CHAPTER IV

LAND AND PEOPLE

The kingdom of Thailand is situated between the equator and tropic of cancer, between 5° and 27° North latitude and between 97° and 160° East longitude and serving as a land bond between the Pacific and Indian oceans. Thailand is one of the group of countries which are together called South-East Asian (ASEAN) countries. Thailand lies to the east of Myanmar. A part of Myanmar and a part of Laos form the northern boundary of Thailand, the rest of Laos, Kampuchea and the Gulf of Thailand/Gulf of Siam form its eastern boundary; a part of Myanmar and the Andaman sea are on its western side; and Malaysia lies to the south of the long Thai isthmus.

Thailand was known to the world as ‘Siam’ until an official proclamation of May 11, 1949, changed the name of the country to "Thailand" which means "Land of the Free" (Office of the Prime minister 1995).

Climate: Lying between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer, Thailand is enriched with a tropical climate, receiving two major seasonal monsoon: south-western winds, which cause abundant rain throughout the country especially along the season coast lines of the South.

Thailand enjoys three major seasons: the rainy season (May-October), the cool season (November-February), and the hot season (February-May). The average temperature throughout the year is 23.7 - 32.5 C. and the annual average rainfall is approximately 1,500 millimetres.
**Language spoken:** The official national language, spoken by almost 100 percent of the population, is Thai. It is a tonal language, uninflected, and predominantly monosyllabic. Most polysyllabic words in the vocabulary have been borrowed, mainly from Khmer, Pali or Sanskrit. Dialects are spoken in rural areas. Other languages are Chinese and Malay. English, a mandatory subject in public schools, is widely spoken and understood, particularly in and other major cities.

The total population of Thailand (31 December, 1995) is 61,460,382. About 81 percent of the population live in rural areas. The population growth rate is 1.03 percent per annum and population density averages 113 persons per square kilometre. A little more than 94 percent of the population are Buddhists, about 4 percent are Muslims and the rest (about 2 percent) are Christians and others.

Thailand is a democratic country. The Constitution is the supreme law of the state. According to the constitution, the King is the Head of the state. All three powers: executive, legislative and judiciary, have to be exercised in his name. Executive one is handled by the Government, headed by the elected Prime Minister who is the head of the political party that gets a majority in the general election. Normally, the term of the Government is for four years.

At present Thailand is administratively divided into 76 units which are called Provinces (except Bangkok, being called ‘Bangkok Metropolis’). Each province is further divided into districts, sub-districts and villages. Thailand is divided into the four natural regions:

1. The North region is a mountainous region comprising natural forest, vridges and deep, narrow, alluvial valleys.
2. The Central plain, the basis of the Chao Phraya River, is a lush, fertile valley. It is the richest and most extensive rice producing area in the country and has often been called the ‘Rice Bowl of Asia’, Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, is located in this region.

3. The Northeast region, or the Korat plateau, is an arid region characterized by a rolling surface and undulating hills. Harsh climate conditions often result in this region being subjected to floods and droughts.

4. The South region is hilly to mountainous. This region is the centre for the production of rubber and cultivation of other tropical crops.

**Northeast region:**

My area of fieldwork comes under the Northeast region and hence is discussed in detail as under:

The northeast, the largest region of the Thai Kingdom, is a rolling semi-arid plateau which also contains various valuable minerals. Most of population of the northeast called themselves ‘Thai-l-San’ (ISan: pronounced Ee-san) which mean the northeasterners, and ‘Phak-l-San’ for the northeast region. The northeasterners speak *Thai-lao* (Thai-l-San), and the rest speak *Yo, So, Phu, Seak, Khmer, Kui (Soai)*, etc. which are the dialects of some minority group in Burirum, Surin, Sisaket, Nakhonpanom, Sakonakhon and Kalasin provinces.

Administratively, the northeast region is partitioned into nineteen provinces, namely Loei, Udonthani, Nangkhai, Sakonakhon, Nakhonphanoam, Kalasin, Khankean, Chaiyaphum, Mahasakham, Roi-et, Nakhonrajchasima, Burirum, Surin, Yasothon, Ubonratchathani, Mukdahan, Nongbourney, Amnadchareod and Sisaket.
Map-11

Map of Sisaket Province

The research area where the study was conducted is located in Sisaket province.

