CHAPTER II

POLITICO-SOCIO-ECONOMIC FEATURES OF THAI SOCIETY.

I. GEOGRAPHY FEATURES:

The Kingdom of Thailand is part of South-East Asia bordered by Indian Ocean and Burma in the West, Cambodia and Laos in the East, Laos and Burma in the North, Malaysia and the Gulf of Thailand in the south. Its total area is 514,000 Sq.Kms. The climate is tropical and the population estimated in 1983 was 50 millions.

There are four natural regions, Conveniently delineated by the pattern of rivers and mountains in Thailand. 1. The North, 2. The North East (Principally the Khorat Plateau), 3. The South (Peninsula) and 4. The Central Plain (Chao Phraya Basin).

1. The North:

Northern Thailand includes the area drained by upper reaches of the Chao Phraya tributaries. It is a 60,000 Square mile region of long North-South mountain ridges and deep, narrow, alluvial valleys. Villages and towns cluster in the valleys, making use of the

alluvial soil suitable for growing paddy.

The political and economic capital of the region is Chiangmai, one-time capital of the Kingdom of Chiangmai which extended over an area corresponding to natural region.\(^{(3)}\) The ridges in this area are thickly forested and yield many types of valuable woods. South-West of Chiangmai, the ridges reach the maximum height of 8,400 feet above sea level. The easternmost ridge in North Thailand consists of the Luang Prabang mountain, along the crest of which is the North-central portion of the location of Thai border.

2. The North-East:

Its capital is Nakhon Ratchasima and the region is known as Khorat Plateau and its higher mountain range separates Thailand from Cambodia to the South. It is a huge saucer-shaped basin surrounded on the north by Mekong river and the Dong Phya Yen mountains, rising to about 1,000 feet above sea level. It is the largest of the four regions of Thailand, consisting of 167,000 square kilometres or 64,500 square miles, i.e. about one third of the entire area of the country. A large part of the plateau is flat and is very poorly rain-fed. In the flood-prone area of the river lowland

rice is the principal crop. The Northeast area has a poor rainfall and so also has poor soil. The dry-land rice is grown on the jungle hillsides, and westland rice in the lowlands and more cattle is raised in this region than elsewhere in Thailand.

3. The South:

The South is made up of two-thirds of the Northern Malay Peninsula; a section of the Peninsula with a narrow high mountain chain flanked by narrow strips of land. Rivers and numerous streamlets create watersheds in the valleys on each side of the mountains, and it is on the floors of these valleys that west-land rice is grown. The south was gained by conquest and much of it has never been fully integrated into the larger economy. Even its people are in part non-Thai. They differ ethnically and linguistically from the Thai of the centre and feel isolated from national life.

4. The Central Plain:

"Central Thailand, the basin of the Chao Phraya, is the political and economic heart of the nation. Its northern limit is the Uttaradit area, and it stretches to the slope of the Khorat Plateau. Here was established the historical Kingdom of Ayutthaya predecessor of Bangkok and the Kingdom of Siam. Bangkok dominates the 50,000 square miles of the Central Plain, but there are
other important regional centres, such as Ayutthaya, Lop Buri and Rat Buri."

The central plain region is the nation's best rice land. It is often called the rice bowl of the nation and is the location of Bangkok capital of Thailand.

The Thai in this area are essentially farmers. After farmers, perhaps the largest single work force in this area is the civil servant. Apart from government departments, public schools, colleges, Universities and various government monopolies and enterprises such as state railway, tobacco monopoly, telephone organisation, pharmaceutical organization and so on are government owned. These enterprises employ many people as civil servants.

II. HISTORICAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT:

The Thais are freedom loving people. (4) This particular characteristic can be noted from the fact that when each country in South-East Asia remained under colonial rule, Thailand is a unique country which has not been a colony. This may be credited to the redoubtable diplomacy of the Thai Princes under

enlightened monarchs. "Thai history has numerous records of heroic, kings, who have been saviours and pride of the nation without whom the Thai nation may not exist today. Throughout the course of history, they have managed to maintain independance and sovereignty\(^5\) of the Country." Thai kings also throughout history have contributed significantly towards this independence, security and progress of the nation. In modern era of the Chakri dynasty. King Chulalong Korn (Rama V) accomplished the uphill task of preserving national sovereignty by brilliantly manoeuvring between the colonial powers, and is widely remembered for his modernizing programmes which provided a base for modern Thailand.\(^6\)

The exposure to western liberal philosophies and ideas were bound to have an effect on Young Thais overseas. Those who felt that development should proceed at a faster pace took matters into their own hands by staging a coup in 1932.\(^7\)

The change in power structure, from absolute, monarchy to constitutional monarchy, brought new elite into power. The royal courtiers and existing elite

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\(^7\) Wood W.A.R., A History of Siam, op.cit. p.133.
were replaced by a new power structure comprising of civil service officials and military officers, with new zeal and a set of ideas about the directions in which the country was to be steered. Though the changes they envisioned were considered revolutionary, there had always existed ancillary to the monarch and his court, working in the background, in touch with the modes of rule and channels through which change could be instituted. (8)

Thus, the alterations effected in 1932 were not as traumatic as they might have been. For the majority of the people, with their social attitude towards the rulers in the capital, the changes meant little.

The year 1932, marked more than a change in political philosophy. It represented an awakening to new economic realities that would see the emergence of a broadbased more stable economy over the ensuing 40 years. (9) Government involvement took the form of expanded infrastructures and trade promotion. Government encouraged agro-industrial development and modernised the educational system to meet the new demands of the society. Throughout 1940’s and 1950’s, considerable political experimentation was taking

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The restoration of the representative democracy. In October 1973, heretofore new directions for
the democratic process.

In the democratic process, intense involvement of a wide spectrum of the populace
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county which gave another turning point to that
a number of social and economic problems before the
China war, disturbed the economic progress and created
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early toward Earth’s policies but interested few of
carried by a succession of governments all of which
was ruled by a succession of governments all of which
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agency to plan and administer national development.

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poster Rhee Marshal’s last step forward. He initiated
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men a continuation of the central figure of the
country’s growth. The concept of strong
place with new governing system evolving to meet the

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the country. The new awareness demanded that long standing problems be solved equitably and that those sectors of society formerly ignored be brought into active participation in the development process.\(^{(11)}\)

The Thai people through their representative institution, Parliament and Council of Ministers, headed by constitutional Monarchy - the King, accepted the responsibility for change and prosperity of the country, by solving the problems which have plagued it for the past two decades. For this, Government accepted a decentralised pattern, and established local Government institutions at provincial, district, city and village level. The creation of these institutions of local government stems from government's desire to promote democracy as rapidly as conditions allow. These institutions have been made responsible for the development of the areas under their charge.

"The basic impetus for this drive is the sense of Thainess engendered by common origins, culture and aspirations. The manifestations of that spirit can be seen in the efforts of Thailand's total development and its prosperity."\(^{(12)}\)


III. ECONOMY:

Thailand is an agricultural country. The total land under agriculture including forests and grazing land is millions hectares or 19.20 percent of the total area. Roughly 90 per cent of the total population of 50 million, is engaged in agriculture and they are mostly small farmers. The major crops are rice, cotton, sugarcane, coconut, peanuts, soya-beans, maize, tobacco, rubber and tapioca. (13)

Among these crops rice occupies an highest portion and it is the mainstay of the Thai economy. Not only 85 per cent of the Thai people earn their living from agriculture, but 78 per cent of all land under cultivation is also used to grow rice. Thailand is the world's greatest exporter of rice with Japan and Hong-Kong among its chief customers. (14)

"Rice is grown throughout Thailand, but the Southern end of the Central Plain is the country's most important agricultural region, and the grain from this area is of high quality and much of it is exported." (15) Farming is


done by adopting traditional techniques and is also subject to the whims of the monsoon. February to June is a dry season, and farmers remain without work during this period. "Most of the farmers cultivate their land and the practice of leasing of land on rent is practically absent in Thailand. The average size of farm comes to 10 acres."(16) Small holdings below 2 acres as in India, are somewhat rare exceptions.

