Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives-
Native American Proverbs.

The colonial rule significantly modified the politics and geography of the Naga hills. The expansion of India-British administration processes categorically dissected the contiguous Naga hills and arranged them into different political administrative units. The colonial rule brought the region within the political framework of colonialism and sealed the various Naga communities with the rigid administrative territorial boundaries hitherto unknown in the history of the Nagas. Today, the Naga hills fall into four administrative units in India viz., Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and also in northern Myanmar (Burma).

Tangkhul Naga is one of the largest Naga ethnic groups that traditionally inhabits Ukhrul district of Manipur. A majority of the Tangkhul Nagas live in villages having well demarcated territories. According to 1991 population census, the proportion of Tangkhul Nagas living in rural areas is 97.3 per cent. The main economic activity is agriculture that is, shifting cultivation and sedentary terraced cultivation and also forestry. In 1991 population census, the total Tangkhul Naga workers engaged in cultivation activity is 80.3 per cent. However, the proportion engaged in service sector is only 13.4 per cent.

For the Tangkhul Nagas as well as other Naga groups, village system is the main backbone of their livelihood and social system. The village consists of population of various clans, village territory, land and forest. The village itself is the identity in terms of society, culture, tradition and economy. The village is a compact and well-knit society
where the traditional institutions regulate the customary laws. The surrounding natural resources are the main economic asset and life support system. The village community organises the village land and forest resources based on the ethics of common property.

The Naga do not have a scientific definition of ecology. The Naga village is defined by their territory, land and forest and its main ecological settings. In other words, the Naga ecological setting is land and forest in the given village territory. The village land and territories are demarcated either by rivers, streams, rivulet, ridges or stones. Based on this context, we define the village territory, land and forest as the ecological structural parameters. The structural parameters are static and unchanged. The ecological functional parameters include land use system and ownership of land. The functional parameters are dynamic and change with time and space. The various land use systems and ownership of land and forest revolve within the given village territory and land.

The Naga socio-economic systems are intrinsically linked with local knowledge system and ecology. In the Naga traditions, there are different cultural practices and an effective system of traditional self-government institution and laws. These systems have been developed with their practical experience and traditional wisdom. Such traditional culture and wisdom maintain the balance of structural and functional ecological parameters. The traditional knowledge system is based on experience which is tested for centuries and adapted in their cultural practices and economic systems. Over centuries, Nagas have learned how to grow food and to survive. They possess knowledge on what varieties of crops to plant, when to sow and weed and harvest. They identified poisonous plants and fruits and medicinal herbs. In fact, such wisdom covers a wide range of subjects such as agriculture, food preparation, traditional institutional management, natural resource management and others. The treasure of wisdom is stored in memories,
daily activities and is expressed in the form of stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, mythes, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, agricultural practices, traditional laws, equipments, plant species and animal breeds.

For instance, in selection of new site for shifting cultivation Nagas observe the earth of that particular area and if there are lots of earthworms casting (mud dung), the site is approved to be mature and fertile. The trees growing in the selected sites are not randomly cut, but the height at which stump should be left is discriminatively decided by the variety of the trees. Whereas some trees would require a height of about one metre others would require one and half or two metres for the proper sprouting of new coppices as per the species and variety. Burning the slashed trees is regulated properly so that the fire may not spread to the adjoining forests. The traditional practice of Alder tree (*Alnus nepalensis*) based shifting cultivation has immense ecological significance.

Indeed, the Nagas may not have scientific and quantitative evidence to prove the worth of their wisdom in maintaining the ecological system. But the important aspect to be considered is their traditional economic systems that have been sustaining for so many years without affecting the ecological parameters. The sustainability was possible due to their in-depth ecological knowledge and innovative local knowledge system. This indigenous knowledge system strengthens in conservational measures. Gadgil and Guha (1995:142) point out, “(t)he practical knowledge and wisdom of India’s ecosystem people must therefore once again come to assume an important role in enhancing the services being provided by natural systems, a role that is today being completely denied.”