**Sisaket province** : Sisaket is one of the nineteen provinces in the northeast region of Thailand, about 503 kilometers from Bangkok by route. The area is 8,839.97 Sq. Kms., about 9.92 per cent of total area of northeast. The population on November 30, 2001 was 1,443,766 persons (Sisaket Education Office 2001). Sisaket borders with Roi-et province on the North, Ubonratchatanee province on the East, Surin Province on the West and Phanom Dong-Rek Ranges and Kampuchea (Cambodia) on the South.

Sisaket province is divided into 22 districts, namely Muang-Sisaket, Uthumponpisia, Rasrislia, Yangchumnoi, Kantrarom, Kantralak, Nonkoon, Benchalak, Khun-Harn, Khu-Khan, Phrang-Ku, Phuseing, Huataptan, Wanghin, Phayu, Phyboung, Sriratana, Phosrisuwan, Boung - Boon, Nam-klearg, Muang- Jan, and Silalad. At present the province has 206 sub - districts (tambons) and 2,519 villages.

Though the great majority of Thailand’s 50 million people are ethnically Thai and Buddhist, the country has a substantial number of minority groups who have historically lived together in harmony. Of these the Chinese are perhaps the most numerous, particularly in urban areas, though they have become so thoroughly assimilated it would be difficult to isolate them as a distinct group. Similarly, while there are Laos and Khmer groups in the northeast and west, nearly all regard themselves as Thai, culturally as well as by nationality. More clearly defined are the Muslims, who are mainly concentrated in the southern provinces, and assorted hilltribes who live in the far north; there are also sizeable communities of Hindus and Sikhs in large cities like Bangkok.
Photograph — I

Whatever the layout of a village may be, home for villagers is usually a simpler wooden house on stilts with a steeply sloping roof.

Photograph — II

A Thai family always extends beyond the nucleus of Parents and their offspring. Here, in a rural household, mother, aunt and daughters enjoy themselves.
Thai Society: The communities in the Sisaket province are organised on the basis of clan or village, and the social relations are determined by kinship and locality. The society is divided into distinct classes occupying distinct social status. The Chiefs occupy the highest position. The monks though second to the chiefs in rank and position, are very influential and the people including the chiefs respect them. The third is the class of government officials, and the fourth is the class of free men who form the bulk of the population. The lowest strata of social structure is formed by the slave-like people and servants of the past.

Socially the Thais, to a certain extent, remain a village centred people. The word baan or huen in Thai language means the village, and the larger centres of population are ruled by a chief who is called muang. They are public-minded people in so far as their village is concerned.

It can be said that the life style of the north eastern is marked by the simplicity of the society. Usually, each village consists of a monastery (wat), probably at the east end of the housing area, a sala klang baan (small meeting hall for government and village), and perhaps a few stories, most of them under their own raised houses.

The traditional social values can be seen in their unique form at the village level. It is at the village level that the extended family structure of Thai social organisation is tempered by religious influences and prevailing social concerns to generate the values and attitudes shared nationwide.

Buddhism account for much of the Thai world-view. For example, the commonly expressed mai pen rai (never mind, it doesn’t matter) when something unfortunate occurs, springs from the feeling that one must
gracefully submit to external forces beyond one’s control such as the effects of past *karma*.

Although highly individualistic, resisting regimentation, Thai nevertheless realise that inner freedom is best preserved in an emotionally and physically stable environment. Therefore, they believe, social harmony is best maintained by avoiding any unnecessary friction or turbulence in their contacts with others. Accordingly, the strong Thai feeling of *kreng-chai* means an extreme reluctance to impose on anyone or disturb his personal equilibrium by direct criticism, challenge or confrontation. In general, people will do their utmost to avoid personal conflicts.

