CHAPTER - VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Ever since India attained independence, education has been given great emphasis in most of the developmental programmes for the Scheduled Tribes. This is because the Indian policy makers have accepted education as one of the key factors for the development, not only of the tribals, but that of the nation as a whole. It is hoped that through education, the tribals would be able to improve their socio-economic condition and be at par with the national mainstream.

In such a situation, the most pertinent question that arises is: has education really been able to improve the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Tribes? Or rather, has there been upward mobility among the tribals who have availed educational opportunities? This question is particularly relevant in the case of the Scheduled Tribes in the north-eastern region where, in many cases, the literacy rate is higher than that of the national average.

Although there has been numerous studies on the education of the Scheduled Tribes, and also on their occupational structure, there has been no indepth study that linked these two variables. The present study is an
attempt to examine the educational situation of the Hmar tribe of Manipur, and try to establish linkages between education and occupational mobility among them. Keeping in mind the criterion of equality, it also seeks to explore the nature of educational inequality among the different sections of the Hmar society.

The study is based on field work conducted in three Hmar villages in the south district of Manipur: Sielmat, Saidan and Pherzawl. These villages differ from one another in their geographical location (or proximity to the nearest town), type of economic activities, and type of educational facilities. Data were obtained through an interview of the heads of households from the three villages. The total sample includes 320 households which accounted for 75.6 per cent of the total Hmar households in the three villages.

An overview of the Scheduled Tribes in Manipur

Altogether there are twenty nine different recognized Scheduled Tribes in Manipur; constituting a little over one-fourth (27.30 per cent) of the state's total population. These tribes are broadly divided into two major groups: the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin groups. A majority of the tribals concentrate in the hilly areas of the state, while only a small proportion of them are settled in the central plain area.
Traditionally, all the tribes of Manipur could be classified as agriculturists of the 'Hill Cultivation Type'. There are no separate artisan tribe. Hunting, rearing of animal, basket making, weaving, etc., are being practised as secondary occupations. Two types of cultivation are generally being practised by the tribals - namely, shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation. Of the two, shifting cultivation is more popular and is found in all the hilly areas occupied by the tribals. Whereas, terrace cultivation is practised by a relatively smaller section of the tribal population.

The techniques employed in shifting cultivation are primitive and the products from it are barely enough for sustenance. As a result, the tribals are living in a poor economic development level. Economic improvement in such a case will involve either improvement in the existing system or a shift from this traditional occupation to other sectors of the economy. Either way, education becomes one of the most relevant means through which structural changes could be brought about.

A brief review of the historical development of education among the tribals in Manipur brings to light the important role of the Christian Missionaries in this field. It was through their activities that the tribes of Manipur first came in contact with formal education in the late
nineteenth century. Two Missions - the American Baptist Mission, and the North East India General Mission - played a prominent role in the propagation of education among the tribals. These two missions remained the sole agency for spreading education among the tribals prior to India's independence.

However, the educational policy of the Missions was unfortunately handicapped by vested interests. It was essentially framed in the light of their evangelical activities. Schools were primarily aimed at religious instruction or intensification of the propagation of Christian teachings. Education mainly revolves round the three 'Rs' in preparation for Bible reading and understanding of writing for daily religious exercise. As long as basic education was attained, the missionaries did not see any need for introducing higher education. As a result, tribal education in the pre-independence period was mostly limited to the primary level.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the missionaries laid the foundation of education among the tribals. The tempo of educational progress during the post independence period would have never been the same but not for the ground work prepared by the missionaries.
After independence, the progress of education among the tribals, particularly that of higher education, began to gain momentum. According to 1981 census, the literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes in Manipur (39.7 per cent) was higher than that of the Scheduled Tribes, as well as the general population, at the national level (16.4 and 36.2 per cent respectively). In terms of enrolment too, the position of Scheduled Tribes in Manipur is comparatively better than that of the Scheduled Tribes at the national level. But within the state, the tribals of Manipur are still behind the non-Scheduled Castes/Tribes communities in terms of literacy as well as enrolment in higher education.