7.1 Recent Developments

The two major recent developments in the Tangkhul Naga society are follows. Introduction of western education and Christian doctrine by the colonist and the World
War-II that followed by the appearance of Japanese and British troops in the Naga hills. These two factors, in general brought many new things like education, new religion, attire, food, weapons and money economy. No doubt, the new religion and education system proved beneficial in innumerable ways such as removal of superstitions, diversification of economic activities and improved living condition. Eventually, adoption of such new concept and culture encourage and promote to abandon the old tradition of animism and Morung culture. According to Horam (1977:99), "(t)he very first changes in material equipments are such as lamps, lanterns, gun, matches, battery torches, boots, shoes, umbrellas, aluminum utensils (replacing the earthen-ware and wooden ones)." Today, many Tangkhul Naga households have modern furniture, electronic gadgets including clock, wrist watch, transistor/radio and vehicles.

The villages are no longer isolated from the outside influences. The influences have brought changes in both village morphological structure and social system. The morphological changes occurred due to the developmental schemes like construction of village approach road, electrification and water supply in the village. The transition of village is also conspicuous on social aspects like economy and education. The systematic improvement of communication, urbanization and market forces are considerably changing village ecological setting and economic system. The market forces encourage in utilizing more forest land use for commercial purposes like growing commercial crops, logging and firewood. Uncontrolled and sporadic commercial shifting cultivation in community land has started in many villages.

The recent changing pattern of social system and economic activities threatens the ecological structural parameters. The changes are both contributed by the internal changes and exogenous forces. The internal dynamism includes the socio-economic factors like increase of household number, large family size and expansion of economic activities. The increase number of household in the village is due to the factors of decline age of marriage and early school drop outs. This factor notably increases
household number and population in the Naga village. Moreover, the number of deaths especially of children is low. This internal dynamism in due course of time changes the land use system and ownership pattern. The steady exertion of population and economic activities in the village land threatens the village community resources.

In sedentary terraced cultivation, topographic features of the given village land determine the availability of arable land. In other words, expansion or construction of new terrace fields is limited because the terracing depends on the village topography and source of water. In many cases, arable or terraceable land in the village land is exhausting. In other words, this cultivation system requires good sources of water to channel to the fields. The non-expansion of terraced fields or construction of new fields in the village is because of two factors; (a) exhausting terraceable areas village land, (b) construction of new fields requires enormous human labour and monetary cost. The labour shortage in the village is a recent phenomenon. Today, in the villages children are sent to local school and the economically productive age groups either go to school or to work in nearby towns. The non-availability of this age cohort in fact increases the parents’ labour in agricultural works and household activities.

At the same time, the household’s landed properties are fragmented due to the division of properties among the married sons. In this process both the ancestral properties and acquired properties are divided among the male siblings. This is a continuous process from generation to generation. The shortage of sedentary terraced fields eventually leads to increase in shifting cultivation. The increase of household number and population in the village eventually expand the village settlement areas pushing towards the periphery of forest.

Many Tangkhul Nagas are also absorbed in governmental jobs, private firms and institutions and non-governmental organisations. The penetration of urban-based
economy has started changing the overall economic system and participation. Many people are in trade and commerce, transport and communication activities. Singh (1994) notes that the growing urbanisation and limited industrialization, particularly at foothill/plain areas has provided an opportunity for number of Naga communities to go for jobs outside the village and for wage labour. There is evidence of extending market links in the village system, that is, introduction of money and cash crops, entry of government officials, traders, money-lenders and shopkeepers.

Indeed, the Tangkhul Naga economy is being progressively linked with the urban areas. With the change of economic system a new structure of society is emerging, based on the economic stratification in the society. And, gradually, the egalitarian social bases are giving way to a stratified system, where land has emerged as the most precious possession. Another issue is emergence of private ownership of property in the community land. The changes that have undergone vary depending upon several factors that includes internal dynamism and contacts with other tribal or non-tribal groups. It is worth mentioning that values of modern consumerism have started penetrating into the village and their social system. As Chaudhury (1998:443) states, "(e)ven the traditional societies have started experiencing the effect of market forces and it is not surprising therefore, the rural communities have vigorously started looking for opportunities to enhance their cash flow." Due to the poor internal economic arrangement, the villages readily surrender to the alien economic patterns.

From the study, we conclude that the internal dynamic of population and economic activities is affecting the village ecological parameters. Indeed, village territory and land is an important ecological structural parameter which determines the economic pursuits. The dynamism of functional structure eventually changes the land use system. Moreover, the transition of socio-economic system results in the unequal
distribution of land ownership and forest land. The system of selling and mortgage of household landed properties begins with the appearance of money economy and market forces. In fact, this process, as shown in given figure below encourages the concept of “rich and poor” households in the community.