Outward expressions of anger are also regarded as dangerous to social harmony and obvious signs of ignorance, crudity and immaturity. Indeed, during normal social intercourse, strong public displays of dismay, despair, displeasure, disapproval or enthusiasm are frowned upon. Accordingly, the person who is serenely indifferent *chaei choei* will be respected for what is considered an important virtue.

Within such a behaviour from work Thais share very definite views on what constitutes friendship and enjoyment. Sincere friendship among Thais is extremely important. The language is rich in intense expressions which reflects the degree of involvement and willing self-sacrifice. Such relationships entail particularly among men. A *phuon tai*, literally meaning ‘death friend’, is a companion for whom it would be an honour to die. Should a friend become involved in difficulties, his friend feels obliged to assist him, regardless of the danger to himself, because *tong chuai phoun* (one must help one’s friend). This requirement is a sensitive point of honour (Boonyong 1987).
On the level of acquaintanceship, politeness predominates. When greeting people, Thais will usually show their concern for other health by remarking how *thin* or *fat* he or she has become. The remark is intended as a gesture of friendship.

A quality valued by Thais in all interpersonal relationship is *namchai* ‘water of the heart’ – an untranslatable concept much like Shakespeare’s ‘the mind of human kindness’. A stranger visiting a village will seldom be seen as an intruder and a subject for suspicion and distrust. Much more likely, the villagers will have the *namchai* to take him in, feed him, offer him a bed in one of their homes, and generally treat him as a friend.

The tendency to avoid unhappy or emotionally charged situations and the anxieties of preparing for the future or lamenting the past causes the Thai to live mostly in the present, to enjoy above all the passing moment. They rate highly the desire and ability to have a good time *sanuk*. Attending a temple festival or visiting a fair is *sanuk*; chatting with neighbours and friends – a very popular past time in Thailand. All observers have described Thais as easy going, hospitable, carefree, and as having a delightful sense of humour.

Another cohesive force in Thai society is a sense of sincere personal concern for even casual acquaintances. Generally, Thais are eager to learn about others private affairs and have no inhibitions about asking personal questions. This is done not to embarrass people or gather stories for gossip but is actually an authentic expression of friendly interest.

**Individual life cycle**: A Thai baby officially becomes ‘someone’ after its name is chosen—frequently by the village about and entered in the village head’s records. Soon after birth the child will be given a nickname,
Photograph –III

Villagers enjoy a folk entertainment

Photograph –IV

Folk dance in rural of Thailand
nearly always of one syllable. Intimates will continue to call him or her by this nickname for the rest of his life and may indeed have to think for a while to remember the proper name.

Childhood is a carefree, cosseted time. By the age of four, children regularly meet to play beyond the family compound, with boys and girls generally segregating and roaming freely throughout the village. Boys play make-believe games, fly kites, plow imaginary fields, and hunt insects and harmless reptiles. Girls nurse make shift dolls, ‘sell’ mud-pies in make believe markets, play games emulating their mothers, and look after younger brothers and sisters.

Gradually the children are drawn into work patterns. Around eight years of age, girls give increasing help with household chores and boys assume greater responsibilities such as feeding domestic animals and guarding the family buffalo as it grazes or wallows.

Children attend the government village school to be taught from a standard nationwide curriculum. They acquire varying degrees of literacy and study, Buddhist ethics and Thai history. All receive a comprehensive education and by coming into contact with neighbouring villages’ children and visiting the provincial capital on school trips they enjoy a broadening of social experience.

Having assumed ever increasing workloads and responsibilities, youths of 15 and 16 are already regarded as fully mature adult labourers. Between graduation from school and marriage at around 20, most village males go into the monastery, usually for the duration of one rainy season, in order to make merit for themselves and their parents; in some areas a
The Bang Fai or Rocket Festival is based on the arid soil of the Northeast.

*Phi Ta Khon festival*
man who has never been a monk is avoided by marriageable girls, who regard him as a *khondip*, literally an ‘unripe person’.

The village girl’s entrance into adolescence is a gentle one. Courtship continued initially to communal work groups during planting and harvesting and at monastery-centred festivals and activities. There may be extensive banter between boys and girls but, individually, young people tend to be shy and ‘whirlwind courtships’ are exceedingly rare. Emotional relationships mature slowly and customarily involve chaperoned meetings at the girl’s house.

