CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapters have presented a discursive discourse regarding various components of the agrarian systems of the study villages of the Lonchangs located under Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The study has covered the aspects of change and continuity of agrarian systems, intricate agricultural operation, complex rituals and the role of induced developmental policies as well as people’s response.

It is evident from earlier chapters that the Lonchangs who constitute one of the prime sub-groups of the tribe Tangsax, still primarily dependent on agriculture as their livelihood. The sample villages (six) provided excellent examples regarding the question of transition of shifting to settled cultivation - an issue which still dominates whenever the issue of the plight of jhum is discussed in different forums. It is a fact that anthropologists hailed a notion which many a time differs from many other scientists who stressed much more on the negative aspects of Jhum, specially its environmental implications. However, this study does not provide any scope to discuss this issue but undoubtedly it provides a very significant point to realize that people who are traditionally remained attached to jhum are not averse to settle cultivation provided they have physical space to opt for the same. So they are not against change - a change which helps and promotes their economic advantage in meaningful ways.

Historically, Tangsax in general and the Lonchang in particular, were jhumias (shifting hill cultivators). All published literatures supplemented this idea in clear terms. In chapter two, it is described that the Lonchangs had been migrated to the north-eastern India and it is a historical fact that when they came down to the foothills of Patkai, they were solely shifting hill cultivators. Since 1960s onwards, with the initiatives of the village level worker (VLW) and the state agencies, they gradually switched over to this much more effective mode of productive strategy and with in last four and half decades this has became part of their tradition itself. This
transition is very significant as it came from within rather than hurriedly imposed on them. People gradually realised the benefits of settled cultivation, which ensures a better production and upgradation of their subsistence economy to a considerable extent. Chapter four clearly depicts how efficiently they have integrated this new mode of wet cultivation which now became synonymous with their livelihood pattern. They have developed with in last four and half decades a distinct cycle for settled cultivation like their jhum cycle which has seasonal implications. In consequence, it is also observed that the forms of extended and joint families have been gradually decreasing among the Longchang Tenchakx. With the increase of nuclear families and population, their traditional concept of land holding is also changing from joint or collective ownership to individual ownership or private ownership. And this has led to marginal landholders due to constant fragmentation of cultivated lands into smaller segments among the deserving brothers with increasing number of nuclear families along with the growth of populations. Naturally, for such families agricultural production based on divided land is not enough to meet their subsistence level. So in order to meet their basic necessities of life they need to heavily depend on non-agricultural economic activities, for example, petty business, contractual works, marginal or wage labour etc. So, not only the occupational mobility but also one can locate a change in the very perception of domestication of animals among the villagers. With the change in the mode of agricultural production, now the rearing of cattle has an added dimension rather than just having traditional socio-cultural values. Obviously, in settled mode of farming, cattle became one of the important and essential components (instruments) of agricultural farming. Naturally, as a result of change in agrarian institution or agrarian system, the concomitant change has been taken place in social structure and socio-economic condition among the study community. In simple words, due to shift from shifting agriculture to settled agriculture the society is becoming more stratified at the subsistence level and along with the growing sense of individualism at the societal level.

Undoubtedly, multiple factors are collectively bringing change in agrarian structure and relations, such as, initiatives and effort taken by the government agencies, people's gradual realization came after observing and experiencing the
better mode of production which ensured upgradation in subsistence economy to a considerable extent for a large segment of villagers. regular interaction with various other ethnic groups as well as urban people, comparatively better location of settlement than that of earlier hilly slopes and mountains, advancement in the field of education for both the sexes etc.

Hiring and immigration of agricultural labourers from outside is another reality came into existence among the Longchangs in habited areas. Even there are examples where a few of them have developed marriage alliance with a few Longchang families. Regarding relationship between such labour force and the land owner, it has been observed that more or less cordial relationship prevailed. By and large, people felt that peaceful co-existence and maintenance of inter-community solidarity is pre-requisite for any kind of development.

However, people didn’t wipe out their traditional jhum completely as it has also some advantages, especially as it provides some space for multiple cropping which settled cultivation hardly generates.

This shift in mode of production has lead to the upgradation of their technological level by incorporating implements necessary for settled agriculture and in a new situation plough became their most important tool though for shifting agriculture they are still dependent on simple tools. In general there is no indication of improved technological inputs to promote the concept of “Scientific jhuming” or even for settled cultivation at a significant extent though some stray cases of improved agricultural tools are reported.

