CHAPTER I
Introduction

1. A Brief Introduction of Nagaland

1.1 Background of Nagaland

Nagaland situated at the easternmost part of India, covers about an area of 16,579 sq. kms. It is bordered on the west by Assam, on the north by Arunachal Pradesh, on the east by Myanmar and on the south by Manipur. Further, it is also equidistant from the tri-functional of Indo-China-Myanmar in the Northern and Indo-Bangladesh in the south.

Historically, the Nagas have always been brave warriors. Like all territories of the Northeast India, Nagaland too has its own share of legends and stories. Each Naga village had their independent system of governing. It was only in the 19th century that there came a change in the history of the Nagas, when the British appeared on the scene. Nagaland too, did not remain untouched by the revolt of 1857 and later in the struggle for freedom. After independence in 1947, this territory was made a centrally administered area under the Governor of Assam.

The State of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on December 1st, 1963, as the 16th State of the Indian Union. With statehood, a sense of self-attainment was achieved among the Nagas, and within a short span of a decade and a half there had been tremendous changes. Today the State consists of 11 (Eleven) Administrative Districts, with Kohima being the State capital.

Topography of Nagaland is similar to that of any young mountain terrain features with high hills, sharp crest ridges, deep gorges and narrow valleys. Bearing a few hundred square kilometres of plains along the foothills in the western part of the State and in the valleys along the riverbeds, the entire state is covered with high hill ranges. The climate is pleasant except for a few small regions in the foot hills.

1.2 People

The indigenous people of the state are commonly known as ‘Nagas’. They are tribesmen belonging to the Indo-Mongolian group of people. They have been for centuries dwelling in the land they inhabit today. They were formerly head hunters, and that is about all that the outside people knew about them. They had a free and an independent outlook on life. They are cheerful and have a sense of hospitality beyond their resources. They have an instinct for colour, love of music, rhythm and dance. Although, most of the Nagas have now become
Christians, they still preserve some of the remnants of their early animist and ancient culture.

The major tribes are Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Kuki, Konyak, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Zelaing, Pochuri and Rongmai. Each of the 16 odd tribes and sub-tribes that dwell in the hill state of Nagaland can easily be distinguished by the colourful and intricately designed costumes, jewellery and beads that they adorn. The creative talents and love of colours have propelled the younger generation of today to blend the ancestral motifs with modern appeal bringing out beautiful mix of the past and the present. These tribes and sub-tribes have their own distinctive dialects and cultural features. Greirson (1927) classified the Naga dialects in the Tibeto-Burman family, dividing them into three groups: The western sub group, the central sub-group and the Eastern sub-group.

1.3 Culture

Colourful life and culture are an integral part of the Naga tribes of Nagaland. These 16 tribes are different and unique in their customs and traditions. These customs and traditions are further translated into festivals which revolve around their agriculture cycle. Songs and dance form the soul of these festivals through which their oral history has been passed down the generation.

Each tribe in Nagaland is distinct in character in terms of their customs, traditions, language and dress. They differ so much from tribe to tribe, yet there are similarities. The Naga society is non-class, non-caste with autonomous culture. Each tribe comprises of a number of villages and are bound together by political, social and religious ties.

Ramunny, Murkot, in ‘The world of Nagas’, describes the varied pattern of village administration ranging from near dictatorship to most liberal democracy. In many villages the most important indigenous institution was the Morung or the dormitory for the unmarried young men. They served as clubs, guard house, training place in art, discipline and for several ceremonial purposes.

Each village had their own indigenous institutions of village council. These councils composed of elders representing the clan and khel (sectors), had both judiciary and executive responsibilities. They direct the co-operative actions and regulate the village life. In Nagaland the village council, in fact, provides the basic machinery for local self government. The ancient Naga people though, unaware of the democratic principles of western civilization lived and were govern by democratic principles and practices since time immemorial.

