CHAPTER VII

Views of Select Respondents

Introduction
To bring the problem faced by the Shiplomaramth youth into clearer focus I present below the views expressed by some of the respondents interviewed. The views of four respondents have been selected two males and two females. Although, the respondents are from diverse family background belonging to families of cultivator, government employed and Christian mission worker, cutting across the differences, their view coalesce when it comes to issues confronting them. It may not represent the opinion of all the respondents interrogated, this sample reflects a broad feature of the response collected on various problems confronting the Shiplomaramth community.

Respondent I
Mr. O is the youngest in a family of five whose case study I recorded. He has a brother and a sister both of who are married. He is one among few respondents who have crossed the age of thirty. He is from a relatively stable economic background since his father was an employee in a government primary school who retired just a few years back. His mother engages in cultivation and does not have any formal education. By virtue of being from a relatively stable economic position he got the opportunity to finish high school from a private school. He completed his pre-university and graduation from institutions with better environment and facilities, as his parents were able to send him to study outside the state. He was an active student activist and held an executive post in the student’s union a couple of terms. Extra-curricular activities and sports are very much a part of his life.

Mr O sees the problems of youth in the Shiplomaramth society as closely related to the political instability in the state and the fragmentation of the Naga society and territory under the present political regime. He asserted that territorial reorganisation is a must because solution is impossible without integration. He is conscious that staying together with the Meiteis has no future for the Shiplomaramth Nagas. In fact, he was unhappy because, according to him, the Meiteis have cornered the states’ entire share for
developmental work and job opportunities for themselves to the disadvantage of the other ethnic groups including the Shiipfomaramth. According to him, the unemployment problem has led many youth to indulge in unproductive and destructive activities, which is harmful to both society and the individual. Even after completing their studies, many youth failed to find themselves a suitable job. Lack of a promising and a secure future is, he claims, responsible for the present youth like him to despair and feel frustrated. He feels that unemployment problem is partly the outcome of their share of work force being deprived by the state.

According to Mr. O, general backwardness, unhealthy socio-political environment, poor quality of education, lack of proper facilities and determination are together responsible for many youth's low academic achievement. Specifically and categorically he notes that achieving proper education takes many years and hence requires lots of moral support and strong financial stability. In his own case, inadequate career guidance was a serious problem since it prevented him form choosing the right subject and right career choice. This failure has made his studies less interesting and less fulfilled. Similarly, he feels that many teachers were not trained and efficient enough to provide quality education. According to Mr. O, no good and qualified teachers will come because the remuneration is very low. In his view, there is an urgent need to improve school/college buildings, libraries and recreational facilities. He also feels that there is a great need to change the syllabus in order to update with the new frontiers of knowledge. Likewise, the syllabus is non-holistic and does not augur well with the present social need. Further, basic technical education should be made part of educational system at all level. He personally feels that the present political instability and ethnic tensions do not help to generate the right environment for promotion of sound education.

Socio-religious change and the influence of westernisation has affected the whole life of the Shiipfomaramth community but, according to him, far from bringing satisfaction it has resulted in cultural confusion and increased individuation. He claimed that the church on its own part has also failed to control the growing increase of self-centredness. Instead, he maintains that many church leaders and mission workers are not committed, but are infested with selfish-interest and materialistic greed. At the same time, he commented that many youth simply neglect the social values and do not bother
to learn the ethos that concerns either their tradition or Christianity. However, he feels that westernisation cannot provide a secure future for their society, unless there is a blending of relevant values from both traditions – the synthesis of both indigenous and the emerging value system.

He strongly feels that many youth are led astray by various menacing activities of the society in which problem of drinking is one of them. He admits that he used to drink alcohol but not as a regular drinker. The factors that led him to indulge in alcohol include easy availability, peer pressures, fun and lack of proper guidance. However, he remarked that the frustration and failure do not necessarily lead to indulge in drinking because, according to him, even celebration goes along with drinks. Likewise, he maintains that trend of emulating advanced society’s culture, immature mind and inadequate knowledge of the real consequences of alcohol consumption trap many young people to drink. He also feels that destructive opinion and conflicting versions on the model of drinking was unhelpful for the youth to abstain from alcohol. Even though, alcohol was part of their culture, according to him, it has become a problem because people misuse it. At the same time, friends’ influence and peers pressure, he maintains, lead many youth to drinking. Proper guidance and education on the consequences of alcohol, setting up of counseling centres for alcoholics, opening job-oriented courses, according to him, can keep away the youth from unnecessary and excess drinking.