We also identified six other activities that are operating in the region which are ecologically sensitive. The activities are as follows:

(i) Commercial Logging and cropping: Logging and commercial plantation in Tangkhul Region is a recent introduction. This is encouraged by the availability of transportation
facilities. Commercial logging is one activity leading to over extraction of forest resources. The rampant commercial cropping in the community land.

(ii) *Unregulated Forest Burning*: Unregulated forest burning is a common feature in the Naga Hills especially in dry season. In this case, the hunters often burn the forest to chase the wild animals for game.

(iii) *Intense Grazing*: Introduction of a large number of cows and goats in the Naga region poses a threat to the local environment. Traditionally, Nagas do not domesticate cows and goat. Such introduction, if done on a large scale, could have adverse impact on forest resources due to grazing and browsing effects.

(iv) *Extensive Hunting and Fishing*: Traditionally, hunting and fishing is one socially important activity of the Nagas. These activities are incorporated within their social systems. Recently, the region experienced aggressive hunting and fishing activities. With the introduction of modern shotgun indiscriminate hunting activity is being performed. Extensive hunting reduces wildlife population. The community hunting system slowly becomes non-active in the village and instead individual hunting becomes more prominent. In fact, the individual hunting is not based on season but anytime the hunter wishes to hunt. The seasonal hunting protects and ensures that the animals are not hunt during their mating season.

(v) *Insect Hunting*: Hunting of edible insects and larvae of that live inside the trunk of trees. Today, larvae and insect hunting is done for commercial purposes. In hunting, it leads to cutting down considerable amount of tree in a single day by one person alone. The average cutting down the tree is about 20 to 30 trees per person in a day.

(vi) *Militarisation*: In many Tangkhul Naga villages, there are army out-posts. The army occupies the hill tops. In the process of setting up the army camp the entire trees of the
hill are cut down. Also the trees near the road are cut down in military operation areas for security reasons. Such military activities affect the economy of the Nagas to a considerable degree.

7.2 Community-Based Conservation

The Naga traditional customary laws governing the society ensure resource management. This also enhances in building social security and control mechanisms which address the needs and requirements of each household of the village. Such social mechanisms have helped in nurturing the community feeling and solidarity. Also it helps in retaining community responsibility to natural resources. Ramakrishnan (1992) points out that resource management practices among the tribal of the North East India are deeply interwoven in their day-to-day lifestyle and forest-related livelihood pursuits. We have observed certain examples of environmental conservation through traditional ecological knowledge systems and practices of the Nagas. Such understanding of the environment is also reflected in the traditional philosophy which embodies a host of their beliefs and acts as a cultural means of conservation.

Chaudhury (1998:440) studied on how the Naga Village Council (Changki Village) has taken certain conservation-orientation measures to be followed by the community. Some of the measures include:

1. Conservation of about 24 square kilometers of land surrounding the village as village reserved forest.
2. A ban on fish poison (both chemical and indigenous herbal)
3. Not allowing the trapping of nesting birds.
4. Strictly prohibiting the cutting of edible wild fruit trees.
5. Prohibiting hunting during the breeding seasons of animals or of female animals.
The same method of community based conservation of forest and resources is observed in one of the sample villages, that is, Chingjaroi village. This village is situated just below the lofty mountain called Mountain *Matha* (or *Chingjui Matha*) and it is one of the highest peaks in Ukhrul District. Like the above measures, the village had a very firm Village Authority's Resolution that no one can use *Matha* for any farming purposes. Also, nobody is allowed to fell any trees for firewood except for the collection of agricultural implements. The only human activity that allowed is hunting and trapping.