There are also a series of household ceremonies, some of which have religious overtones, such as death and the ordination of a son as a monk, as some less apparently religious, such as births and weddings. On some of these occasions, monks and/or neighbours from the home and nearby villages will be invited, and the latter may reciprocate with cash presents.

**Dress** : Everyday village dress is simple. Men generally wear shorts, a simple shirt, and their versatile *phakhaoma* – a checkered rectangle of cloth loosely worn around the waist which, at a moment’s notice, can serve as a turban for protection against the sun, a loincloth to preserve modesty during public bathing, a sweat absorbing towel, or a hammock.

Women wear the *phasing* (the Thai version of the *sarong*) and a simple blouse or bodice. Children wear similar clothing as their parents except when they are dressed in their school uniforms.

**Food habits** : The ideal traditional Thai meal aims at being a harmonious blend of spicy, subtle, sweet, and sour and is meant to be appealing to eye, nose, and palate. A large central bowl of rice may be accompanied by a clear soup (perhaps bitter melons stuffed with minced pork), a steamed dish
(mussels in curry sauce), a fried dish (fish with ginger), a hot salad (sliced beef on a bed of greens with chilies, onions, mint, lemon juice, and more chilies) and a variety of sauces and condiments, of which the most essential is nam pla (fermented fish sauce), into which food can be dipped. This is normally followed by a sweet dessert (bananas coated with sugared coconut and deep fried, for example, and finally, fresh fruit (such as mangoes, durian, papaya, jackfruit, watermelon, and many more) of which Thailand boasts a year round supply.

Food varies from region to region, with modifications of standard dishes and also local specialties. In Chiang Mai, for example, the food is generally milder than that of the central region; name, a spicy pork sausage, is a northern delicacy.

Northeastern food tends to be very spicy, with explosive salads and special broiled, minced meat dishes mined with miniature, high-voltage green chilies. Glutinous rice is more popular in this region than steamed rice and exotic dishes like fried ants and grasshoppers and frog curry are not uncommon.

**Family**: The main function of the family is its economic pursuit and it plays a dominant role as an agent of socialisation and social control over its members. Family may be defined as “a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults (Murdock 1965).

Perhaps the best way to comprehend Thai social values is to focus on its basic unit, the family, and in particular the rural family in its typical
Village children attend government schools where a standard curriculum is used nationwide.

Thai children usually accompany their grandparents to the wat to take care of them and to listen to the monks’ teaching.
village setting. Generally this will be an extended family, with several
generations living under one roof, or at least under several roofs within the
same compound, and it is here that the Thai child learns the codes of
behaviour that would guide him throughout much of his later life, whether
it is spent in the village or beyond.

The family is the base for social organisation in Thailand. It
commands individual’s primary values, loyalties and associations. The
rural family is characterized by leniency, and informality, by its
orientation toward contemporary relation or relatives, and by movement
of new nuclear families from its shelter to independent units. In urban
society the aristocratic families have always been characterized by pride
of ancestry and wealth and they are imitated in this aspects by the
elite. Middle and lower-class families are less easily differentiated
from those of rural Thailand (Wendwell, 1958).

The nature and type of families may differ between different
cultures such as nuclear and extended family. The families in Sisaket
province are mostly nuclear families consisting of a husband, a wife,
and their unmarried children.

In Sisaket province, a village home is usually a simple wooden
house raised on posts, domestic animals like buffaloes, pigs, and chickens
are kept below, and the family lives above, often in a single room. There is
little privacy, though this is not as highly regarded as in western countries,
and the communal life style instills a strong sense of social harmony in
which tact, compromise, and tolerance are essential. The father is regarded
as the leader, but the mother also plays a significant role, particularly in
the family finances.
Marriage: Marriage which one used to be instrumental in cementing existing relations or force new alliances among known circles is now found to bring together persons who are otherwise strangers to one another as to their family background, upbringing. In the rural setup, there is more freedom now than formerly for young people to marry a person of their choice but it still remains a family arrangement. Parents act as intermediaries to help them to come closer. In making decision on the suitability of marriage proposal, parents on both sides consider their respective social standing and status.

