PART I

PROBLEM AND REGIONAL BACKGROUND
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Social geographic studies are assuming great significance at present in the contemporary field of geography. It is obvious because without understanding the character of people and the social milieu no sphere of human life, be its development or anything else, could be meaningfully conceived of. It is more so in the case of the groups of people who are little known outside their own territorial realms. Nagaland presents such a case and it is in this backdrop a social geographic study of the Nagas is undertaken in the present work.

Situated as it is in the extreme eastern corner bordering Burma, Nagaland is one of the frontier States of Indian Union. Its physiography being an extension of the Himalayas, the entire region is characteristically hilly with only a few expanses of plains in the western
part adjoining the plains of Assam. Its altitude ranges from about 110 metres in the west to 3,840 metres in the extreme east at Saramati, the highest peak in the State. The indigenous people of the State are commonly known as 'Nagas', the term under which there are tribal groups like Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Chirr, Kheinmungan, Konyak, Lotha, Makware, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Tikhir and Zeliang occupying their own well-demarcated traditional territories. These groups have their own characteristics including the spoken dialect which make them distinguishable from one another. Thus the region has distinctiveness not only from its physical perspective but from its social as well.

The total population of the State as per 1981 census is 7,74,930 and its density is 47 persons per km². Both the growth and density of population exhibit wide spatial variations. Altitudewise distribution of population too shows uneven concentration in different levels. The Nagas, categorised as scheduled tribes, constitute about 84 per cent of the State's total population. The growth of population over the decades beginning from 1901 indicates that it has increased phenomenally during the last two decades. This steep rise of population is due largely to the continuous influx of people, especially from the neighbouring states. The number of migrants from outside the State accounts for nearly 9.58 per cent (as
per 1971 census) of the total State population. Internal or local migration particularly from rural to the urban centres has also been significantly high over the years.

The State being wholly rural in character has only a few urban centres. The settlements are mostly sited atop a hill or at the ridge of hilly ranges, though of late, settlements are sprouting even in the low lying areas in its western parts. The traditional abode of Konyaks in Mon District and Phoms, Yimchungers, Changs, Kheinmungans, Chirrs, etc. in Tuensang District is at a higher elevation than that of the Aos, Angamis, Lothas, Zeliangs, etc. who occupy the western and south-western part of the State. The size of the settlements is generally small with 61.48 per cent having less than 500 persons. Kohima village is the biggest, populated by 6,935 persons as per 1981 census. Nevertheless, the size of villages varies from one tribal group to the other. The most interesting and fascinating feature of the settlement is that each traditional Naga house, whichever tribal group it belongs to, reflects a close relationship with its ecology around. Spatial variations exist in the use of materials particularly for roofing and in the frontal decoration of the houses among the various groups, although the general design and structure of the houses do not differ much. The house with a sitting-out platform on piles normally consists of two rooms having different
functional characteristics. The types of cultivation and the cropping pattern prevalent in the State also show variations from one group to the other.

Unlike the most tribal areas of India the level of literacy in the State is quite high, i.e., 41.99 per cent, and it is only next to Mizoram amongst the seven States in the North East India. The disparity in male-female literacy is also not very high. However, the spatial variations in literacy are still staring with 59.96 per cent as the highest in Mokokchung District and 18.97 per cent as the lowest in Mon District. The former is the homeland of the Aos, whereas the latter is populated by the Konyaks. Among the different tribal groups Konyaks, Kheinmungans, Chirrs, Tikhirs are outstanding in respect of low literacy rate. The relatively high literacy in the region as a whole has its root in its being influenced by Christianity. For the Christian Missionaries who were mostly Americans took up the task to educate the people while propagating the Christianity to the Nagas. This is the reason why the Nagas are overwhelmingly Christians representing 80.21 per cent of the total population. The Hindus follow distantly with 14.36 per cent and the share of others is highly negligible. Remarkably enough, those who still profess animism constitute a good number constituting nearly 3.59 per cent of the total population. They are mostly Nagas who are found concentrated in the remote
areas in Mon and Tuensang districts.

So far the language of the Nagas is concerned there is no common language of their own. Each tribal group has its own distinctive spoken dialect. English has, therefore been adopted as the State Language which however, is spoken only by the upper crust of the educated Nagas as a link language among themselves. Nagamese (broken Assamese) on the other hand, is more popularly used by the people as their common language. In fact, it is the Nagamese (Assamese) which has taken deeper roots among the Nagas than any other languages. The speakers of languages specified in the eighth schedule of Indian Constitution form 7.32 per cent (as per 1971 census) of the total State population. Amongst the different linguistic groups, the Hindi speaking people represent 46.09 per cent of the total. They are followed by Bengali and Assamese speaking people, the respective percentages to the total being 22.69 and 17.35.