The Nagas have a strong dependence on the landscape and natural environment in which they live. To this dependence, they learned to interpret the signs of nature evolving their social and cultural practices. No doubt, the erosion of local knowledge systems directly leads to negative consequences on ecological settings, as the basis for well-tried systems of management, use and conservative break down. A change in one part can have a chain effect on others. Moreover, the erosion of local knowledge systems significantly disturbs the web of village ecosystem. Kothari, Anuradha and Pathak (1998:30) warned that, “(t)he introduction of market mechanisms, or government controlled institution, will affect local traditional knowledge which in turn will affect the way resources are managed.” They further argue that, “(l)ocal community knowledge systems have been severely eroded by a variety of factors including the devaluation of traditional knowledge and practice by the modern ‘scientific’ knowledge system. The institutional takeover of resources by the private sector including the infiltration of local village institutions by vested interests and market forces further erodes local community knowledge systems.” Indeed, the changes in ecology and its knowledge system are brought about arbitrarily by the community itself as well as by the various “development” measures. These changing phases in social and economic activities in fact impose a serious threat to the ecological relationships.
7.3 Forest Management

In independent India, the North eastern region of India was segmented into many smaller states. The seven states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) constitute the whole region sharing larger frontier with Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. The constitutional administrative system in the region differs from the rest of the country. Even within the region, the administration varies from state to state. For instance, the tribal states like Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya and tribal areas of Tripura and Assam are placed under the Constitutional provision of Sixth Schedule. The Nagaland state is governed by Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution. The article provides that, "(n)otwithstanding anything in this Constitution-no Act of Parliament in respect of (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Nagas customary law procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice...and (iv) ownership of land and its resources shall apply to the state of the Nagaland." Article 371(G) provides similar safeguards for Mizoram. To protect the interests of the tribal population of Manipur Article 371(C) provides for the constitution of "Sixth Schedule-type" in the hill areas of the state.

As said, in Manipur state there is no full fledged Sixth Scheduled Areas in the five hill districts. The present District Autonomous Council is not functioning. The District Council Members election was not held for past 15 years (The DAC in Ukhrul district is look after by the Chief Executive Officer a bureaucrat equivalent to Sub-Divisional Collector). Such defunct system in fact, is a major reason for the slow developmental process in the hill districts/tribal belts of Manipur.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, in Naga villages, the village territory, land and forest are under the nominal ownership of the village headman and it is regulated by traditional laws and customs. In Manipur major forest areas are found in the hills and are not
controlled by the state government. Even now there is no legislative law to claim any land or forest in the hill districts. The present Manipur State’s statutory status on land and forest such as Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act (MLR & LR), 1960 (see Appendix…) is not extended to the Hill areas, that is, all the hill districts-Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel and Churachandpur. Rather curiously the sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Act, 1960, the words “except the Hill Areas” and the provision there were omitted but the MLR & LR (Sixth Amendment) Bill 1989 there is a provision of extending to any part of the hill areas if deemed proper. Hence the Sixth Amendment Bill intends to extend the Act to the tribal areas. This Bill is indeed controversial in nature because it encroaches upon the tribal traditional customary rights. The extension of MLR&LR Act would inevitably annihilate the traditional land holding system and livelihood of the tribals. In fact, such system impinges upon the right and deprives villages of not only their traditional source of livelihood but also place them under a new system of domination. Due to strong resistance from the tribal community the bill not been pass in the legislative house. The threat of this Act is not only to the tribal social, culture or economic but to the ethnicity. This Act opens a corridor to any non-tribal to purchase land and forest in hill areas. In fact, such approach could lead to further ethnic clashes in the state.

Joint Forest Management: Manipur state is in the process of implementing Social Forestry and Joint Forest Management. The concept of JFM is a radical shift away from the centralised policies. The statutory condition is sharing of decision making power between forest official and the local community. However, the region is reluctant to adopt JFM. It is noted that JFM basically operates in government owned forests (reserved forest), to plant forests and to revive degraded forest land. Through the principle of sharing and exchange in the village contributes the labour power for
protection and regeneration of forest and in return they are promised a share in the revenue generated from the forest timber resources. But in Manipur most of the forests in the tribal areas are outside the reserved forests.

Instead of operating JFM in government reserved forest, the government should empower the local community to protect their community forest and encourage afforestation in community land. The government should recognise the traditional community management of land and forest. Any afforestation programme or forest related policies should work with cooperation among the social organisations. At the same time, the JFM can be regulated with the traditional institution of the village. No legislation or controlling machinery should be imposed on the resources right and traditional ownership of the Naga community. Instead it is necessary to uphold the customary knowledge system, technologies and innovation related to agricultural system and forestry. Also it is important to encourage traditional manure and weeding system in the agricultural system and not to use artificial fertilizers which could harm the village ecosystem. Recognition of customary practices would sustain the tribal economy in the long run.