In matters concerning the family of junior members of the ménage, it is usual for the advice of the older members to be sought and followed. Power in the kinship group tends towards the oldest and richest number. Where kin live with the family, the head of the family remains the arbiter, subject, or course, to his duty of respect or those older than he.

Most young people select their own marriage partners. Rarely is parental disapproval voiced since marriage often take place between families within the same village, further strengthening and widening communal ties. A marriage is sometimes presented as a fait accompli by children who work in towns or cities and are thus beyond parental control. In many parts of the country it is the custom for the groom to move in with the bride’s family, thus providing extra labour for the family fields and also avoiding friction between mother and daughter-in-law.

Early in the morning, in accordance with traditional Thai belief that married life should begin with merit-making, the bride and groom feed village monks and present them with small gifts. In return, the monks bless the couple and the house or room where they will live.
The village marriage ceremony bestows no official validity on their union but is merely a public proclamation that the two people will live together as man and wife. The young couple’s wrists are ceremoniously bound together in the presence of village elders and they are led to the marriage chamber as guests feast, drink, sing and dance. Later, their marriage is officially registered at the district office and becomes a fact of law. Daily tasks are generally divided equally between husband and wife. Women normally do the household chores, but they work in the fields during planting and harvesting. Men perform heavy tasks and fieldwork, fetch water, and occasionally clean their own clothes. Thai village men are often very good cooks and sometimes help prepare the food for festivals.

After marriage, every couple eagerly awaits the birth of its first child, which usually comes during the first year. Children have a high position in rural and cultural values, since there is strength in numbers, a vital sense of continuity is ensured, and many hands make farming activities easier. Often there exists an unspoken preference for boys since they alone may be ordained as priests to gain merit for themselves and their parents, but no love is withheld if the child proves to be a girl.

**Kinship**: At Thai rural family is first a kinship group where each member has his status according to his position as a senior or junior or on the mother's or father's side. The family as a kinship group, there are number of a households haring children and their spouses, aunts, uncles and grandparents.

In matters concerning the family of junior members of the manage, it is usual for advice of the older members to be sought and followed. Power is the kinship group tends towards the oldest and richest member. Where
kin live with the family, the head of the family remains the arbiter, subject, of course, to his duty of respect for those older than he.

The kinship group with each member defined according to his position as a senior or junior or on the mother’s or father’s side. Thus, the word for older brother of the father or mother is *loong*. But the younger brother or sister of the father is *ah*, and of the mother *nah*. The in-law status even of uncles and aunts by marriage is carried in their titles. The older member, called *ah* or *phi*, accepts and receives formal respect and service from the younger *nong* and the father’s side ranks above the mother’s.

It is usual for the supernumeraries to call the head of the household *pow* (father) and the other members of the family are called *ay*, *phi* or *nong*. In return for this partial absorption into the family, they may be expected to do customary things for the head of the household to support all. This house-sharing is characteristic of both rural and urban areas.

The titles of the Sisaket province people are meaningful to indicate sex and age, similar to the other region, *nai* is the title used before the name of the man who is over 15 year old. *dek-chai* is the title of a boy who is under 15 years old. The title of a Thai 1-san girl is *deck-ying*, since her birth up to the age of 15 years. When she is over 15 years old, the title *nang saaw* is changed to *nang*. This is to indicate that marital status, single or married. *phu saaw* is for a young woman. Some people call a young man *chow baaw* and a young woman *chow saaw*. Actually most people use the words *chow baaw* meaning groom, and *chow saaw* meaning bride.
Economic organisation: The economic condition in the Sisaket province always has been basically agricultural and self-sufficient in every aspect of life, including food, implements, and item for daily use. The main income comes from agriculture: rice, maize, red-onion, garlic and fruits. Agricultural production is the basis and fundamental sufficient economic fact of the province, and this the centres on rice, fruits and vegetables. In addition to farming, other occupations bring income.

