PART III

EMERGING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND PROGNOSIS
CHAPTER IX

EMERGING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

The present chapter endeavours to examine the changes that are taking place in the social landscape of the area under study. The changes in whatever degree they may be, can be attributed to the more exposure of the people to the outside world and the incursions made into their society by modern civilization over the years. While attempting to highlight some aspects where the changes are most prominent, social space of the Nagas and how it has gradually got widened with the realisation of their common identity has also been considered. Obviously, such a study pertaining to social changes can hardly be carried out justifiably without falling back on the past. For the present is what it is as a result of a series of events of the past. Thus, keeping this end in view, the study makes an effort to look into the expansion of the social space of the Nagas along with the march of time and the facets of life where changes appear to have taken place palpably. However, it is to be noted that the study particularly in relation to the social changes is based more on the researcher's observation and perception than on the data.
One of the common characteristics of any tribal groups is its exclusiveness. It is true for different tribal groups of Nagas as well. After years of wandering they finally entrenched themselves in their present country at the hill-tops, shoulders of the ridges and the spurs of the hilly ranges overlooking the valleys, and lived for ages virtually secluded from one another in the midst of rugged terrain clothed with thick forest and ever unceasing hissing streams and rivulets gliding down the villages. They lived in their own worlds, independent of each other and as such there were hardly any healthy social contact except the ones when they met for physical confrontation. The aloofness from one another was because of both physical and social factors. The opening of link roads between the villages through the formidable landscape, infested with wild animals like tiger, elephant, wild boar, etc. must have been not only difficult and hazardous but also undesirable from the security point of view. For social environment was rather volatile characterised by tension, fear, uncertainty, hostility and rivalry. Such being the prevailing situation, each village with full sovereignty like a Greek City-State was self-sustaining and stood on its own leg; the more isolated it remained the better it was. No authority wielding power over all the Nagas emerged and hence the realisation that they all belonged to the same ancestry or the same stock of origin was apparently missing from their concept of the world. In most cases, they
perceived their neighbours as an adversary and not as a friend. It, therefore could be mentioned that the social space of the Nagas until recent times was narrow just as their social outlook was, and limited to their respective villages or the territorial boundary of the villages.

When the Nagas were passing through such a period marked by the welter of inter-village rivalry and conflict some tribal groups like Ao, Konyak, Lotha, etc. developed some relations with the people of Assam. Though their interactions with the Ahoms were largely in the form of confrontation there grew amity and cordial relationship at times between these two peoples. As discussed earlier, the relation with the Ahoms had its own share of effect on the life of the Nagas. However, by far the most important contact that was to have far-reaching implications for the Nagas was their coming in contact with the British at the early part of the 19th century. The British for various reasons annexed the Naga territories one after another into their domain and began to rule over them. The imposition of the British authority on the Nagas who were hitherto disunitedly independent, led to the growth of fellow-feeling among the people. With the coming of a new government exercising its power over the people, the head-hunting practice too came to an end. Peace prevailed over the land of the Nagas and the realisation that they were one began to take
roots in the minds of the people. Getting the Nagas together into the orbit of one political entity was indeed a great achievement which was soon followed by various changes in their society. Side by side with the British administration, the American Missionaries who came at the heels of the British occupation of Naga inhabited areas, played a vital role in this respect. While carrying out their mission to wean away the Nagas to Christianity they spared no pain to educate and shape the attitude of the people. Their efforts were never in vain for making the people enlightened and conscious of one another. Another important factor which was also responsible for bringing about solidarity among the people identifying with the common name 'Naga' was the Naga National Council (NNC). It had its inception before the British left India, and moved for the interest and welfare of the Nagas. Later it assumed political significance and spearheaded the Naga Independence Movement. Basing on the fact that the Nagas were never dominated by alien people other than the British, the movement demanded that the Nagas should be left alone as they were. However, their voice and pleadings went unheeded and as the talks with the Indian Government evaded solution to the liking of the Nagas, the Nagas resorted to violence which reached its height at the late 1950's. Now though the movement for Naga Independence is far from being petered out there are practically no violent incidents as
there used to be. As stated above, the Nagas' struggle for freedom has been a potential driving force in generating the feeling of oneness among the Nagas, not only of Nagaland but also of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma where they are inhabiting. It therefore, can be said that the social space of the Nagas, though was confined to a limited area due to the lack of social interaction and awareness, has now been widened with the growth of awareness and feeling for one another. It includes not only Nagaland but it even cuts across political divisions and boundary.