Characteristic of any tribal group the Nagas have their distinctive socio-cultural traits. As for instance, their food habit, household industry, marriage system, celebration of festivals, institution of morungs though becoming extinct, village organization, governance of the village mostly through democratic process, inheritance of property, status enjoyed by women, etc. are characteristic features of themselves. But it is worth noting that significant differences exist among themselves too. For
example, the spoken dialect differs from one group to another so also the traditional dresses and customs of each of the tribal groups. Besides, physical attributes like physique, height and complexion, cropping pattern, agricultural implements etc. show some degree of variation from one social group to the other.

As elsewhere in the rural areas of the country, the Nagas as a whole are keeping pace with the process of changes adopting the new values and at the same time losing grip on the tradition-bound practices. The impact of modernization is observed not only in the tangible aspects like dressing pattern, food habit, etc. but also in the observances of traditional rites and rituals. The embrace of Christianity by the people as their religion is highly responsible for the disappearance of most of the traditional values. However, it needs to be noted that the social changes taking place are in no way uniform throughout the land. Different tribal groups inhabiting different regions with varying environmental characteristics exhibit disuniformity in changes they have undergone. The changes seem to have occurred more perceptively among the Aos, Angamis, Lothas, Semas, etc. who are more advanced educationally and economically than their counterparts like Konyaks, Phoms, Yimchungers, Kheinmungan, Chirrs, etc. who are concentrated in the northeast and eastern part of the State. Again, in terms of the availability of social amenities like schooling facilities, health centre, etc. the
groups in the northeast and eastern part are in no better position than those particularly in the western portion bordering on Assam.

The present work is thus a study covering the attributes outlined above in the spatial context of Nagaland. It gives emphasis to the treatment of population characteristics as a background for the understanding of social structure of the people of the region. It includes an analysis of the various facets of social composition, component and characteristics of the people and the emergence of a new social landscape in Nagaland at present.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The basic objectives of the study are to outline the patterns of population characteristics and composition, patterns of social components and characteristics including settlement and house types, land use and cropping pattern, patterns of working force, literacy and educational development, religious and linguistic composition and tribal component. Moreover, it attempts to give a perspective of the social character of the people at a micro level and the peripheral view of the changes that the present Naga society is going through. The major questions of enquiry may be briefly stated as follows:
1. What is the reason behind the rapid growth of population in the State, especially during the last two decades?

2. To what extent have there been demographic changes in the State? Have they been affected by the outsiders?

3. In what way has the physical framework influenced the distribution and the density of population in the State?

4. What are the factors that have led to the migration of Nagas in recent years from their traditional highlands to the low lying areas in the west which were hitherto almost uninhabited?

5. To what extent does the settlement pattern differ among different social groups?

6. To what extent the traditional practice of shifting cultivation in the region is undergoing change?

7. In which social groups shifting of occupation from the primary to the tertiary through secondary is taking place at a relatively higher rate?

8. Why do the tribal groups like Konyak, Phom, Kheimagan, Chirr, Tikhir, Makware, etc. in the northeast and eastern part of the State have relatively lower literacy rate than the groups like Ao, Lotha, Angami, etc. in the western and southwestern part of the State?

9. What are the reasons for significant socio-cultural differences and also the existence of a multiplicity of
dialects among the Nagas?

10. Why are certain social groups moving ahead of others in respect of development and social changes?

1.3 Scope of the Work

The present study is mainly confined to the period 1971-1981, although it deals retrospectively with the changes in the population growth pattern from the beginning of the present century. The restriction to the above mentioned period has been due to a number of considerations. First, the relevant data for the study at the circle level are available only from 1971 onwards. Secondly, noticeable changes are observed in the various facets of life and economy of the State during the last twenty years than ever before. The changes have surely affected both demographic and social character of the people in the State.