They were and still are people fond of social and community life. Their social life was marked by traditional institutions, feast of merit, traditional festivals and games. There were varieties of festivals celebrated throughout the year by different tribes. Each tribe had a number of festivals of its own. Some of these
festivals are still being celebrated by the different tribe of Nagaland. Some important festivals are sekrenyi of the Angami tribe, moatsu of the Ao tribe, tokhumonyu of the Lotha tribe, tuluni of the Sumi tribe, etc.

Music, art, beads, ornaments are an integral part of the Naga people. They were singing and dancing people in times of joy, victory and sorrow. The folklores, folk dances and folk tales eulogizing ancestors, brave deeds of warriors, depicting scenes, famous events, were a great source of information and projects the rich and unique Naga culture.

Naga society is patriarchal and patrilinial. The social customs here differ widely from those in other parts of the country. Also, isolated from the other, has made the Naga tribes’ lifestyle different from each other. Inheritance and land ownership are fields in which Nagaland observes its own usage. The tribes were also not immune to the values of materialistic values of modernity. Thus, a number of social values of the traditional Naga tribe had also undergone changes bringing about a drastic change in the value patterns of the people.

1.4 Economy

Like most of the tribes of the world over, the Naga tribes were also forest people, hence their economy in which subsistence agriculture was combined with extraction of sub-tropical rain forest produce. They hunt, fish, collect wild vegetables, herbs, roots fruits etc. Agriculture was and still is the main occupation of the people. Over 85% of the population of Nagaland are still directly dependent on agriculture and lives in a thousand and odd villages. In most of the places agriculture consists of mono-crops. All the tribes practice shifting cultivation but a group of Naga tribes (Tenyimia) practice terrace cultivation which is a permanent cultivation, existed long before the British invasion. In addition to the land forest, there also existed industry in pottery, weaving, carving etc. Each village stuck to their own pattern different from the other. They were also known for their use of beautiful coloured dyes and their ability to mix and match. They made both useful and artistic object. Each village produced everything they needed and most of the villages were self-sufficient economically.

With the influence of modernisation, came improved method of communication and development of commerce. Village traders previously cut off from the plains and hostile neighbours were able to trade and travel afar which improved the economy of the Naga people. Today, the traditional economy is being taken over by modern technological based economy in many parts of the state. With improved formal education in the state, the people today are involved in different fields of work. Agriculture is still the most important occupation of the population.
1.5 Religion

The traditional faith of the Naga was termed as ‘animism’. They did not worship any form or figure, nor did they belong to any major religion of the world, but like all other tribes of the world they believed and feared the spirits. They believed that the spirits were present in all nature and thus respected it. Nature dictated the various activities to be carried out in the village. Today, more than 90% of the people of Nagaland are Christians but there are still a few in some villages that still follow the traditional beliefs. Traditionally, the religious beliefs of the people regulated their social and individual life. The various festivals celebrated with strict traditional rites and rituals by the ancient Naga are today being celebrated with interwoven secular rites and rituals.

1.6 Population

As per the Provisional Population Totals of census 2011, the total population of the State stood at 1,980,602, comprising of 1025707 males and 954895 female. Of this, the rural population stands at 1,406,861 and the urban population 573,741. The rural population constitute 71.03% of the total population and the urban population 28.97%. The decadal growth rate of Nagaland during 2001 to 2011 is 0.47%.

1.7 Literacy

The literacy rate of Nagaland as per to the Provisional Population Totals of census 2011 is 80.11%, a considerable jump from the 67.11% recorded in 2001 census. The literacy rate in rural areas in 2011 stands at 75.86% whereas in urban areas it is 90.21%. As in 2001, the male literacy rate (83.29%) continues to be higher than the female (76.69%). In 2011 however, the gap between the male and female literacy rate in Nagaland (6.60 points) is not as wide as at the National level (16.68%).