The Hmars had a literacy rate of 52.2 per cent in 1981. This is significantly high when compared to the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes at the state, as well as at the national level. In fact, it is also higher than that of the non-Scheduled Castes/Tribes at the state level (42.1 per cent). However, a closer examination of the educational attainment of the Hmars revealed that more than half of the literate population does not have any educational qualification. Further, only a small percentage of the Hmar population had attained matric or higher qualification. This indicates that despite their high crude literacy rate, only a small section of the Hmars are able to obtain formal school education, and higher education is yet to be developed among them.
Inequality of Educational Opportunity Among the Hmars

An attempt has been made to examine inequality of educational access among the different sections of the Hmar society. First, educational inequality is examined among the three sample villages, and secondly, among households having different socio-economic status. The indicators used to study educational development are: the highest educational attainment level of the respondents, the enrolment of respondents' eldest children in the age group of 6 to 21 years, and the highest educational attainment level of respondents' eldest children who are above the age of 21 years.

There is a high literacy rate of more than ninety five per cent in all the three villages. However, the level of educational attainment differs significantly among the sample villages. For instance, Sielmat is found to be outstandingly prominent. A majority of respondents from this village have attained higher education (matric and above), and a significant proportion of them have obtained professional degree.

But in Saidan and Pherzawl, only a small proportion of respondents have completed high school level, and the number of persons with professional education is significantly low. Between the two villages, the proportion
of respondents attaining higher education is higher in Pherzawl.

Regarding the enrolment of respondent’s children, it is found to be highest in Pherzawl (89.5 per cent), and lowest in Saidan (57.1 per cent). The agewise data shows a high enrolment of more than ninety four per cent among the younger children (6-11 years) in all the villages. However, the enrolment of older children (17-21 years) has drastically declined in both Saidan and Pherzawl. While Sielmat has a consistently high enrolment for all the given age groups.

So far as the educational attainment of respondents’ children is concerned, it is found that a majority of them have not completed high school. Moreover, only a small number have obtained professional diplomas, and none has attained professional degree. Village-wise, Sielmat takes the lead, while Pherzawl is at the bottom.

Lastly, sex-wise data reveal that enrolment is significantly lower among the respondents’ daughters than the sons. Moreover, the educational attainment level of the daughters is found to be lower than that of the sons.

Thus, the various indicators of educational development have pointed out the advantageous situation of the inhabitants of Sielmat. This is not surprising
considering the relatively better facilities that they have availed, because, among the three villages, Sielmat has the best educational facilities within the village. Besides, as it is located in the suburb of Churachandpur town, the inhabitants of Sielmat can easily make use of the educational facilities provided in the town. On the other hand, Saidan though located only 2 kms. away from Churachandpur town, does not have much advantage over Pherzawl, which is located in a remote hilly area. This is probably due to the poor educational facilities in Saidan. There is only one middle school and two primary schools in the village. The inhabitants have to go to the town or other village for high school education. Whereas, Pherzawl has a government high school and a number of middle and primary schools. Hence, it may be that the type of educational facilities available within the villages play an important role in the educational development of its inhabitants.

Besides inter-village disparity, educational inequality has also been detected among households having different socio-economic status. The socio-economic status of the respondents is found to be directly related to the educational development of their children - in terms of enrolment as well as educational attainment.
The enrolment of respondents' children is found to be directly and positively related to the socio economic status of respondents. Thus, enrolment is highest among the high status category and lowest among the low status category. Age-wise data shows that the relationship between enrolment and socioeconomic status is more prominent among the older children, while it is insignificant among the younger children. Village-wise, it is felt more significantly in Sielmat than in the other two villages.

Similarly, in terms of educational attainment too, the children of respondents with high socio economic status have advantages over children from lower socio economic background. In this case too, the relationship between socio economic status and educational attainment is found to be most prominent in Sielmat than the other villages. Further, among the various strata, the high status category in Sielmat is found to be in the most advantageous situation while the low status category in Saidan is the most deprived group.