"Rubber is the second most valuable cash crop of Thailand, which is produced in the Southern part of the Malay Peninsula. Latex, the sap of the rubber tree, is collected daily on all rubber plantations and rubber is made by subjecting this latex to a chemical process."(17)

Thailand is gifted with useful minerals such as "iron, tungsten, gold, lead, petroleum, lignits and tin ore." However, only few of these have been exploited in sufficient quantities to justify mining operating. Deposits of tin ore along the Malay peninsula are mined by Chinese and British companies and exported to Europe and America.(18) The total annual export earnings of

these minerals exceeds 400 million bahl. Mineral output in Thailand to a significant extent depends on foreign demands as domestic consumption remains low. It's share in the total gross domestic production is about six percent. (19)

In Thai economy, forestry also plays an important role. Teak logging dominates. Thai forestry, just as rice is greatly important. The teak trees themselves are scattered all over the forest and are outnumbered by less-valuable kinds of trees. However, this industry since its beginning has suffered from suitable transport facility. "Thai people have to depend on rivers for such transportation which causes delay as well as risk. For example when a teak log does finally reach a Bangkok saw mill it may be anywhere from 4 to 12 years from the time it was cut in the forest." (20)

"Thailand's fishing industry is dependent on marine catch-up. Fish from fresh waters, commercial fish farms and irrigated paddy fields account for less than 10 per cent of the total catch. The remaining comes from the sea." Near about 5 lakhs marine fishermen, having 1250 powered vessels are engaged in fish industry.


The recent establishment by neighbouring countries of 200 miles territorial water limits has greatly affected the development of Thailand's deep sea fishing industry. (21)

There is a network of small industries closely linked with agriculture. These includes "rice mills, saw mills, sugar mills, textile mills and gunny bag factories, tobacco leaf curing plants and cottage and household industries such as fabric weaving and basketry to supply local needs. All these industries grew up as a result of free market forces and with limited government assistance." (22)

Large scale industries are somewhat absent in Thailand. Since 1960, Government, through its industrial policy, declared a number of concessions to large scale industries. This includes, reduction of taxes on imported raw materials and machinery, tariff protection, financial assistance etc. Till this date, industrial sector contributes to national income to the extent of 20 per cent, making it second larger sector after agriculture. (23)

(21) Fisheries Promotion Department, Bangkok, Thailand 1980, p.15.
One important reason for slow pace of industrialisation of Thailand is the lack of transport facilities. Highway (Road) network and rail-road system is not well developed. Telephone and Telegraphs services exist but are inadequate as they exist only in important cities. "International agencies like United States are helping Thailand to improve these facilities their object being to create an infrastructure for the overall development of Thailand."(24)

Though Thailand is self-sufficient in food production, for other things the country has to depend on other countries. This is done by sale of raw materials to many nations. Rice is sold to Asian countries and rubber and tin find good markets in Europe and North America. With the profit from these sales, Thailand buys a variety of manufactured goods and food stuffs. "Thailand's dependence upon the export of raw materials as chief source of national income is dangerous for several reasons. The international tin and rubber markets are often subject to violent price fluctuations caused by the changing needs of industrialised countries. To meet this situation, industrialisation is the only answer to the problem, but as observed earlier Thailand still has a long way to go in this direction."(25)

IV. THAI'S SOCIAL PATTERN

According to 1983 census figure the population of Thailand was 50 millions. The percentage of population, religiously distributed was as follows, in 1983. (26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>95.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>04.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>00.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindu, Sikhs</td>
<td>00.35%</td>
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Thai Government has bestowed upon people the freedom to profess any religion and has accorded them not only religious freedom but also has extended appropriate support to their faiths inspite of the fact that Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand, as great majority of the Thai People are Buddhists. (27) However, 'there is the spirit of religious tolerance towards most of the world's religions. For example, in Bangkok alone there are over a hundred mosques, reflecting the powerful presence of Islam in the province of the South bordering on Malaysia'. (28)