1.8 Education

Before the advent of the British, Naga people had no formal education. They had a number of indigenous institutions in each village, which was responsible in the education of the village people. The most important of institution in the Naga villages was the ‘Morung’, which has been translated as ‘male dormitory’. It was here that some kind of informal education was carried out for the adolescent boys. These institutions evolved from a very primitive stage. These indigenous institutions trained the young male to build up their life with very strong community-based approach and established a deep sense of cooperative relationship among them. This institution occupied the central position in the village organisation and administration as an institutionalised mechanism of social control and socialised education. Education in the ancient periods was in the form of discourse between the elders and the younger
generation through oral communication. The village community and the elders played a vital role in the education of the younger generation.

It was in such a scenario that the British arrived into the land of the Naga tribes. The real changes in the field of education were brought by the Christian missionaries. The first American missionary to arrive in Nagaland was Rev. E.C Clark, who ventured into the territory in 1872, even before the British could set up their permanent headquarters which was in 1878. The missionaries not only influenced the Naga people in their faith but education became a corollary. The first formal school was established at Impur in the year 1882 and thereafter there was gradual progress in the field of formal education in Nagaland.

The growth of formal education got its momentum after the attainment of Statehood in 1963. The Government of Nagaland had established a number of schools all over the state. There were only two colleges before the attainment of statehood. The first college being, 'Fazl Ali College', in the year 1959, followed by, 'Kohima Science College', in 1961. There after there was considerable increase in the establishment of colleges. Today there are a number of institutions all over the state. Nagaland has had tremendous increase in the literacy rate over the years. The literacy rate was only 27.40% in 1971, with an increase to 67.11% in the 21st century, and a considerable jump to 80.11% in 2011.

1.9 Conceptual framework

1.9.1 Socio-cultural traditions of the Naga society.

The Naga tribes were endowed with a very rich heritage that had been handed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition. They do not posses any written history but what little we know of came through the folksongs, folklore and dances, British administrators/writers, documents, reports, research works and local writers.

The 16 tribes and several sub-tribes in Nagaland differ so much from tribe to tribe, yet there are similarities in many aspects. Each tribe have their dialect entirely different from the other. In fact, even among the villages of the same tribe, there are differences. Each tribe is distinct as well, in terms of culture, tradition and social life. Naga traditional society was characterized by equality, devoid of class or caste society. Traditionally, the Naga social unit was not the tribe but the village. The village and not the tribe was the sole political and social unit. Each of the villages is inhabited by two or more clans, usually occupying its own area. Nagas had a free and independent outlook. Despite their common origin from the progenitor, there emerged different tribes who maintained separate social, cultural and political entities. Therefore, there was no centralized polity. Further, Naga villages even within a tribe were isolated from one another and became a separate social, political and economic independent unit, like a
village state. Naga tribes represent a varied pattern of village administration. It ranges from near dictatorship to most liberal democracy.

Every Naga village has a defined territorial population and internal and external policy. They honoured the independence and integrity of the village state. In every village there is a village council. In the early days it was the supreme governing organ of the village. The members of the village council are varied from village to village and also from clan to clan. According to practice and customs, each clan in the village selects their representatives. Usually, depending on the population, an elderly person or the most capable individual of the clan is represented by one to three members to the village council. The village council presides over any form of dispute in the village and its decision is final and binding. The council formed the ultimate authority in protecting and maintaining fraternity and peace in the respective villages. The village council is a system, where everyone is a partner, where even the head or chief works for his keeps, where the need for locking doors and windows did not arise. Traditionally, there was trust and belief in the village system. In the system, any decision is reached through consensus, when a group of villagers or elders sit together. Customary laws were the strongest institution to maintain law and order situation. This institution which has been in existence for centuries settles all disputes in the village, tries cases, imposes fines, and sorts out all the problems in the community. Though this institution still exists, some of the cases are referred to the State Government through the local administrative officer. In other words, the village organization is a miniature government.

The Nagas have evolved their own land ownership system based on customs and traditions. Each tribe has its own area of land. The whole of Nagaland is divided into tribal areas and it is practically and morally owned by the tribe. This is an important aspect of Naga life. No other tribes encroaches the land area of the other tribe nor sell it to an outsider. The traditional beliefs and practices of the Nagas is that, 'land is the mother earth and she is older than man and she is living. The man who comes from the dust cannot claim the land falsely, without the risk of becoming the dust.' The Naga people had always lived in harmony with nature, respecting, protecting and preserving, but this characteristics is slowly dying with time.