**Respondent 2**

Miss P is eighteen years old, is the eldest among her siblings and has two younger brothers. Her family can be considered as small based on the average household size in the Shiipfomaramth community. Generally, households with five to seven children are the most common in her society. Being the eldest in the family, she appears to have the advantage as she did all her school and college education outside the state. What made this possible is because her father is employed with the government. Her mother also has some formal education, but she looks after the family farm.

On the question of contesting territorial issue, she claims that there is no possibility of compromising on territorial reorganisation, as she feels that there can be no development and peace without it. According to her, socio-economic backwardness, lack
of proper educational facilities and educated unemployment problems are in some ways related to the indifferent government approach (as it always favours the Meiteis).

Unemployment problem is serious and, according to her, it was partly responsible for many youth’s irresponsible behaviours and activities, which are seen deviating from social norms. She also points that failure to secure employment leads many youth to turn to alcohol and drug. In view of the many problems, which are related to unemployment, she states that the government has failed to provide the avenues the youth are looking for. Corrupt politicians and greedy officials who asked for huge bribes, according to her, also contribute to the unemployment problem. At the same time, she feels that many youth are not confident of themselves to set up their own business but always depend on government for job. In her opinion, this is because the educational system does not train the youth to become secure and confident.

In her view, the family’s poor economic condition and lack of government support to pursue one’s ambition are major problems in education. The present syllabus is adaptable, however she feels that there ought to be more ‘teacher-student’ interaction, participative learning and field-based experiences than just theories and ‘four-walls’ teaching. At the same time, she feels that dated syllabus ought to be revamped and the new syllabus updated to keep pace with time. A good socio-political environment helps students to do better in studies, but she laments that the present situation in the state is full of social tensions and political instability. She also feels that it takes lots of time, money, proper motivation and guidance to be an achiever, irrespective of the academic course one pursues. However, she maintains that due to general backwardness, parents’ ignorance and illiteracy, many youth are denied of this opportunity.

She points out that the confusion on social values in the wake of socio-religious change and westernisation is part of the larger social problems. Miss P concurs like many respondents that people are losing their cultural values and are becoming self-centred and more individualistic. Perceiving this as a serious social problem, she suggests they need to generate and preserve their values – honesty, hard work, dedication, creativity and kindness. To her, imported cultural value system is okay if one still respect and abide by his/her traditional cultural roots since learning and taking anything that is positive makes
a person better and helps to broaden the perspective. However, in her opinion, most young people like her cannot make up their minds on what they should follow. This is partly due to lack of blending the identical values found in both their native practices and in Christian principles. Our socialisation influences us greatly. Therefore, she maintains that with no proper imparting of social values, many youth are in state of confusion: they cannot follow either the values of the emerging socio-religious system or that, which concern their tradition.

Miss P is concerned about the increasing alcohol and drug abuse among the youth, because the same youth will one-day become parents, elders and leaders in the society. However, she feels bad because apart from irresponsibility of the youths, the present social environment is unhelpful for them to stop from drinking. Personally, she does not take alcohol. But easy availability, parents own inability to restrain from taking alcohol and peer pressures, according to her are some of the factors leading to problem of drinking among the youth. She also feels that contradictory opinions on value of drinking wine and non-committed individuals to combat alcohol menace are part of the problem. ‘We are known by the kind of friends we have. So a good circle of friends can help us, inspire and motivate to stop from drinking’, says she. In the same way, she feels that the opposite may be also true, but that will definitely end up as an undesirable and useless persons in society. In conclusion, she suggests that the Shiipfomaramth society need people who are dedicated to helping the youth and to shape their future in a better way.