Agriculture in Sisaket province depends exclusively on rainfall; there are some irrigation reservoirs and the Moon river. Crop cultivation depends almost entirely on human labour, the main source of which is domestic unit or household. Hired labour and traditional work group (long khack) are only supplementary. Use of machine, such as a tractor, in crop cultivation is minimal even among rich farmers. Agricultural land is the most precious household property, and hence the last thing that a household can lose, no matter by what means. Occupations, other than agriculture, are of secondary importance. These include trade, transportation and carpentry which are confined to a minority of the villagers.

Despite the constant threats from nature, the North-eastern people in this province seem to be carefree and happy. Many work from hand to mouth. Farming and cattle raising are the main occupations. Their main crops are sticky rice, corn, tapioca, and cotton. During their spare time the women weave silk and cotton cloth; while rattan and bamboo works are favourite pass time of the village men. Frogs, lizards, field crabs and various leaves compose a major part of the villagers’ diet.

The people in Sisaket province love peace and are satisfied with what they possess. They are afraid of doing bad things. In general, they are
Buffaloes are usually taken care of by young village boys to help their hard-working parents. While their animals are grazing, they enjoy various...
gentle and friendly. They live on growing rice and cotton and catching fishes. They use fishing nets, fishing rods, and other fishing tools made of bamboo. They plant and fish just for eating in the family. They grow cotton and dyewood. They weave and dye cotton for use in the family. They eat sticky rice with preserved fish *pha-daek*, crabs, shrimps, bamboo shoots, and some vegetables found in the near by forest. Sometimes they buy food from the market. Most of their products are for eating and use in the family. If they have more than enough, they sell their products. Most of them are poor, but most of them have their own houses and rice fields. They still use water from the wells. In the rainy season they use rain water for consuming (Boonyong 1987).

Most families come close to being self-sufficient economic units. They grow their own food which consists mainly of glutinous rice. Some build their own homes, and make their own implements. Cloth, however, for making their simple garments is bought, and stitched at home.

The women and children of the family help equally in caring for the water-buffaloes, planting and transplanting rice, harvesting and threshing. In spare time, all members of the family may hire themselves out for farm work elsewhere in their locality. The women and girls of the family may spend the morning at the local market trying to sell a basket of products got from the farm.

Even at a tender age the children are given household chores to do, such as preparing *attap* for roofing, gathering coconuts, fishing, hunting for crabs or shell fish- whatever is within the range of their physical power.
Poor or rich, they work and help one another at the time of need and enjoy socially and aesthetically together. In such circumstances of life, money is valueless. And in fact there is very little currency in calculation because the people invest their wealth in arable land, oxen and buffaloes, implement and tools. When money becomes currency the rich people extend all financial help to the poor and the latter supply physical labour. An important tradition in the provinces and districts is that every village is involved in labour exchange (long khaek), principally used during times of transplanting and harvesting rice. Farmers are helped by relatives and neighbours in these tasks, and they in turn provide a meal during the day of work, and are obliged to reciprocate with their own labour for the same type of task. Usually, a village has several of these groups, within which labour is exchanged.

Labour exchange is now much less common, partly because of upland cropping, which requires a much tighter scheduling of labour and partly because money is the accepted medium of exchange in the districts, provinces.

Community labour was very important in the past. Farmers worked during the dry season for the village in the construction of or maintenance of roads, ditches, wells, bridges, irrigation system, schools etc. But this practice is also declining, particularly under the influence of the government’s rural work programme whereby farmers, their spouses, and dependents, are hired on wages to carry out this work. The value of devotion has been changing.
Photograph -X

Thai food is not only spicy but also colourful decorated with delicate vegetable carving
Photograph – XI

Girls at play

Photograph – XII

An elder pours sacred onto the bride and groom’s hands to bless the couple in a local wedding ceremony.
Political organization: Thailand enjoys a democracy with a constitutional Monarch as the Head of state. As in other free world democracies, sovereignty belong to the people. All Thais, rich or poor, rural or urban possess this power.