Another distinctive feature of the Naga custom was 'Genna'. It depicts something forbidden to the individual or the society. It is an important part of the Naga social and religious life. It indicates that the people were forbidden to go about the normal mode of work and social life. It may involve the whole village, a group or a clan, a single household or exclusively men or women. All taboos, religious or otherwise, were meant to consolidate and solidify the village community for any eventuality. The welfare of the individual was made subordinate to the welfare of the community of which he was a part. Thus, the principal of oneness or unity became the underlying motivation in all activities,
group or otherwise. At the same time it also developed self-discipline, self-restrain and tolerance among the individuals.

Traditionally Naga land inheritance was and still is in the male line. One sees no distinction between men and women but for inheritance. The villagers share a common interest and work for the general needs of the society.

One of the most important institutions of the traditional Naga was the ‘Morung’. The Morung was the pivot around which the social, religious, educational and cultural activities of the young men and women evolved. There were separate Morungs for boys and girls. It was here the young were taught the ways of village life. The young unmarried men were trained to become administrators, warriors and learned the folkways of the village. The girls were also generally sociable, respected and enjoyed freedom and independence. Their mothers’ sisters and relatives also guided and advised them in work and responsibilities as a woman. The youth learned handicrafts, folksongs and folkdances, rules and customs, to cooperate, social behaviour, discipline, obedience etc., from the elders of the village. The Morung also provided a good meeting place for the young and the old to discuss various issues concerning the village. Thus, the traditional Morung system was the established institution to impart knowledge, skills and training to the youth for survival, competency and adjustment in the village. People and the society remained accountable and disciplined as per the social norms and traditions, but these institutions are completely disappearing with the importance being placed solely in formal education. Formal education is important, so also, are the good age old values of our society. Today there is a debate on the erosion of values and that the present educational institutions are functioning short of the expectations in this regard.

**1.9.2 The Angami tribe and their socio-cultural traditions.**

The Angami tribe is one of the major tribes of Nagaland. The area is bounded by Wokha and Zunheboto districts on the North, Pekh district on the East, on the South by Manipur and Chachar (Assam) and on the West by Karbi Anlong (Assam).

The Angami villages are within Kohima and Dimapur districts. A typical Angami village has a well defined and wide territory, usually located on the paddle of a mountain spur. Each village had permanent source of water and sufficient land for cultivation. Agriculture was their main source of economy for generations. Much of the Angami areas were covered with thick forest rich in flora and fauna. These forest wealth surrounding the village were common property. There were no land records but boundary disputes were extremely rare. Also in the early days, any destruction or disturbances of the village property were fined. Even to cut single tree required permission with a reason. None went wasted. They respected and protected the land. This kept the forest wealth rich with immense diversity. However, many of these fascinating characteristics are disappearing. A
number of reasons may be cited, such as felling of trees for commercial purposes, increase in population, forming and expansion of towns etc.

The social lives of the Angami were closely intertwined with their religious life and the religious festivals are in perfect harmony with the agricultural seasons. Some of the prominent festivals are Sekrenyi (sanctification festival for the lives of the male members), Ngonyi (the festival of sowing seeds), kerunyi (the festival before transplantation of seeds), Chadanyi the festival of cleaning footpath and village wells), Khoupfünyi (the festival where there is sharing of meals with neighbours, friends and relatives) and Terhünyi (the harvest festival).

The highest form of polity among the Angami was the village. All their laws, institutions, code of conduct, social relationship, social behaviour, religious performances etc., were confined and limited to the village. Each village was an independent unit by itself. As a result, there are some differences in the customs and traditions, from village to village within the same tribe.