As mentioned earlier, Naga society was a close-knit one with all the distinguishing characteristics of a tribal society. However, with the passage of time it is now fast undergoing changes though the changes by no means can be said to be uniform among all the social groups inhabiting different parts of the State. Not only the social values and the way of life but the social organizations as well have been affected to a considerable degree following the inroads made into their society by modernization. Now the events of their dark period of history clouded by ignorance, stark isolation and in-group feeling stand in contrast to the shining light of the modern period. The Nagas are manfully facing the realities of Indian national life, culture and civilization by assimilating themselves into the mainstream whether it is in the sphere of politics, economic enterprises or cultural affluence. Such a change-over from
the traditional ethos to that of the modern in every aspect of life is, however, observed not only among the Nagas but is also clearly visible among other tribal groups, especially in the neighbouring States like Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The changes can be attributed mainly to the new way of life introduced by Christianity, contact with the outside world, introduction of formal education, imposition of the new political system and the planned socio-economic programmes undertaken by the government. It is, however, to be noted that though the changes are invariably taking place among the Nagas as a whole the degree of changes or transformation markedly varies from one social group to the other. Obviously, the society in the urban centres and in their vicinity is more characterised by modern values than the ones in the far-flung areas. Among the different Naga tribal or social groups rapid process of changes and the adoption of modern values are clearly observed in the case of Ao, Angami, Lotha, etc. that are inhabiting the western and south-western part of the State. Other social groups particularly the Kheinmungan, Tikhir, Chirr, etc. in the extreme eastern part of the State are however, less marked by changes as compared to their counterparts in the western and south-western part of the State. Lesser degree of transformation is also observed among the Konyaks in the north-eastern portion and Phoms, Yimchungers, Changs etc. in the central part of the State in Tuensang District. Given the disuniformity in the
process of social changes among different tribal groups of Nagaland, primarily as a result of variation in physical framework and in the degree of exposure to the outside world, it would now be worthwhile to dwell upon some of the facets of Naga society where the process of changes is in clear evidence and also on the factors that are responsible for bringing about the changes.

It can be mentioned that the proselytization which landed on the soils of the Nagas following the occupation of their territories by the British was an important factor responsible for social change among the Nagas. With this many social practices and aspects of culture were abolished and many modifications were made in the traditional social customs and practices. For instance, until the recent past the Nagas were known for the notoriety of head-hunting practice. In the midst of inter-village feuds the one who could take the enemy's head was regarded as the capable and brave one. But with the coming of British administration this practice became extinct along with the notion of paying highest tribute to a head-hunter. On the other hand, due to the preaching of the gospel of Christ the people changed their minds and their way of life. This psychic change that suppressed the deep-rooted traditional practice of head-hunting was indeed the most remarkable change in the Naga way of life. It was also the Christian Missionaries who not only took to the task of converting the animists to
Christianity but also worked hard for the upliftment of Naga society by introducing education. Before the appearance of Christianity in the land of the Nagas, the Nagas were almost cent per cent illiterate and there was no written language of their own. In order to sow the seeds of education in the midst of darkness missionaries tried their best to educate the people by translating, as already mentioned, the Bible into different tribal dialects. In a way it can be said that whatever changes that are seen to have taken place among the Nagas had their inception in the initial boost given by the foreign missionaries with a different lifestyle.

The effect of Christianity is also noticed in the observance and celebration of traditional festivals. In the pre-Christian Naga society the traditional festivals were performed with great eclat, amusement, social-get-together, eating and drinking to the maximum for a number of days. Rites and rituals were also performed religiously during the festive period. However, the performance of rites and rituals as per the dictates of tribal belief is fast dying out due to the influence of Christianity. Now the celebration of Christmas has gained predominancy over the traditional festivals. And as far as the religious affairs are concerned, it is the church that has come to play the most dominant role not only in bringing about religious consciousness among the people but also in deepening religious faith in accordance with what the Bible says for leading an ideal
Christian life. Aside from its religious role, the institution also acts as a function to make people conscious about their obligations in the society as a social being. From the social perspective, the church performs social activities like marriage, divorce and enforcement of moral laws. Above all, the church brings the spirit of oneness as people worship in the church as equal partners without making any difference between the rich and the poor, between the high and the low and between the literate and the illiterate. This kind of social mixing invariably creates a sense of collective social security and fosters uniformity among all sections of the people in the society.