At present, Sisaket province is administered by an appointed governor. The appointment, promotion, demotion, or transfer of the provincial governor and the district (amphoe) head is under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. Apart from the province (changwat) governor and the district head, there are also officials from other ministries stationed in every province and district administration. These are directly under the control of the central government in Bangkok. However, the leaders at the lower levels, sub-districts (tambon) and village (moo baan), are popularly elected. Village heads in a sub-district then can be the candidates for the sub-district head or kamnan who is also popularly elected. Both sub-district and village head men may be, depending on personal characteristics, influential people in the daily lives of the people in rural areas. Both leaders are not civil servants, but are entitled to wear uniforms and be paid a small honorarium for their services.

The heads of the sub-districts called kamnan and the heads of the villages called phu-yai-baan can be considered quasiagents of the central government. They are responsible for transmitting to the people the directions of the government as handed down through the chain of command, and responding upwards with specific information and answers to questions. Their functions include the supervision of law and order in the sub-district or village, the supervision of agricultural projects, participation in ceremonial duties, recording vital statistics, tax collection, and ex-officio
The village headman regularly delivers the government’s policy to his villagers, and leads the discussion to find a solution to local problem.

Larger social groups within the village are formed spontaneously to help one another in various activities which a single family could not manage unassisted.
membership on the sub-district council. They try to maintain peace and happiness of their sub-districts or village projects, and communicating with the district officials. Farmers’ Association, Voluntarily Security Forces, etc. have also been recently established in the villages. Due to these developments the lives of kamnan (sub-district heads) and phu-yai-baan (headmen) have become increasingly busy and filled with government directed tasks (Office of the Prime Minister 1997).

Probably the most important decisions at the village level are those concerning the management of communal resources. For each farm household and farm resources system, access to village level resources and the need to meet demands of the village level social system may critically constrain farmers decision making. For example, access to communal grazing lands maybe a key factor in determining size of livestock herd raised by individual families. Also village norms about communal sharing of available water during the dry season may limit individual opportunity for small scale irrigation activity.

**Religion**: Buddhism is still the state religion of Thailand. The influences of Buddhism can be seen in all aspects of the Thai life and culture. At home, people keep worshipping the statue of Buddha of various sizes placed on small altar tables. While travelling, they wear small Buddha images around their necks as objects of veneration and recollection or as amulets for adornment and protection. Every turn of life practically cannot do without Buddhist ceremony or observance in some way or the other. The birth, marriage, death and many other occasions of an individual as well as state ceremonies often require some monks (Bhikkhus) to take part in them by changing or by delivering a sermon or by some other methods.
The Hinayana sect of Buddhism is only one school practised by Thai in the whole country. There are 99.5 per cent of Thais in Sisaket province who follow Hinayana sect of Buddhism.

The Sisaket province has 242 Buddhist monasteries, usually located on village outskirt. The people in various villages have encouraged and supported Buddhism by building and maintaining monasteries by providing the monks with material necessities and facilities for performing religious duties, by patronizing their educational activities such as the Buddhist Councils for revising the Tripitaka and having the scriptures translated into Thai.

The Buddhist brotherhood is composed of four assemblies of Buddhists namely monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Monks and nuns form the monastic section while laymen and laywomen form the lay section. The two sections follow the path of the Buddha at different levels. The monks are more devoted to spiritual development than the laymen. To minimize personal cares and worries, they shave their heads, wear only three yellow robes and possess only a few necessary requisites. They depend on the laymen for material necessities such as food, clothing, lodging, and medicine, and give them spiritual advice and guidance in return.

There are usually a number of novices. They shave their heads and wear yellow robes as monks. They call themselves san-ma-nen, most of them live, with the monks in the monasteries. In some monasteries there may also be a number of white robed women who also shave their heads and women are devotees living in the separate section of the monastery and call themselves mae chi or nuns. sam-ma-nen or novices respect in the ten
principles known as *dasa shila* or *sin-sip*. But *mae chi* or nuns respect in the eight principles known as *Ashta shila* or *sin-paed* respectively. But the monks have to respect in 227 principles (Boonyong 1987).