The tribe believed in that form of Democratic Government that permits the rule, not of the majority, but of the people as a whole. Unlike the Naga tribes of Nagaland having chiefs such as the Konyaks, Semas, Changs etc. The Angami had no Chieftainship nor elected members of the elders. Instead, they had the Kemovo/Zievo, generally referred to as the headman of the village. But the powers vested in him were very limited. In fact he was almost a figurehead.

Every Angami village had several clans, and the elders of the different clans were representatives who were called Rünapeyu or simply Peyumia. The term Peyumia refers to the quality of a person rather than position and status. He was thought to be a person, who speak the truth in settling cases, who knows the history of the people, who has diplomatic and oratory skills and who has leadership qualities. The Peyumia were not drawn from hereditary nor were they elected, but they emerged in the clans as natural leaders by virtue of their inborn talent. The Peyumia cannot and do not give orders but can only guide the community in decision making for the benefit of the society. They were men of great influence and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the village.

The Angami tribe followed their own customs and usages for regulating social related relationships, and never tolerated lawless behaviour. Penalties for violating the rules and regulation were prescribed by the customary laws. For instance, theft was a crime punishable by up to seven fold of the value stolen. This law was applicable in all the Angami villages. In case, of any dispute, a temporary court was set up. The members of the jury (Peyumia) pronounce the judgment only after much cross-examination and inferring the case. When the village court does not settle disputes amicably, traditional oath would be taken as the last option. Oath taking was considered as a very serious commitment and
no one would dare take the oath unless completely sure of the validity of the statement.

The village of the Angami was a social and political unit. The Family is the permanent living institution, a conscious unit in national polity. No family had ever been left by their fellowmen to the mercy or circumstances of others. The Angami Naga belong to family first then to the pfüstanuo (offspring of one grandfather), and from there he belongs to the Thepfü and the Chienuo or clan. Within the clan, intermarriages are not allowed and decent is traced in the male line. The clan then belongs to the Thinuo or khel and ultimately to the village.

The custom in the Angami society does not favour the system of joint family. They believe that a person getting married is in a position of independence, is a responsible adult and has the capacity to ensure the welfare of his family. The traditional society was also characterized by male dominance. The male population had far more privileges than the female. That the traditional culture had been male-dominated had not meant the women was ill treated or disrespected. Rather, the evidences infer that women exercised a sufficient amount of independence and enjoyed a certain amount of respect from the male folk. They were quite independent of even their husbands. They were tolerant, hard working and industrious. Monogamy was and is the accepted form of marriage and widow remarriage was allowed.

Angami society had a number of social institutions which even today can be considered as utmost importance in view of value inculcation. One such institution is the Peli (age group). All the children within the same age group were organized into a social group and once someone becomes a part of that age group, he or she belongs to it for life. This institution still exists in almost all the villages. They get to know each other better, help in times of mishaps and develop a social unit as equals. During the festivals particularly Sekhrenyi, these group of young men and women come together to sing dance and play traditional games. It is also during this festival old friendship is strengthened and new friendship is established.

Two important institutions namely the Thehu (men’s hall) and Kîchûki (Dormitory) may be compared to the Morung of the other Naga tribes. The female too had their own Kîchûki but not a Thehu. Like the Morung of the other tribes, all the clan history, the legends, the songs and traditional practices were taught in these two institutions. It was here that each foundation had been laid, moulded and build. The youth were taught, trained and disciplined in these institutions.

Another feature of the Angami tradition is the Thehou or Thehouba (meeting place) where men usually gather especially in the evenings after field work. Here they discussed and debated on any issues concerning the village and outside the village. They related stories and daily happening were shared. It was
also here that some kind of leadership training took place. Young people learned their histories, diplomatic and oratory skills.

The Angami Naga also has a characteristic called Mhoshuo. This has been translated as ‘self-honour’. It was because of this inherent characteristic that a relative will not be allowed to beg or to live at the expense of others. The rich relatives supported the poorer relatives. But this characteristic also had a negative impact on the people in general. It was due to this character that for generations villages remained enemies.