Next as it is elsewhere is the impact of modern civilization though varying in degree in different regions on the socio-economic organization including the traditional family and household organization of the Nagas. It is more profound among the tribal groups like, Ao, Lotha, Angami, Sema, etc. whose homeland lies in the western and southwestern part of the State. Earlier for a successful working of the family organization, required full cooperation in their day to day life was easily available from the members of the family. But today such kind of cooperation or working together has become difficult since many of the family members leave their villages to work elsewhere. This inevitably puts burden on the family. Previously, it was the immediate relatives who used to come to the aid of such a family in
plight on the basis of reciprocity. But as the way of life is changing the importance of the clan and the mode of family cooperation is waning. This has undoubtedly given rise to the importance of nuclear family. And under such circumstances, the kinship relationship and obligations could no longer remain immune from perceptible modifications or changes. Persons employed elsewhere now find little time to visit neighbours and kinsmen in the village. Their personal relationship with the kinship group thus decreases in intensity to the extent that they cultivate relationship with their co-workers in different office establishments. This has naturally its psychological effect of diminishing the interpersonal and kinship relationship and obligations on the immediate family circle and kindred group. This, however, does not in any way mean that kinship obligations have been obliterated completely from the social surface of the people. When need arises kinsmen extend help and assistance under any circumstances. However, it needs to be noted that due to the impact of modernization which has definitely brought the people closer to the outside world, now the traditional social fabric of the people and their village life is undergoing changes. The era of near isolation imposed by the formidable physical compulsions and the traditional blood feuds is being replaced by one of wider and freer contact within a particular tribal group and outside the tribal territory.
Moreover most of the traditional forms of economic activities which were based on the principle of reciprocity between the groups of neighbours or kins are now losing their significance, particularly among the Aos, Lothas, Angamis, Semas, etc. who are more exposed to the outside world than the Konyaks, Phoms, Kheinmungans, Yimchungers, Chirr, Tikhir etc. in the north-east, central and extreme eastern part of the State. For instance, in the days of yore houses were constructed by the whole village community basing on the customary practice that everyone would get the same treatment when it was needed. All that the owner had to do on his part was to provide food and drinks to those who had come to help him in constructing the house. In fact, such a community participation was a way of life of the Nagas as of any other tribal groups in executing various economic activities such as hunting, fishing, etc. However, now-a-days the corporate responsibility or the community participation which used to be a prominent feature of the people is fast crumbling under the impact of modernization in Naga villages, especially in those located about the urban areas and in the areas of the tribal groups, as mentioned above. In this way the community approach towards life style is becoming atrophied and thereby everyone is becoming individualistic in one’s approach. The community labour which was an intrinsic part of the life of Nagas at a primary subsistence
cycle or the principle that worked against laziness and consolidated social relations is losing its charm and beauty.

When the socio-cultural life of the Nagas shows sign of changes under the strain of modernization and as a result of the wider scope of social interaction with the outsiders, nothing less can be expected in the more tangible aspects of their life which are more susceptible to the dynamics of change. The traditional dresses and customs are now fast giving way to the modern and western dresses though it cannot be denied that there are still people in the interior areas of the territories of Konyaks, Phoms, Yimchungers, Charga, Tikhir, Kheinmungans, Chirr, etc. who clothe themselves scantily in traditional way. Despite the severe competition posed by the machine-made products in this modern age Naga weavers are still active. However, with the growth of women's education many women who used to make clothes for their use are now being engaged in various jobs finding less time for weaving clothes. The detachment of women from their traditional practice of weaving as a result of the growth of educational consciousness and of the engagement in some other professions is again more perceptible among the Aos, Lothas, Semas, Angamis, etc. who are educationally way ahead of the tribal groups of Mon and Tuensang Districts. Even in the matter of food habit changes are being observed,
as already discussed earlier. Now in many areas people use dal, mustard oil apart from the items like meat, fish, chutney, boiled vegetables, etc. Besides, people are also found to have developed a close attachment towards the western style of singing. For this the influence of Christian songs which are mostly sung in western tunes cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, the traditional songs are only occasionally sung as and when the occasion demands particularly in time of celebrating traditional festivals. Thus, in almost every facet of Naga society there is change though lacking in uniformity and it undeniably puts one to say that the society as a whole is passing through a transitional period.