The subject of social geography, as it stands today covers a wide area of study. Despite the fact that Nagaland offers a wide scope of study, the present work touches upon only certain aspects, as stated above. This has been so mainly due to the dearth of data on various aspects at the desired level. For the same reason, even many of the socio-economic data which would have thrown a light on the problems of and prospects for the people could not be referred to. By and large data used are from the secondary sources, i.e., census reports and statistical compilations. Moreover, the
field work undertaken by the researcher was brief and selective covering only those areas connected by transport network. In any case, with the available data from the secondary sources and on the basis of personal observations in the field every attempt is made in the study to make the work worthwhile both in length and in depth.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present work is an attempt to give a comprehensive view of social geographic aspects of Nagaland. It encompasses a number of issues that have regional as well as local significance. No doubt, in recent years a number of research works pertaining to political, historical and socio-cultural aspects of Nagaland have appeared in different forms. But so far none has taken up and done any work on the State from the socio-geographic point of view to analyse the patterns of population characteristics, social components and composition and the social character as a whole. Hence, the present study which aims at analysing these aspects will surely provide an insight into the understanding of the real situation of the people in the spatial context. This, in turn will definitely serve as a prerequisite for taking up any socio-economic development measure for the State. Academically also, the work will be a useful one providing itself as a springboard for launching further and deeper research into the land which still gives ample scope for research in different areas of life. Moreover, this will undoubtedly help both the
Researchers and the general readers in acquiring a better knowledge about the region which is inhabited by a number of tribal groups, little known to the outside world. Thus the present study will fill in a gap in the field of knowledge about the region and enhance the conceptual basis of the field of social geography. Further, it will be useful for those who are at the helm of affairs in structuring and streamlining the programmes and schemes for the all-round development of the region.

1.5 Procedure and Source of Data

Secondary information available from the District Census Handbooks and State Government publications and reports on various aspects of Nagaland form the data base for the present study. Data thus collected from different sources have been checked and examined at different levels, such as the State, the districts and the circles. The processed data have been represented wherever necessary by the cartographic techniques for the identification of spatial patterns of different aspects of the study. Thus it can be mentioned that the primary steps in methodology consist of collection of relevant data at various spatial levels, their collating and processing, description, and interpretation of the patterns identified. Simple mathematical techniques including population projection method and sex-disparity measure have also been used for identifying
and explaining the patterns. Moreover, the field study covering six villages of different tribal groups has been carried out on the basis of their population, size, location in terms of altitude and accessibility and the social character of the major groups of the region. At least 20 households from each of the villages were interviewed and asked a criss-cross of questions related to the general framework of the present study. The familiarity with the region by virtue of being hailed from it has been an added advantage to the researcher to understand the various facets of the study area in proper perspective.

(a) Basic Areal Unit of Study: Most of the analytical work has been carried out at the circle level, the smallest administrative unit in the State in order to understand the spatial variations of the various aspects at the micro level. Moreover, data of the circles represent the units of the rural areas and hence they give a clear picture of the rural character of the region. However, data of the higher administrative unit or of the State have also been used in a number of cases while making comparative study with the neighbouring States.

(b) Cartographic Techniques: As already mentioned, maps and diagrams constitute an essential form of presentation of a number of phenomena of this study. However, it is worth mentioning here that as the mapping at the circle
level turns out to be inconvenient, it has been presented at
the district level. All the maps are shown in black and
white shade keeping in view the convenience and economy of
their preparation.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The present work is organised in ten chapters
including the present one where the problem, methods and
plan of chapters are presented. Chapter II deals with the
review of literature on various aspects that fall within the
purview of social geography. This serves to provide a
theoretical background towards formulating ideas on the theme
of the present work. In the chapter III the geographical
setting including economic scene and transport and communica-
tion is discussed. Here the various physical aspects have
been treated in the light of their bearing on the social
groups of the region. The chapter IV is devoted to the
description of the historical background of the study region.
The process of peopling of the region and the study of the
people in the historical perspective are included in the
chapter. The introductory part of the thesis thus consists
of these first four chapters. The analytical part which
begins with the chapter V includes an analysis of the growth,
distribution and density of population, migration, sex ratio
and age structure of the people. The chapter VI is devoted
to the treatment of the patterns of social components and
characteristics including settlement and house types, land-use and cropping pattern, working force and literacy and educational level of the people in the study area. The chapter VII touches upon the patterns of social composition in which treatments of tribal component and traits, and religious and linguistic composition are covered. The case study of six villages focusing on the population characteristics and the social character in each of the villages is dealt with in the chapter VIII. Departing marginally from the above, the chapter IX treats briefly the changes that are being observed in the present social landscape of Nagaland. The chapter X, the last one in the third part summarises the various aspects of the work and synthesises the major findings derived at from the study. It also offers certain suggestions which may bear some relevance for the improvement of the social milieu of the region.