The Angami tribe in the past was an egalitarian society. The wealthy had never looked down on the poor. They shared their wealth through the ‘feast of merit’. This Feast of merit is also not simply feasting. It is based on their attitude. It bestowed so much distinction on the donors, depicting distribution of wealth rather than its possession that was important. The feast includes not merely one’s own relatives or clan but the whole village. It signifies social acclaim, charity and dedication towards one’s fellow villagers.

Thus, the life of the traditional Naga, be it the organization of agriculture, be it village government, be it the organizations of the young and the old etc., were linked directly to the land. The democracy, equality, the love of freedom and respect for others freedom, hard work etc, were all rooted to the land and in its inheritance.

1.9.3 Value systems

Values are those standards or a code for moral behaviour conditioned by ones cultural tenets and guarded by conscience, according to which human being is supposed to conduct himself and shape his life patterns by integrating his feelings, beliefs, ideals and attitudes to realize cherished ideals and goals of life. Everything one does, every decision one takes, comes from within, conscious or unconscious system of values. Values are the guiding principles in day to day human behaviour as also in critical life situations. It is a yardstick we use, to guide the actions, attitudes, comparisons, evaluations and justifications of others and ourselves. It helps us in distinguishing the personality desired from universally undesired and vice-versa. Thus, human values are virtually determinants of all kinds of behaviour. They govern, guide and determine the social attitudes and ideologies on the one hand and social behaviour on the other.

The present society is a fast changing one with scientific inventions and discoveries, mass media and global influences. The era is going through a transition of values. Some values seem to parish, some submerge into others, some new values have emerged. This is due to the changes in our social set-up. The lives and problems are new and different. The changes have brought transformation of customs, different outlook on life and work, religion and conduct. It has also brought about differences in ideas, ideologies and values in the present social
system. But there appears to be a value crisis in the society. Every generation always feel that the values have declined in their time as compared to what were in the past. But due to the rapid changes in this generation and the degeneration of socially desirable values in every field- social, moral, political, economical, educational etc., has made it imperative for us to take stock of the values to be imbibed by the growing generation of young men and women.

In the Angami Naga tribal society the main interest in every individual was his family, his clan and his village. He regarded this as his culture. He was closely attached to his land, to the system of land-tenure, to the arrangement for the government of his village, the organization of cultivation, the administration of justice through the village court or council, and had strong religious beliefs. The Angami society was once characterized by its community, sense of justice, equality, integrity, hard work, honesty and religiosity. In such a society one finds a sense of belongingness because all the important activities affecting individuals and the community are done together, keeping in mind the welfare of the village community. Every individual felt responsible towards the welfare of the village. It is not untrue to say that majority of the Angamis still feel the attachment to ones village. Unfortunately, the rich old customs and traditions are slowly disappearing or are been modified beyond recognition and many good old beliefs, which for ages had been held closed, are being forsaken. There are a number of values within the village life of the traditional Angami that needs recognition which can find inspiration for social service and faith in the future. Re-interpretation and re-evaluation of the past that are most needed. It is, however, especially important in the world of today that this effort should not be restricted to one single source or culture only but necessary to draw upon varies forces and cultures which have emphasized among other things, the dignity of the individual, equality and social justice.

1.9.4 Conclusion

What is required is that our traditions should be properly rediscovered, analyzed, assessed and reinterpreted with a view to selecting those that can be blended with the modern concepts and values. The things, principles, values, etc., can be valuable irrespective of their being traditional or modern. Values are and will always be in the process of evolution. New trends will emerge every day. Therefore, we need to adopt the new trends, but not at the expense of the good age-old ideals and values. In this regard we can quote our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, “can we combine the progress of science and technology with the progress of mind and spirit also? We cannot be untrue to science because that represents the basis of life today. Still less can we be untrue to those essential principles for which India has stood in the pass throughout the ages. Let us then pursue our path to industrial progress with our strength and vigour and at the same time remember that material riches without toleration and compassion and wisdom may well turn to dust and ashes.”