1. Buddhism:

The basic form of Buddhism practised in Thailand

is Hinayana, and it originally came from India. The Thais over centuries have evolved a form Buddhism suited to the Thai temperament." (29)

To put it briefly, "Buddhists believe one's life does not begin with birth and end with death, but is a link in a chain of lives, each conditioned by volitional act (Karma) or acts committed in previous existences. The concept of Karma, the law of cause and effect, suggest that selfishness and craving result in suffering. Conversely compassion and love bring one happiness and well-being. Therefore, only by eliminating desire can one find peace of mind. The ideal Buddhist aspiration is to attain perfection through Nirvana, an indescribable, immutable, stable condition, unconditioned by suffering or further rebirth, in which a person simply is, yet is completely at one with his surroundings." (30)

Buddhism spoke to the individual's inner being and provided him with direction in ordering his daily life. "More importantly it gave an explanation for his daily life. More importantly it gave an explanation for his existence and offered hope for a better life in future


Out of 27,000 Buddhist temples in Thailand, majority of them are in country side. Although the temples prime function is to aid aspirants in their search for Nirvana, it has traditionally served as the village hostel, a village news, employment and information agency, a school, hospital and recreation centre. "The Buddhist males over twenty, offer themselves to religion as monks and this helps them to continue a tradition in which Buddhism united all Buddhist members of society." (32) As a philosophy, as distinct from religion, Buddhism has a profound role in shaping the Thai character, particularly, their reaction to event." The Buddhist concept of earthly impermanence, its idea of the absurdity of trying to establish certainties in an ever fluid existence, has done much to create that relaxed carefree charm that is one of the most appealing characteristics of the country. Their religious outlook to life becomes more clear from the facts that Thai people consult astrologers regularly to learn the most suspicious time for weddings, important journeys, moving into new house and even promulgation of


(32) Well K.E., Thai Buddhism, its Rites and activities, Bangkok, 1939, p.40.
a constitution.\textsuperscript{(33)}

"Many of the Thai's non-Buddhist beliefs are Brahminical in origin and even to-day Brahmin priests coming from approximately four thousand Brahmin families in the country, have an important place in Thai religious life and officiate at a number of major ceremonies. The Thai wedding as well as naming ceremony, is almost entirely Brahminical, and so are many of rites connected with a funeral. Brahminism has given the Thai their court rituals and traditional justification for rule. It has also supplied a cosmology which includes many heavens and hells. Quarte a number of Thai even hope to achieve Buddhist nirvana, but one or two of the 19 Brahmin heavens are within the grasp of all. The Thai do not distinguish among these various components of their religion, for them it is all of a piece. Only the sophisticated few are concerned with doctrinal logic and purity.\textsuperscript{(34)}

"To the average Thai, there is nothing inconsistent about intermingling of such practices and beliefs. Their broad, easy-going tolerance makes it possible for them to accept or atleas to absorb, all such beliefs."\textsuperscript{(35)}

\textsuperscript{(33)} Wendell Blanchard, Thai its people, its society and culture, 1958, op.cit. p.147.
\textsuperscript{(34)} Wendell Blanchard, Thai its people, its society and culture, 1958, op.cit. p. 154.
\textsuperscript{(35)} Wendell Blanchard, Thai its people, its society and culture, 1958, op.cit. p.154.
Religion is not only a visible agency in Thai life but a germinal one as well, Buddhist values permeate the culture, and "the religion is the historic wellspring from which flow the nation's metaphysics, its art and literature, its ethics and morality and many of its mores, folkways, and festivals." (36) The most honoured social type is the Buddhist monk. Every male is supposed to spend some time in temple service and every family regards a son in the monastic community as a mark of high merit. Religious achievement is valued above wealth or power. In old Siam even the kings paid deference publicity to venerable monks. (37)