New institution of share cropping made its root at the agrarian base and as a result we found new forms of agrarian relationship which has emerged due to the practice of leasing out, leasing in of cultivable lands along with heterogeneous terms and contracts. This operational frame is quite contrary to what we as anthropologists, tried to look at the tribal agrarian mode of production from an ideal perspective. More over, one can find distinct and different forms of labour exchange for which Longchangs have their own local terms. Practising and maintenance of labour
exchange mechanism through out the agricultural operations helps them to cultivate their field within the available time frame. Moreover, it creates social integration and peaceful co-existence among the communities as mentioned before.

Villagers have a distinct sex-wise division of labour in relation to both settled as well as shifting hill cultivations, though they share some works together. Even children have some roles to play in order to ensure protection of their crops. Undoubtedly, like many other tribes, Longchang women share much more responsibility in the whole production organization and they have dense intricate knowledge about agriculture what today we call “Traditional Wisdom” or discussed with in the frame of “IKS”. For instance, traditional knowledge in selection of seeds, sowing of seeds, transplantation of seedlings, preservation of seeds, pests control etc have a gender dimension. Thus, their traditional knowledge has an applied value attached to various stages of agricultural operations. In this context, sometimes, even modern techniques are also found ineffective.

Still their customary laws do not allow transfer of land beyond the village boundary and obviously patriarchal social structure regulates the question of land inheritance where Longchang women didn’t have any right though they can construct a house on their parental domestic land, if available. Even in case of the absence of a male child land will be inherited by youngest or eldest brother’s son. However, in case of adoption of a male child, their customary law allows his inheritance right over the land which people still respect.

The cultivators who follow indigenous religious beliefs have rather more rituals in relation to their agricultural practice than their other counterparts who are converted to Christianity or accepted Buddhist belief and practices. Rangfraites believe that such sacred rituals provide one sort of supernatural protection from any unforeseen hazards toward land, livestock, crops and people too. On other hand, ritual complexity acted as an obstacle in agricultural operations and productivity. For example, after every important ritual, the observation of taboo is inevitable. It also leads to sudden disruption in otherwise smooth agricultural operations as well as wastage of time which has been traditionally framed according to the lunar position or
calendar. Of course, nowadays villagers are not much rigid about maintenance of various taboos. Study further reveals that owing to more inclined towards wet rice cultivation rather than jhuming the volume of rites and rituals which Lonchanghs traditionally practiced are gradually decreasing. On the other hand, the converted Christians and Buddhists cultivators have already given up such tradition of performing agricultural rituals as they have adopted new ways of appeasing their Gods by offering prayers. Anthropologists always stressed on the need of looking at such non-economic aspects of agriculture which others may not bother much. It is evident throughout the world that agricultural communities have well defined sacred domain intricatedly associated with their agrarian institution. Understanding of this sacred dimension of agrarian institution is very important as this reflects the ideological structure of a society which is evident in case of the present study. Perhaps it can be said that in order to understand the agrarian system of the Lonchanghs such understanding of both secular as well as sacred dimension of agrarian behaviours is very important.

Finally, occupational mobility is clearly visible in the study villages and this is inevitable due to introduction of education, better mode of communication, exposure to larger socio-political reality and immergence of market as a dominant institution etc. So some of the villagers are trying to opt for alternative economic avenues for which many of them even settled out side their own villages - sometimes in distant places. But, they didn't lose sight of the importance of cultivation, and this very realization might have given rise to new agrarian relationships and new modes of productive strategies, as evident in the villages, paving the ways for an agrarian transition among the Lonchanghs around which their economy is still pivoted.

They used to sow varieties of crops ranging from traditional to improved varieties (HYV) which has been listed in the earlier chapter four, particularly in settled field. On the other hand, in jhum field, they grow purely the traditional variety of crops. At the time of cultivation the farmers have to choose which variety of crop has to be cultivated. While choosing crop variety for cultivation the farmers usually keep certain points in their cognition, such as, whether it would be tasty for
consumption, easy for threshing, consume less water etc. In this relation, sharing of intricate knowledge regarding agricultural operations among themselves also helps in choosing the proper crop variety for cultivation to a large extent. They consider their traditional crop variety as mother and modern or high yielding variety of crops as children because of the preconception that their traditional crop varieties are susceptible to the physical setting or environment prevalent in the region. However, in comparison to earlier agrarian system, growing and adoption of new improved varieties of crops despite of having such notion, is another important development found among the farmers of the study villages.

