as “Little Scotland”.

Prairie of gently plain and sloping grasslands interspersed between hill tops, sparkling natural lakes and streams, the early morning mist revealing just enough to make the sight seems almost ethereal: a romantic pretty picture. This village has the biggest prairie in North East India covering an area of 200 hectares. Thus, old konphung is a village of surpassing scenic beauty. Natural lakes and mountain
lakes, rising peaks, billowing meadows and rushing brooks combine to offer a rich panorama.

RESTRICTED AREA PERMITS (RAP):

The people of Manipur have been demanding the government to review the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) Act and open it for the tourists. Under this particular Act, non-Indian citizens cannot enter this State nor visit any other North East area without a special visa. Even the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) who do not possess the Indian passport are prohibited from entering this beautiful area of India’s North East.

The Government will have to review this Act with special reference to Indians settled abroad who possess dual passports. Even if the foreigners or Indians (Who do not have Indian Passport) acquires the special visa from the Government to enter the area, it is valid only for fourteen days counting from the day the visa is stamped. Unfortunately, the visa is usually valid for only three days in Imphal (Capital city of Manipur). The visa restriction is for security reasons because the region is marked by insurgency, sensitive internal problems and other factors.

Occasionally, the people of Manipur have been holding protests and raising their voices against this Act. They point out that even Jammu and Kashmir does not have such restrictions. Hence, they strongly feel that the Government of India metes out a step-mother treatment to them. Majority of the people in the State feel that such restrictions are repressive. Without access to the area by both the domestic and foreign tourists, the local people believe that they are deprived of a wider connection and interaction. Moreover, they assume that this Act denies them from developing tourism. If this Act is repealed, the district of Tamenglong will get a boost from tourism.
ISOLATION OF THE ZELIANGRONG PEOPLE:

Even after 58 years of independence, the people of Manipur particularly of the Tamenglong district feel they are marginalized. The isolation of the Zeliangrong Naga people leads them to believe that they are victims deprived of the benefits of development. Even the educational institutions are neglected by the government for a long period. These institutions have been functioning in this district without adequate paraphernalia such as inadequate building structure, furniture’s, equipments, requisite atmosphere and above all, shortage of teachers. No pragmatic measures are contemplated to transform these people at par with other communities in the field of education, health and overall development.

The economist Gunnar Myrdal (1968) propounded the concept of ‘vicious circle of poverty’. According to this theory, poverty is both the cause and effect of poverty. Perhaps, this theory is applicable to the people in Tamenglong district as the income yielding economic assets is found in paucity among them. And, the Zeliangrong people are caught in the vicious circle of poverty with low per capita income, low health standards, child mortality rates and low expectancy of life. Nurkse Ragnar (1953:4) opines that “country is poor because it is poor.” But, we cannot complacently accept such theory of poverty assuming that minority communities remain poor because India is also a poor country.

Gunnar Mrydal (ibid) came to the same conclusion as Nurkse. The social processes in the underdeveloped countries are dominated by ‘vicious circle of poverty’ and stagnation. Mrydal regards poor people as helpless victim of society caught into vicious circle and then, envisages destiny for them. Myrdal’s theory of poverty is relevant to the conditions prevailing at Tamei sub-division of Tamenglong district in Manipur.
To make the issue of negligence worse, rodents in Tamenglong district have reportedly destroyed major tract of crops in the jhum fields. In 2003, bamboo flowering occurred in which rodent population multiplied resulting in large scale destruction of agricultural crops. After consuming the seeds of the bamboo flowers completely, rodents attack standing crops in the field as well as grains. A large number of farmer families have nothing to reap from their fields.

The local leaders in the district urged the government to declare the rodent menace as a natural calamity in the Tamenglong district and petitioned the Government of India to bail out the poor farmers. Although the government sanctioned compensation, it did not reach the homes of many poor farmers. Since corruption is rampant, those who control power at the higher levels siphoned off funds. During the 1950s, a similar phenomenon had occurred in the district.

On the other hand, the people of Tamenglong district do not have a strong leadership or organizations to find solutions to their problems. The fruits of India’s freedom have not yet percolated to the people at this district. It is time for the State government and the Central government to ponder over the turmoil faced by the people and suitable measures should be chalked out to ameliorate the conditions of people living in a deliberately neglected area like Tamenglong district.

Regarding the poor economy in the Naga inhabited areas, Dr.M.Horam (1988:126) argues that there is the question of poverty, hunger, disease especially rampant in rural Naga area: it will be the humanitarian duty of all to eradicate disease and inculcate awareness of the needs of the unfortunate people among the more fortunate section of our country. Not only this but ways and means must be sought and practiced to weed out these social ills together.
An important question needs to be raised as to how long India should remain to formulate a new strategy or policy to ameliorate the conditions of our indigenous people like Zelianrong Nagas who have produced Freedom fighters such as Rani Gaidinliu and Haipou Jadonang. Rani Gaidinliu became a legend in her lifetime due to her fearless fight against the British. From 1925 onwards, she started to struggle against the British rulers in order to free the Nagas from the suppressive and exploitative foreign administration. Mr. Jadonang who revived and reformed the Zelianrong religion and started the “Heraka cult” by amalgamating the Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei led her. Today, this cult-group is associated with the RSS, VHP and the BJP. Indian democracy can succeed only if the government uplifts the depressed class, tribe or caste as equal to other communities. To add fuel to the fire, the community at Tamei sub-division in itself is inflicted with many menaces like alcoholism, drugs-abuse, HIV/AIDS etc.

People do not have full faith in the State machinery since their basic demands have not been fulfilled for several decades now. At such a juncture, a few Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged at Tamei sub-division to promote development. And, people have begun to perceive the NGOs as alternative machinery to the State government. NGOs are often engaged in creating public awareness on various issues of social concern and simultaneously implement development projects to enhance the per capita income of the families. But, it is too early to accept NGOs as the provider who delivers goods and services at their door. It is futile to romanticize the efforts of NGOs in alleviating poverty with their implementation of development programmes. It is in this context, that the present study has been undertaken. As stated earlier, the study examined the role that NGOs are playing in the process of development in one of the most backward districts of Manipur.