"The Buddhist values are apparent too in the endless efforts of the believers to gain merits. Ways of gaining merit are legion. One gains merit each time he feeds a monk or goes to the temple. Becoming a monk brings much merit. Releasing birds or animals from cages, pasting gold leaf on the statue of Buddha, contributing to the construction of a new temple, all these acts help earn merit. Perhaps as much as 25 per cent of the average rural family's cash outlays goes to merit making. (38)

(36) Well K.E., Thai Buddhism, its rites and activities, op.cit. pp.77-78.
(37) Well K.E., Thai Buddhism, its rites and activities, op.cit. p.80.
(38) Well K.E., Thai Buddhism, its rites and activities, op.cit.
The main practical consequence of Buddhism in Thailand is emphasis pon serene, humble and virtuous behaviour. Merit-making is an institutionalised expression of virtue. It is the Thai way of expressing ethical convictions in this life and assuring passage into comfortable future life. A Thai gives food to the monks not to help them but to gain merit for himself.

A man's obligations and responsibilities are to himself, not to others and the Thais care little for organize work of charity and social service.

"The attitude of majority of Thai people towards religion is casual and easy-going, as indeed is the Thai attitude towards most of the large questions of life. The Thai enjoy their religion and their religious observances are as much social and recreational as they are sacred occasions. To majority it suffices to feel and believe and enjoy."(39)

Buddhism gained wider acceptance because its emphasis on tolerance and individual initiative complemented the Thai's cherished inner freedom. Fundamentally, Buddhism is an empirical way of life. Free from dogma, it is a flexible moral, ethical and

philosophical frame work within which people find room to fashion their own salvations. (40)

2. OTHER RELIGIONS: (41)

(A) Muslims:

Muslims comprise Thailand's largest religious minority and are concentrated mainly in the southernmost provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala and Satun. Most of the Thai muslims are of Malay descent, reflecting the common cultural heritage, Thailand's southernmost provinces share with Malays. The King not only provided money for Translation of Kuran, but continues to provide funds for building and renovating mosques. The king or his representative presides during the Annual celebrations commemorating the prophet Mohammed's birthday. Additionally, his majesty appoints a respected muslim religious leader as Chularatthesamontri or State Councillor for all Islamic affairs. Government also grants four months' leave to muslim employees to make the Haj.

(B) Christians:

There are about 3 lakh Christians in Thailand. These Christian converts came mainly from ethnic


minorities such as immigrant Despite
the small number of Thai converts, Christians have
made several major contributions in the field of health
and education. Many of the Thai schools and hospitals
are Christian schools and hospitals.

(C) Hindus and Sikhs:
The Hindus and Sikhs are less in number as compared
to Muslims in Thailand. The approximately 20,000 Indians
residing in Thailand are almost equally divided as Hindus
and Sikhs. Most of the Hindu community is concentrated
in Bangkok, where it worships at four main Hindu temples.
There are also several Brahmin shrines at which Hindus
and Buddhists alike worship. The Hindus manage their own
schools in which in addition to Thai, Hindu, Sanskrit and
English are also taught.

3. Language:
Thai language is spoken nationwide with regional
dialects differing widely from North to South and East to
West.

Thus, the religious minorities Muslims, Hindus,
Sikhs and Christians, contribute to a rich variety of
thought, philosophy, worship and endeavour that is
fashioned into a tolerant society with Buddhism as the
dominant spiritual factor.
4. WAY OF LIFE:

Geographical and religious situation has been largely responsible for shaping the Thai pattern of life. "The Thai seems to have a genius for accepting the virtues but rejecting the vices of different societies from which they borrow." (42)

One of the most stinking features of Thai society is the almost total lack of a strict division of class or caste system. Slavery was abolished in the 19th century and the 1932 Revolution stripped the monarchy of most of its powers. Today, social position and respect are gained by the acquisition of education and wealth. A humble background is no bar to a person of ability if he can obtain proper schooling.