Though there is no gainsaying the fact that the Naga society as a whole is moving with the march of time and is going through the process of change from that of primitive to modern, there are widespread differences in the changes among the people in different parts of the State. As stated earlier, social groups like Konyak and Phom in the northeast, Kheinmingan, Tikhir, Chirr and Maykware in the eastern extremity, Chang, Yimchunger etc. in the central portion of the State are economically as well as socially less developed than the Aos, Lothas, Angamis, etc. in the western section of the State. The social surface of some remote and interior areas inhabited by the above mentioned tribal groups wears a markedly different look still bordering
on primitiveness. People are steeped in ignorance and this is clearly borne out by their unhygienic way of living, the way they keep their bodies almost unclothed, simple food habit, etc. while the literacy rate among them is at the rock-bottom as compared to that of the areas of other social groups like Aos, Lothas etc., the basic social amenities like schooling facilities, dispensaries, health centres, etc. are in no better condition in their areas. As a matter of fact, there are quite a number of villages in the circles like Pungro, Thonoknyu, Monyakshu, Champang, Chen, Phomching, etc. (Appendix XI) which miserably lack in social amenities. These villages are populated by Tikhirs, Chirrs and Maykwares and Kheinmungans and the Konyaks. All these realities once again point to the impress of environmental factors, particularly the physical one on the socio-economic development of the region. However, it needs to be reiterated that though the social groups of Kheinmingans, Konyaks, Tikhirs, Chirrs, Yimchungers, etc. are apparently backward from the point of view of modernity, their social fabric is relatively intact without being much dented by the process of modernization. Characteristics such as closely-knit family system, community participation, principle of reciprocity, etc. for which any tribal group was known before appear to be more pronounced among these tribal groups. The vestiges of tribal society found in less diluted form among them definitely help in understanding of and probing into the traditional Naga
society. In fact, the social milieu obtained among these groups in the extreme north-east and eastern part of the State serves as a flashback which depicts at least to some extent the traditional mode of life of the Nagas.

From the preceding it is observed that the changes that are being enacted on the social surface of Nagaland vary from one group to another. The variation in changes, as already mentioned, can be ascribed to the degree of exposure to the outside world and the differential impact of topographical nature on different areas. Obviously, places located on the way of oncoming civilization and at the same time less encumbered with formidable terrain appear to be more developed and advanced both economically and socially than those places in the far-flung areas characterised by lofty hill ranges. While the rural areas are not without the signs of changes fast social transformation is going on in the urban areas like Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, etc. As elsewhere, the urban society in the State stands in dead contrast to that of the rural areas in every aspect of life. It should also be pointed here that along with the process of transformation and modernization, the evils of modernization have also begun to raise their heads in the society. With the ever growing social enthrhipy people are becoming more and more materialistic - the corollary of which is corruption. The traits such as honesty, justice, loyalty, truthfulness, etc. for which the Nagas were
known only a few decades back are fast losing ground in the face of the onslaught of this materialistic world. Following the introduction of modern political system and the exposure to a different life style, social class based on material acquisition has now come into being in the society which was once free of class distinction. The so called elite people including politicians and high ranking bureaucrats are rolling in luxury, while the common people are groaning under the enormity of their amassment of wealth through dubious means. Besides, people's predilection for westernization has spawned social evils such as drug addiction, perversion, promiscuity, etc. particularly in the urban areas. Thus it can be mentioned that though keeping pace with the process of modernization has its own merits, in no way can it be said as a desirable one in every respect. It has its own demerits or drawbacks which once eat into the nerve of the society, can affect it adversely even to the extent of making it lose its own identity.

From the foregoing paras it becomes evident that though variations do exist in the degree of social changes from one group to the other, spectacular changes are inevitably taking place in the society. The problems of assimilating the new values in the context of the old ones are also being observed. However, it may be pointed out that many of the values, be they old or new, are vital and
active, and of immense significance for the development of the society as a whole and of the individual as well. Today the Naga society is struggling willy-nilly for its survival by retaining the old and incorporating the new values. At this juncture the most urgent task confronting the society is to tackle the problem with circumspection without falling a prey to the circumstances and the onslaught of the speedy currents of modern civilization. One should try to understand the implications of the traditional values and the modern ones as well; and the adjustment has to be made accordingly for the best interest of the people in their forward march towards attainment of social equality and justice plus an improvement in their standard of living.