Hence, while socioeconomic status is positively related to education, its impact is felt more in the enrolment of older children and in the village having higher exposure to urban facilities, than in the enrolment of younger children and in the relatively remote villages respectively. This may be because educational expenses are
lower for younger children than for the older ones. It may also mean that the older children from poor families have to participate in the economic activities.

Further, all the educational institutions in Sielmat, and most of those in the town area are managed by private bodies and demand a fairly high tuition fee. Therefore economic background is a crucial determining factor for enrolment in these institutions. On the other hand, most of the schools in Saidan and Pherzawl are managed by the government or Christian missions and tuition is free in most cases. Moreover, rules and regulations are relatively relaxed, and attendance is not as regular as in the private schools. Enrolment in such schools, therefore, may not cause much hardships even to a poor family. Probably because of these reasons that educational disparity among the various socio-economic strata is more prominent in Sielmat than in the other two villages. At the same time, due to the locational advantage of Sielmat, respondents from this village may also enjoy certain benefits which respondents having the same background in the other villages may not be able to enjoy.

Finally, sex-wise data shows that the percentage of enrolment is significantly lower among the respondents' daughters than among the sons. Moreover, the educational attainments of the daughters is also found to be lower than
that of the sons'. Even when socio-economic variable is controlled, the women of all strata have educationally lagged behind their men counterparts.

Overall then, our study indicates the presence of educational inequality among the different sections of the Hmar society. In the first instance, those living in a village having better exposure to urban facilities are in a better position than those living in relatively remote areas. At the same time, enrolment of children tends to be higher in a village with good educational facilities than those without, even if the former is located in a relatively remote geographical area. Secondly, respondents with high socio-economic status have relative advantages over those with lower socio-economic status. Lastly, the respondents' sons' enjoy certain advantages over the respondents' daughters.

**Education and Occupational Mobility**

As education is considered to be one of the most important factors for socio-economic development, this study makes an attempt to examine the linkages between education and occupational mobility among the Hmar tribe. First, inter-generational occupational mobility during the respondents’ and their fathers' generation is examined. Then an attempt is made to examine the linkages between education and the occupational status of the respondents.
There has been considerable change in the occupations of the respondents and that of their fathers'. The direction of movement is mainly towards the service sector, particularly in occupations that come under category II—such as clerical jobs, junior liberal professions and other allied services. At the same time, it is also found that quite a large proportion of respondents are still engaged in their traditional agricultural occupations. Analysis by using the index of Association shows that the overall association between the respondents and their fathers is highest for respondents in the higher categories, and low in the lower categories. This implies that occupational mobility is more prevalent among respondents whose fathers were in the lower categories of occupations.

A direct and positive relation between education and occupational status has been noticed among the respondents. Those having higher educational qualifications are able to achieve high status occupations. While respondents having low educational attainments tend to continue their traditional agricultural occupations. Moreover, education also influences the relation between the respondents and their fathers' occupational status. For respondents who have completed matriculation, occupational inheritance is high if fathers are in higher categories and low if they are in lower categories.
Further, upward mobility is found to be highest among respondents having higher educational qualification. While only few of the respondents who have no formal education are able to move higher than their fathers.

Village-wise comparison of occupational mobility indicates that upward mobility is highest among respondents in Sielmat and lowest in Pherzawl. Even when education is controlled, respondents in Sielmat tend to have higher upward mobility rate than the other villages. This could be probably due to the availability of more employment opportunities in Sielmat than in the others two villages. Thus, within a given educational background, respondents in Sielmat have a greater chance for upward mobility than those in the other villages.

Overall then, our study highlights the importance of education for the occupational mobility of the respondents. Because in the Hmar society where the general tendency of manpower shift has been mainly towards the service sector, education seems to have become a precondition for occupational mobility. Therefore, only those persons having a certain level of educational qualification are able to take up occupation other than their traditional agricultural occupations. The mobility of persons with no formal education is negligible.
Lastly, a majority of the respondents who have moved from their traditional occupation are found to be concentrating in clerical jobs and other allied services. While only a small number of them have managed to reach high administrative and managerial positions.