5. FAMILY:

The Thai concern themselves only with their immediate families. Although regional differences determine the size of a family, a typical Thai family almost extends beyond the nucleus of parents and their offsprings to include grand parents, cousins, an uncle or aunt living amicably together in the same house or compound. Urban houses retain similar values, though in many cases these have been modified by the pressure

of modern life and by the tidal wave of non-Thai influences that have swept over the countries urban centres during the past decade.

"A rural family often lives in a simple wooden house whose single room serves as bedroom, living room, kitchen or dining room, as the situation demands. This communal life style, in which every one lives together in an open space with little or no privacy obviously requires fact, compromise, courtesy, and tolerance if social harmony is to be preserved." (43)

Essentially, "the family represents security and stability in an uncertain world and as such commands individuals loyalty and respect. Its welfare is always the primary concern and it is incumbent upon each family member to consider his actions in the light of their consequences to the family's wellbeing. Within each household, the father guides and guards. The mother plays a supportive role, handling finances and influencing family decisions." (44)

A sense of responsibility is also inculcated from

early childhood, each child being assigned such chores as feeding chickens and buffaloes, leading live stock to graze in communal pastures or locking after younger brothers or sisters to free his parents for essential household and field work. Duties are determined according to age and capability of the individuals. Responsibility gradually enhances to promote family interests. Children are allowed to participate in family discussions and their opinions are taken into account.

"One of the prime responsibilities placed on children is that of taking care of parents in their old age. This form of social security is a prominent feature of the Thai concept of family. There is no feeling of being inconvenienced by caring for aged parents whose acquired wisdom gives them an elevated place in the house-hold." (45)

6. VILLAGE:

Beyond the family, the next larger unit of social organization is the village. Identifiable in all its aspects as an extension of the family beyond the home, each village is composed of many house-holds, a temple, a school and a village government. Decision-making

within the village on major issues is by consensus.
This generally abide by community decisions reached in
this manner. The principal larger social groups within
the village are formed spontaneously to aid each other
in various activities. Usually comprised of neighbouring
families and their friends, these groups gather to muster
the required labour force for planting and harvesting,
irrigation of fields, or any other similar task which
require more labour force. Often these community groups
extend their attention to the maintenance of communal
property such the water, the village school, roads and
canals.

Religion is at the root of this sincere
consideration for others which permeates every aspect
of Thai village life. The entire village normally joins
in the appropriate rejoicing or sorrow, demonstrating an
expanded family type solidarity that will manifest
itself on a countrywide scale during national calamities
on the occasions of national catastrophes when the Thais
come together to help the victims.

The village life is very simple. Villagers live
in houses made of teak and bamboo and these are of small
size offering little privacy. The Thai does not desire
or require more than is absolutely for him.

"Every day farmers go forth from their homes
accompanied during the busy season by all able-bodied members of the households. The work is hard, the tools are primitive, and they carry out agricultural operation without any sense of oppression. Thai has no desire for accumulating or earning more. He is content to earn that much which his family needs and little over for contributing to the temple and for a few simple luxuries, such as jewellery for his wife or a better kerosene lamp for the family."(46)

The villager has no urge to transform his environment and to change things for the sake of change. His dominant attitude towards nature and environment is passive. Only in Bangkok and in the surrounding lower central plain has this subsistence attitude given way to the temper of the acquisition. The Thais generally have given up exploitation and acquisition. Only the Chinese and politicians indulge in this.

"The Thai are typically friends people, quick to show in small ways their regard for other. They are eager to learn about the intimate affairs of others and do not hesitate to ask the most personal questions to even casual acquaintances. These questions are authentic expression of friendly interest. When a Thai

(46) Anumanrajthon, Phya, Life of the Thai People Bangkok, 1948, p.120.
fails to ask personal question's it usually means, he either distrusts or has no interest in other person." 

