CHAPTER V

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE PEOPLE

In the previous chapter a general geographical description of the land and ethnic background of different sections of the people living in Nagahills of Assam, now called as Nagaland, have been presented. In this chapter the modes of living of these people with their customs, systems, traditions and culture controlling their socio-economic conditions have been presented in detail, leading to identification of the socio-economic factors which contributed to the origin growth and development of Education in the Naga Society.

5.1 SOCIAL BACKGROUND:

Unlike tribal people and their folk-ways in the plains, tribal people of the hills specially in North-East India, had a different type of social set up developed mainly due to their long isolation from other people. Because of their being sparsely distributed alongwith the vast track of hilly land having humid climate and dense forest, they were also isolated before themselves in the form of small groups maintaining their group identity, in the name of a particular tribe.
The traditional practice of living in hilltops, which was essential from the strategic point of view, not only kept the different Naga tribes isolated from each other but also the groups of the people of the same tribe became stranger to each other. This isolation, in course of time, led to the development of sectarian social ideologies. Due to their isolation, the people could seldom come into contact with their urban counterpart— who were living a better life in so far as the human civilization is concerned. This isolation could leave no scope for either between group interaction or their interaction with the urban people. Due to the lack of the former, qualities for living in a bigger society could hardly be developed and due to the lack of latter, awareness of civilized life with up-to-date education could not be created in them. They were, however, having some type of institution for education of their young ones as were found among peoples at the earliest stage of civilization. These institutions were called 'Murungs' like that of 'Barraks' of Greeks and Spartans more than two thousand years ago. Even the same type of institutions were existing hundred years back among the tribes of African countries. It may not be out of place to mention here that this group-living of young children was a process of their socialization which in its modified modern

The traditional living pattern of the Nagas before the coming of the Missionaries was hunting and agriculture as main activity living in log-huts in close proximity to each other, scantly dressed in home made attires under the guardianship of Gaonbura and a village council of elders, having a Murung for non-formal type of education of children to prepare themselves for their adult life and frequent fights between groups for survival of the fittest.

As a matter of fact, the living pattern was more of a natural type than the artificiality of so called civilized, urbanised and advanced societies. The people in the earliest period were animistic in their social and religious taboos and had fear only of natural calamities. They became accustomed to living a hard life without having in their possession the amenities of civic life and modern living. The advent of Christianity through the Missionaries of the West, gave a programme of minimum (as per their version) needs of life and this started functioning bringing in different kinds of developments at stages.
The influence of the traditional life style which is prominent among the Nagas, even in the present society, plays a major role in successful implementation of the modern educational schemes. These social traditions in a way have been affecting the educability of the children at large, and is an important aspect to be considered for ascertaining educational growth.

A.H. Halsey\(^1\) noted that social factors responsible for the educability of the children were the inequalities of school provision, social and cultural ingredients such as language, the social distance between the teacher and the pupil, the level of educational aspirations and the nature of the peer groups in childhood and adolescence. Thus traditionalism are also supposed to play an important role in the educational growth in any situation.

Rathnalah\(^2\) writes in this context as:

"Education can provide very good opportunity for the socially disadvantaged groups provided they have

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2. Ibid P. 8
the necessary facilities and life chances to get education. Inequalities in educational facilities and inequalities in life chances lead to inequalities in educability and thus minimise the chances of social mobilisation."

Nagaland was under the British rule as a part of Assam. Hardly any developmental work was taken up possibly due to the geographical and social isolation from the mainland. The result of this isolation from the main stream of national life made this section of people to adopt a life style different from that of the so called civilized people.

However, this kind of isolation was broken towards the end of British rule in India due to their political reasons when Nagas were gradually gaining their awareness of deprivation by virtue of their limited interaction with the people of the plains while they used to come frequently to the markets of bordering places. When their natural sense of freedom, by dint of living a sort of free life confronted with the subjugative forces of British rule, instant reactions came to the fore and an unifying force acted between the various Naga tribes to masterstrong their
feelings to go unitedly against these subjugative forces. This feeling was exploited and manoeuvred to continue even after independence for its application to meet the tribal needs. Thus, actually, they had to pass through a very hard time under repression, oppression and lastly persuasion leading ultimately to the birth of the land after a prolonged period of insurgency. Mr. Alemchiba observed in this context as:

"When the Nagas were passing through this state of affairs, hostility broke out and suspicions and rumors as associated elements of the disturbances spread all over. Ultimately and quite naturally the police and military forces which were hardly known to the people before were inducted in the area. The unfortunate result of isolation and suspicion was immediately compounded by the fact that the first intimate contact of the Nagas with the Indian administration happened to be through the presence of a large scale of army inside Nagaland. The innocent simple folk had to have an adverse feeling about the new administration. The Nagas, therefore, initially did not have a good impression of the first mass contact with the outside people."