Respondent 3

Miss Q is the second child in her family. There are six members in her family including her parents. She has two bothers; one elder to her and the other is the youngest in the family. Besides she has a sister who is just next to her. She is 22 years old and doing a postgraduate course. By profession her father is a mission worker, who has been in this field for over two decades. And her mother is a housewife with no formal education. As the process of westernisation and christianisation began at the same time in the Shiipfomaramth society, it is common that church leaders and mission workers’ children have greater access to the chance to avail modern education. Miss Q’s case is no different. She has done her schooling in a private school and managed to get some quality
education. It is pertinent to mention here that in Manipur the quality and standard of government-run schools are deteriorating year after year.

The respondent feels that territorial reorganisation is essential to attain for a lasting solution and to bring development and peace. In addition, she feels that there is less scope for easing ethnic tensions as well as balance development without integration of Naga inhabited areas.

Unemployment problem is serious, and in her view it has resulted in many problems in the form of alcohol and drug abuse, irresponsible behaviours and lost of self-respect. Miss Q feels that increase of delinquent conduct and petty social crimes among the youth are intertwined with unemployment problems. Corruption at all levels and inefficiency of the government are part of the contributing factors in the increased rate of unemployment problems. Similarly, she asserts that lack of quality education, absence of good educational foundation and individual laziness in studies leads to low educational achievement.

Economic problem, large family size, lack of proper career guidance and unhealthy social environment are some problems in her education. The economic problem has become a social reality. When it comes to the current syllabus she is not satisfied at all. She plainly says that the present syllabus and educational system is not at all socially oriented but only examination oriented. The syllabus suffers from outdated, non-holistic and dogmatic approach, which has no social relevance. Equally, she is critical of the absence of good and well-equipped educational institutions and absence of qualified teachers. In her view, it has resulted in educated youth without quality, literate but not educated. Lack of parents’ encouragement and support is also a major factor. In her typical style she says that parents can force their children to study but the cannot force them to be intellectuals.

Westernisation and socio-religious change that usher in a new value system characterised by self-centredness and individualism, according to her, is leading to breakdown of communitarian values and social concern. She points out western value system had de-emphasised their tradition has failed to provide a viable alternative standard. However, in her opinion, it is not necessarily the factor that is making the youth
hanging, as it were, in a balance between tradition and Christianity, but mainly due to personal negligence.

Unemployment problem, peer pressures, easy availability of alcohol and considered drinking as part of modern lifestyle, according to her, contribute to the increase of drinking problem among the youth. In her opinion, failure is not necessarily the reason that prompts the youth to take alcohol. Lately, drinking has become a symbol of lifestyle and considered as being fashionable. At the start, inadequate information on evil consequences may be a factor, but she says, ‘if one thinks it is bad s/he should give it up’. However, in her understanding, with social crisis and erosion of moral value, youth of today have become prey to all bad things including alcohol abuse. She claims that we often hear that moderate drinking keeps the body healthy, but is not aware of the fact how it keeps the society unhealthy. The problem of unemployment has led many youth to frustration and to lose confidence in themselves, which according to her, leads in turn to drinking alcohol since it is easily available. To control the growing alcohol problems in their society, she suggests that first of all, it is the individual to decide, pass rules against selling, organise open seminar in order to impart evils of alcohol, and give quality (moral) education.

Respondent 4

Mr. R is a son of a cultivator and is the youngest in the family. His father died when he was young and the mother is now so old that she can no longer work. He is 25 years and passed out of college some years back. He is from a big family of nine members. He has four elder brothers and two sisters. Most of his brothers and sisters have got married. Even though his father passed away when he was young, he is fortunate because two of his brothers got government jobs. That makes it possible for him to study in a mission school. Being the youngest in the family, he is relatively free from the pressures and responsibilities of the family. He is also an active member in the student fellowship. Besides his studies, he devotes his time to serve the Lord in different capacities – in the youth and student fellowships.

He asserts that there is a necessity to have territorial integration because according to him without this solution for the protracted Indo-Naga conflict is impossible. At the
same time, in his opinion, it is just not possible to achieve social harmony and political stability in the present territorial arrangement. He feels that the Meiteis’ demand for territorial integrity is nothing but a strategy to keep his people backward and poor.