After cultivation, selection and preservation of different varieties of seeds are also equally important components of agricultural operation. It is directly connected with the next cultivation season and production as well. If any kind of lacking in selection and preservation of seeds then it may cause problem during the next cultivation season, like, shortage in seedlings due bad seeds and it is well known fact to the villagers that during the peak period of cultivation managing of new seedlings is very much difficult task. On the other hand, cultivation period is also limited. Therefore, to avoid such uncertain forthcoming impediments, the farmers of the study villages were generally very much careful while selecting seeds, harvesting (reaping), transportation and storing.

Seeds are selected from very matured and healthy crops. As per their indigenous beliefs, selection as well as harvesting is done on the even-days of a week except Sunday. Apart from this, treatment of seeds (storing and other preventive measures etc) are done in a separate manner. Seeds are generally kept separately in a safe place in side the granary or house. People basically prefer to keep seeds in granaries which are constructed in a place far away from the actual residence or settlement area in order to prevent from unforeseen fire accident. However, such things happen rarely.

To them, land and forest are their veins and arteries for existence. This apart, land is not only a resource for them, its possession is also equally important for achieving social prestige and political mileage in order to get closer access to power
structure at the local or state level.

*Longchang* society is patrilineal in nature where the descent is traced through the male lines and transmission of property also through male lines. Composition of the family differs from one household to another and one village to another village but the question of inheritance of landed property always revolves around the male members only. Traditionally, females usually inherit movable properties like, beads and ornaments, etc. from the parental house, received at the time of marriage.

Traditionally, the transfers of land within the village are permissible. But the villagers are not allowed to sale their cultivable land or any private land to outsiders (non-*Tangsas*) without prior consent of village council or village elders. So, traditionally the transfer of village land to the outsiders is not permitted at all as per the existing customary law of the *Longchang* of the study villages. However, the present study reveals that such situation is gradually changing; the educated women also started claiming that if their parental cultivable lands are available they must get right to inherit some portions of landed property when they are married within the village or own community itself.

In the study villages it is evident (previous chapters) that any sort of disputes (land, water, murder, thief etc.) occur in the village is settled by the village council involving Gaon Burrah (GB). Cases are settled according to customary laws. The decision of the council is considered being the final and respected by all sections. In this regard even district administration usually suggests settling various disputes at the local level first. In case, the decision given by the traditional or village council is not satisfactory to victims then only the administration will look into the matter. Thus, customary law and village council play significant roles in management of land and water and in selection of cultivation site (*jhum* field).

Considering the water scarcity the *Longchang* farmers use the bamboo tubes and create channel-divides for equal distribution of irrigation water from main irrigation channel to the respective fields in a very effective way which is discussed in previous chapters which even helps in controlling pests attack and unwanted growth
Indeed, government has implemented various schemes related to agriculture and other fields in order to improve agriculture and people's economic conditions as well. It has been observed that since the intervention of government through various policies and programmes there were immense development taken placed in the field of agriculture and people's livelihood condition in the present study villages. They appreciate various government policies and programmes implemented for them. But, on the other hand, the farmers also claimed that they are facing some constraints in availing various materials provided under those schemes due to multiple reasons, like, untimely distribution of seeds and saplings, unequal distribution of materials, minimum subsidy rates, lack of information regarding the incoming schemes, lack of knowledge regarding new items provided etc. Ironically, Government officers also advocated that simply introducing the developmental schemes is of no use because they (farmers) are having casual approach and do not follow the proper methods and advice which are given by the experts while using improved agricultural in puts and some are still bias to primitive notions of cultivation. And this was supplemented by some of the villagers. However, some officers appreciated that despite various inhibitions, most of the villagers are taking interest in induced agricultural development schemes along with other developmental schemes and policies as evident in the present study.

Thus, in relation to transition in agricultural mode of production that is from shift from shifting to settled cultivation, the government agencies played a significant role. No doubt, they are still at the state of producing their crop largely for their own subsistence rather than orienting themselves towards commercial level in a significant way. However, commercialisation of horticultural products is traceable to some extent. Perhaps, this particular work on the Longchangs can be taken as a case study to understand the nature of agrarian transition which has taken place among the hill societies located in a frontier state. This may also provide a model to understand various such tribal communities located in a similar context across the north east region or beyond.