Living amongst the armed forces with such an impression resulted in an attitude of possessing some kinds of arms and ammunitions for their possible use against oppressive forces. They are not relieved of this attitude even to-day when the conditions have normalised to a great extent. The possession of these mass protection tools and equipments is gradually being transformed into a status symbol in the society. As a result of this trend, perhaps, inspite of the Government's attempt to establish peace and happiness in the hilly track of land, this simple folk who had been happy with the nature, took the coming of the armed personnel as a challenge to their sanctity. Thus in such an atmosphere, the young children were fated to pass their days through constant oppression and suppression. Therefore, introduction of a new type of education by some other agencies was a far cry. It is a fact that the Britishers, eventually had no intention for the social and economic upliftment of the Nagas but the need for colonial expansion led them to think of some educational programmes whatsoever in the State through which they can produce some clerks to help run their administration.
As stated earlier, Nagaland, is, exclusively a land of hills and forests. Due to the geographical inaccessibility to the region, no attempt could perhaps be made for industrial growth and hence, the bulk of the people were destined to look for livelihood through agriculture whatsoever was possible. This predominantly determined the mode of living of the Nagas, and the agrarian nature thus formed, seem to have greater impact on the education of the people. It has been reported that drop-outs at school stage has been more due to utilization of children's labour at home and in the field. This may be substantiated by the fact that during the period of cultivation absence of students in schools is found to be in an alarming degree.

After the Statehood and particularly after the period of insurgency actual developments in all aspects of the State started.

1. Personal interview with the teachers.

It was mentioned by the teachers that in some parts of the State especially in the interior places percentage of attendance falls significantly during the cultivation season.
The attempt of the Government of Nagaland towards the improvement of communication system, establishment of schools with maximum possible facilities and the indirect helping attitude towards the Christian Missionaries in establishing schools and other institutions for social improvement resulted commendable success, at the instance of liberal Central policy of persuasion to appease the promised expectation of the people. Rapid and sudden growth of education and facilities led to socio-economic developments no doubt, but not being based on proper planning, outcomes were not what was desired. As a result education facilitated opportunities for mostly the class and not so much for the mass.

Even though every one became aware of the usefulness of education, the economic factor compelled most of the parents to withdraw their children from schools when they were found able enough physically to help in agricultural or in other sources of income.

1. Education upto Secondary level is free. For backward districts of Mon and Tuensang, there is provision of providing free books, kerosine and ration money to those who stay in hostels. These two districts are regarded as educationally backward.
A sort of doubt about the material benefit that was advocated to be derived out of the investment for children's education and the belief that such type of education will misfit children to the common social set up could rarely motivate the Magas towards educating their children. Alemchiba observed the attitude of the Nagas towards such education as:

"Rarely indeed does a Naga regarded education as something which is going to make him more fitted in his ordinary life, he regards it something which will fit him for a very different life and he expects that life to be offered to him in the form of Government post aptly described as sitting and eating job. The result is surplus of half educated youths, unwilling to go back to the village life and looking in vain for employment which they consider suitable to their talents."

It is generally observed in backward societies that the people go in more for that type of endeavour which yield them immediate material benefit than in those which give returns not so immediately;

education is a type of activity which takes time to
give returns of investment.

Naga society is basically of rural type.
The villages are built generally on the hill tops
primarily because of defence point of view. It is
seen that the village approach roads from the plains
are well fortified having a strong wooden gate at
each entry point. In some villages, it is still
seen to have three such gates which may show the nature
of guard the early Nagas had to take against the
head-hunting wars. The practice of selecting the
hill top for the village site had been common to all
the Naga tribes. The general structure of the houses
which were built in a compact way, consisted mainly of 2
two parts for different household purposes. The
larger apartment was used for the public while the
smaller one for the females of the family. Excluding
the rich, there was no practice of constructing separate
house for the domestic animals. A typical Angami Naga
house as described by R. Brown\(^1\) runs thus:

1. R. Brown : Narrative report of the survey party,
in the Nineteenth Century: Varrier Elwin.
"The houses of the Angamis are large and well built, gable ended, with a veranda in front, in which a good many of the house hold duties are performed by the women—spinning, weaving etc. The inside is dark and dirty divided into a larger and a smaller room; the inner room is the smallest, being the family room and usually full of children, fowls, dogs and pigs; the larger room is furnished with long benches of planks, cut out of the single tree. The cows are generally accommodated either inside the house or in a small fenced off portion of the verandha."