Inequality Between Men and Women

This study has also examined the extent of gender inequality among the Hmars. It also examined the attitudes and aspirations of the respondents towards women’s education and occupation. The analysis is based on a sample of three generations namely, the respondents’ parents, the respondents and their spouses, and the respondents’ children who are above the age of sixteen years.

The findings indicate that women of all generations have lagged behind their men counterparts in terms of education as well as occupation. However, the gap between men and women is gradually declining in the younger generation and is significantly low among the respondents’ children.

A majority of the respondents have positive attitudes towards women’s education. Moreover, they have high aspirations for their daughters’ education and future
occupational career. Many wanted their daughters to go for higher studies and take up high prestige jobs such as I.A.S., lecturers, doctor, etc.

Nevertheless, it is found that a majority of the respondents wanted to educate their daughters only up to matric level and take up clerical and other lower cadre services. It is also found that the aspirations of the respondents for their daughters are not as high as that for the sons. The main reason for gender inequality lies in the social tradition, because the Hmars follow the patrilineal system where men take the headship of the family. Therefore, the future status of the family is seen as dependent on the educational and occupational achievements of the sons. Whereas, the daughter’s contribution is in another family, i.e. her husband’s family. Hence, while the importance of women’s education is being acknowledged by most of the respondents, a majority of them still give priority towards men’s education. Moreover, women’s domestic role is given topmost importance and their occupational career is seen only as secondary to it.

Thus, it may be concluded that despite the diminishing trend in gender disparity, the Hmar women still suffer from certain social constraints that prevent them from being on an equal footing to that of Hmar men.
Implications of the Study

This study emphasizes that despite high literacy rate, the overall educational attainment level of the Hmar people is considerably low. Therefore, there is a need to stress on higher education. This is particularly essential if education is expected to play its ameliorative role in the development of the tribal communities. Due to the industrial backwardness of the region, occupations in the organized sector are the only source of mobility among the Hmars. Therefore, education becomes a crucial factor for occupational upliftment. As has been indicated in the present study, mere ability to read and write is not going to do much for the socio-economic development of the tribals. In these days of high job competition, at least matriculation has become an essential requirement for obtaining employment.

This study also shows that though education has widely spread among the Hmars, a large majority of them are still engaged in their age-old traditional occupation (i.e. shifting cultivation) without much change. Education does not lead to the improvement in their method of cultivation. As is well-known, shifting cultivation is unscientific and destructive in nature. But due to the non-availability of other occupations (particularly in the hilly areas), even a highly educated person often resort to this activity if
unable to secure a job in the organized sector. Since unemployment has become a national problem, the progress of education among the tribals is also bound to increase the number of educated unemployed tribals. Therefore, it may be suggested that more stress should be given on vocational education. So that a tribal youth, after spending a number of years in the educational institution, may make use of his/her education even if he/she is unable to secure a job in the organized sector. Vocationalization of education might not be a new issue at the national level, so even at the state level. But till today, there is not a single vocational institution in the whole of Tipaimukh subdivision where the Hmar tribe constitute a majority of the population.

Again, this study highlights the presence of a certain level of educational inequality within the Hmar society. Formal education is not new among the Hmars, and enrolment at the primary stage is significantly high for all sections of the society. But certain structural constraints, such as poor economic condition of the family and non-availability of good educational institutions, have affected the enrolment of older children among the more deprived section of the society (i.e. the low status category and those living in a village without good educational facilities). This has an important significance
as higher education is the one that ultimately matters when it comes to employment opportunity. Therefore, there is need to take special care of the deprived sections within the tribal society.

Finally, this study indicates that the Hmars are neither apathetic nor have negative attitude towards women's education. Nevertheless, women are still not given equal opportunity because of social traditions.