On the issue of the fast growth rate of unemployment problem among the educated youth, he claims that stagnancy of economic development, dishonesty and corruption, indifferent attitude by the government towards the tribal and individual’s lack of preparedness to meet the hard situation is to be blamed. As a result, according to him, there is growing restlessness and helplessness among the youth. The large number of unemployment among educated youth add fuels to the existing problems of insurgency, increase alcohol and drug abuse, social deviance and other anti-social activities. He also feels that the enforcement of the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act or AFSPA has also led many innocent people to stray and rendered many children orphaned, which create more problems than it seeks to solve.

In his opinion, the syllabus and educational system is not suited to the present need, it is full of other cultures and histories to the total negligence of their traditions and mode of life, which, according to him, cause low interest to study. For this reason, he suggests the syllabus ought to be revised to accommodate the fast changing frontiers of knowledge, broaden the syllabus to make it more inclusive, and be more careers friendly. Likewise, he feels that the social political environment is not conducive to attain quality education. Equally, he views that the facilities such as adequate books, journals, good buildings and teaching aid are lagging far behind. He also feels that imparting quality education is unsatisfactory and most of the teachers are not competent enough to do justice in this regard. Similarly, he maintains that lack of encouragement and inadequate moral support due to poor economic condition has affected in his education. According to Mr. R, due to reason of financial constraints many youth like him become disoriented and demoralised, and their ambitions, cruelly shattered. This sorry state of affairs also partly misleads parents to think that investment in education leads to wastage of their hard earned money and hence, they look for short term investments. At the same time, he maintains that he does not get proper career guidance from his parents since they are uneducated and ignorant.
The inadequate blending of traditional values with Christianity, in his view, to a certain extent, leads to confusion of social values. When there is no visible standard to balance between the tradition and Christianity, it creates confusion. He maintains that what they need is to become modernised and not westernised, but it is by and large, the other way round in their society. Generally there seems to be outright rejection of tradition in the wake of socio-religious change. He specifically noted that there is an increase in self-centredness and individual aloofness in which the church leaders and mission leaders are also not free from. He is of the view that for a society to be dynamic and progressive there ought to be a balance between traditional value system and the imported one.

The seriousness of alcohol problems in their society is not far from his knowledge. But sadly, he commented that the youth are confronting the same situations almost everywhere. Some start drinking because they have personal or family problems, some out of curiosity and some through friends, which makes it a major problem for them to avoid alcohol. For him, easy availability, tension and lack of knowledge about the evil consequences of alcohol have led him to drink alcohol. In his view, bad company and friends’ pressure also lead many to start taking alcohol. Parents are also far from being good role models since their exemplification of drinking habit do not serve the desired purpose on their children. He suggested that to control drinking menace, complete ban on selling is needed, intensive health care campaign and awareness programme on the evil consequences of alcohol, and self-realisation of the uselessness of drinking.

Analytical Remarks

The experiences of the above respondents reflect the overall dissatisfaction running through the Shiipfomaramth community. This disapproval ranging from social, political, cultural to economic problems, relates to the biased, divisive and inconsistent policies over developmental works, on the one hand. On the other, the inability of the community to effectively curb social problems, while at the same time, the failure to involve progressive ideas in taking the community forward is clear in the assessment of the respondents. For instance, on the demand of territorial reorganisation, the respondents are guided by what they perceive as the denial of justice and an affront to their history, which
certainly point an accusing finger to the Government. On the issue of rising
unemployment, the respondents’ allegation of the government biased and defective
educational system seem prevalent across the community’s perception. In this regard, the
stagnancy of economy, the social and political instability as well as the lopsided
developmental policies within and around its surroundings, may also be attributed to the
general backwardness of the community. When it comes to the subject of cultural
discontinuity, the respondents are a loss as a result of the imperfect blending of the values
of indigenous and Christian principles. The problem of alcohol consumption among the
youth can rightly be said as a result of the erosion of the traditional cultural value of wine
(rice beer) and, at the same time, the wrong notion of identifying it with modern lifestyle.
Indeed, the predicament faced by the Shiipfomaramth youth deserves greater attention
than the present scope of study allows. The problem faced by them may be considered
unique, in the sense that it is accompanied by the inexorable political problem as well as
what they regard as the cultural discontinuity, which is compounding the intricacies of
the problems.