Although, this had been the condition of the average Naga house during the eighteenth century, at present, in the twentieth century, there has been tremendous improvements in the entire settings where every school going children want to have a place for his studies. This type of living in dirty hamlets and unhygienic abodes, possibly reveals their long deprivation from living in convenient and developed places. Hardly any need for education and availability of physical facilities could be traced in early Naga home and society.
So far as the family structure is concerned, basically a Naga family consists of husband, wife and the unmarried children. A son sets up a separate family unit after the marriage and so the daughter too goes to her husband's place. The joint family system is not common among the Nagas excepting few cases. Among the Phoms of the Tuensang district, especially among the Namsangias, the joint family system still exists. The average Naga family members in such families are about twenty.1

Marriage has been an institution in the Naga society. Like other people Nagas too believe the custom of marriage to be essential for human being. Excepting the Sema Nagas, the system of marriage has been the same among different Naga tribes. Sema marriages are purely on matters of arrangement from the parents' side. Dowry system has been very common among the Semas.

1. Personal interview at B/Namsang village of Tuensang on 6.1.80.
The tradition of separating the son immediately after marriage from the parents family to have his own family unit may be viewed from two angles - (i) giving sufficient scope to shape the family unit on the basis of one's own capability and experience (ii) because of the family responsibility continuation of study was disrupted.

5.2: **ECONOMIC BACKGROUND:**

Traditionally the Nagas have been cultivators. Even to-day 70.49 percent of the total workers in the State are engaged in some sort of cultivation works. There are references about the Nagas in different literature (Ahom History) that they were 'settled people' in the hills who explored the forest to meet the days' needs. Bhattacharyee\(^2\) noted in this context as:

"In common with many other tribes in the country, forests and the Naga tribes are inseparable. Except the limited urban population, forest is their livelihood ...."

It is interesting here to note that most of the Nagas irrespective of their status or position go to their agricultural field (commonly known as Khati). People engaged in some services also join their family members in "Khati" whenever time permits. The remarkable feature here, among the Nagas is that, there has been no landless peasants. The total village social structure has been maintained in a way that the basic requirements of life for all the members are ensured. In most part of the State, the concept of "family land" still exists. The practice of community work is an important aspect of Naga society which perhaps was inherited from the Murung system of education. This tradition of economic life brought among the Nagas a concept of self-sufficiency which led no scope for the Nagas to think of other means of livelihood.

Yonuo states as:

"What is noteworthy about the economic life of the Nagas is the economic uniformity that they have no big landlords, no extreme paupers, no millionaires, no slums and no beggars. In other words, everyone has everything fairly enough to meet the needs of life, rich or poverty, although a small bourgeois class has emerged under modern capitalism since the Second World War."

The notion of self-sufficiency prevailed among the Nagas during the early days perhaps narrowed down the working scope of the Nagas resulting into "easy going" life. The easy going life style which was developed as a tradition resulted into slower economic growth of the State even now. The traditional source of income such as agriculture and other cottage industrial products namely, weaving of shawls bamboo and craft works could earn only little amount. Neither the agricultural products nor the cottage industrial products give any revenue to the State. The cottage industrial works has its importance only to the visitors who also are seen reluctant to purchase, as because, they are costlier. The transaction
within the State also has not been much, because the family requirements are almost fulfilled by the family members themselves. However, with the changing concept of living and with the Government aid, there emerged a new approach to the economic life of the people where every Naga is seen to be craving for a different life for tomorrow with more facilities, more education and more money. The present bulk of employees\(^1\), serving in Government and in such other organisations have emerged as a new group with considerably better economic status and with an ambition to look after their children for a brighter future.

The self-sufficient Nagas of the early days with the aspirations of simple living, rarely thought of requirements other than what was necessary for their daily meals. Hence, looking back to the traditions of Naga economy, it could be said that the Naga economy was absolutely self-generating and as such self-sufficient in its own way. The requirements of the

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1. Refer break up of workers : Appendix 'G'
people were few which were supplied by the villagers themselves. Naga economy, therefore, did not very much dwell upon cash transaction; whatever little purchases they had to make from markets of their boardering areas used to do in exchange of their field or forest produce in the form of a sort of Barter system.

Among such traditional practices the initiative of the administration through the missionary functionaries for facilitating administrative activities brought to the people ways and means of civil life. Western education of British India came to operate on Naga people to create white-collar job and thereby money as a means of exchange started to play its role.

Yonue\(^1\) described the attitude of the Nagas towards such changes as:

"Now if you ask ourselves as to what are the Nagas to-day after twenty-six years of independence, the answer would be that tremendous changes in their physical as well as mental outlook have taken place as never before. Over a relatively short period, they are

rolling in education, revolution, legislation, urbanisation, industrialisation and travel altering the traditional pattern of Naga life for better but less perhaps than may be expected by radical thinkers.