Most of the younger monks are students. Elder monks work as teachers on religious and some secular subjects, as meditation-masters and practitioners as preachers, and as ecclesiastical administrators, and sometimes as counsellors of the villagers, especially on spiritual matters. All the novices are students under the guidance and guardianship of the monks. The younger monks and the novices are given instruction in reading, writing and simple arithmetic as well as in religion and morals. Pali and Sanskrit languages are recognised as classical languages. A large number of Thai words are derived from Pali and Sanskrit. Most of the public and government schools are still housed in monastery buildings or located in the compounds of monasteries.

Besides the monks, novices and nuns, there are a large number of temple boys or monastery boys. These boys, including many young men, who live under the guardianship of the monks, serving as their attendants, and use the monasteries as dormitories to live in while attending primary schools, secondary schools and universities.

It is usually the villagers themselves who build the monastery for their own community. They feel themselves belonging to their community. The village monastery serves as the centre of social life and activities of the Buddhist holy days, such as *Magha Bucha Day*, *Visakha Bucha Day*, *Asalha Bucha Day*, *Khao Phansa Day* and *Ok Phansa Day*, temple fairs and merit-making ceremonies. The villagers also invite monks to chant the Sutras and protective formulas for their blessing and protection in the
household rites such as house-warmings, birthday celebrations and weddings, and especially to conduct funeral rites and memorial services for the benefit of the deceased. The villagers also feel very close to monks in local monasteries as the monks are in daily contacts with them and are constantly drawn into their problems, both secular and spiritual.

Many times during the year they hold and attend festivals at the monastery. Occasionally, they go on a pilgrimage to some favourite shrines located in a remote place.

It has been traditional for every monastery to arrange for a delivering of the sermon four times a month. This is done on Buddhist holy days, called *wan phra*, calculated from the lunar calendar, which fall on the full-moon days, the half-moon days (of the waxing moon and the waning moon) and the day before the new moon day.

The activities that the monks and the novices do every day in the early morning is to go out of the monastery and walk along the streets to receive the offerings from the villagers who wait in front of their houses to offer their offerings: cooked food, fruits, sweet, etc.

It is noticed that the religious place of Buddhism of North-eastern region, especially in every provinces and, districts, a typical monastery contains at least two types of building: living quarters for monks, or dormitories, and an *ubosatha hall* (or *bot*) the main chapel in which the monks perform ecclesiastical acts and ceremonies with its multi-tiled roof, contains the temple’s major Buddha image and it is the site of major ceremonies such as ordinations (Kambhao 1995).

Besides sustaining a monastic community, the temple has traditionally served many other purposes-as the villager hostelry, a village
news, employment and information agency, a school, hospital, dispensary and community centre - to give it a vital role in Thai society. Traditionally rural society is known for its peculiar folk beliefs and supernatural beings which play a significant role in their daily lives. The rural people in Sisaket believe in a certain kind of inanimate creations of nature such as mountains, rivers and land are guarded by a guardian spirit or deity, who shall appear and be treated with respect by them.

In most villages of Sisaket province today there is prevalence of the worship of spirits and often supernatural entities by people who at the same time hold firmly to the Buddhist faith. This worship of spirits is a subject of great interest not only in itself but its relationship with the lives of the people.

In general, the Sisaket people provinces are gentle and satisfied with what they have. They sell some of their products. They believe in spirits and appease spirits every year that is called phi. Other customs are also practised regularly such as wedding ceremony, death ceremony and religious ceremonies. They believe in certain pious and good days: days which are good and are not good for doing things.

The most of people in village of Sisaket province are Buddhists. There is a temple in every village. They practise their religious ceremonies and festivals regularly, such as *wan khaw phansa* (the Buddhist Lent), *won ok phasa* (the end of the Buddhist lent) *song-kran* (the old Thai New Year’s day which falls between April 13 and April 15). They believe that good deeds will lead them to success and happy lives.

However, the processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, modernisation, westernisation, consumerism, etc., generated an altogether a
new socio-political, economic and psychological ethos in society. Tensions and frustrations arising out of these processes, coupled with the problem of unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition, corruption and poverty, have in one or the other way contributed to the problem of drug abuse in Thailand.