PLACE OF WOMEN:

In villages a sense of equality pervades living conditions and social relations. The feeling appears in the relations between sexes, where there is a time-honoured functional division of labour but no legal and little social discrimination against women. "Women have rights of inheritance and ownership equal to those of men. Wives may seek divorce with the same case and freedom enjoyed by husbands. Equality makes an obvious appearance in the absence of great discrepancies of wealth." 

To-day women as well as men have the vote in Thailand. Thai women have always been free and independent. Polygamy is fast dying out. The majority of Thai have always been monogamous. Only the wealthy can afford many wives and families. Although young people select their own mates, they usually do not go against the wishes of their parents. Marriage is a civil contract, but frequently the monks are asked to give blessings with ceremonies and feasting.

(47) Seidenfaden, Erik, The Thai Peoples Bangkok, op.cit. p.135.

"Middle class women now hold positions as teachers, nurses, clerks and sales girls in shops. They have always worked at weaving, pottery and other crafts. They also help in farming. In farming families, both male and female, work equally on farm, as partners of the business. There is little distinction between the roles of men and women. A man can cook as well as his wife and his wife can reap with him shoulder to shoulder."(49)

In urban centres like Bangkok, women enjoy more freedom than their counterparts in rural areas. "In urban area, the women live sophisticated and self-assured life. They serve in offices and drive their cars. A quite a large number of them speak two to three foreign languages. However, at home they remain as ideal daughters or wives, but preserve their independence of mind which has always been a Thai woman's right. They are more determined and try to get it."(50)

Opposite to there are rural women. They lead hard, simple life but enrich their dresses with silver decorations and fine embroidery. But a close look at their life reveals the same confidence, which we find in urban women. Throughout the country, most women own

atleast one dress as well as the traditional garments. Thai garments look fresh and starched, as if they have just come from laundry. Although many of the Thai women wear modern cloths in the office or at social gatherings they revert to the comfortable native clothes at home." (51)

"From the western view-point, the position of women in Thai society is excellent. They occupy a high position in the society and their rights are protected by law." (52) In the past, a father with several daughters was considered a rich man. He could request a suitor either to pay him a sum of money or work in his rice fields for several years before allowing the young man to marry his daughter. To-day western marriage patterns are becoming more and more a part of Thai life. However, as mentioned earlier, the marriage ceremony still follows Thai tradition.

7. EDUCATION:

"Primary education is compulsory for Thai children when they reach eight years of age." In the past the villages had schools for both boys and girls with teachers trained at Government College of Education. The monks taught the boys at the temples. It was a regular


part of their work. Now only monks teach religious subjects. In a number of villages, there are no separate buildings for schools, for which reason this villages hold school in temples. Every town and big village have separate school buildings.

Many subjects are taught in Thailand like United States. Crafts used to be learnt at home, but now they are taught at schools also.

"The majority of children leave school when they completed four years of primary education. In order to enter secondary schools, they have pass an examination set by the Government. They all learn English at these secondary schools."(53)

"The brightest children can go on to a University or to a Vocational College. They may take courses in law, medicine, science, commerce, agriculture and public administration. There is an Arts and Crafts School, a Technical Institute and an Agricultural College that imparts education in forestry and fishery. Government also encourages students to pursue their higher studies in foreign countries such as U.K, U.S.A, and India. Western nations and Thailand share many problems in the field of education. The shortage of trained teachers is

acute in Thailand."  "A population boom is severely straining the Limited school facilities. But Thai education continues to improve despite these adversities. As a rapid rise in literacy nearly 80 per cent of the people can now read and write. This is a good indication of progress." To-day more than eight million students are enrolled in Government Primary and Secondary Schools throughout the country. As a result of this Thailand can boast an adult literacy rate of over 85 per cent. Nearly 80 per cent of population above the age of eleven has some schooling and nearly 90 per cent of children between the ages of seven and ten attend Primary School."  

Thus, the present strength, stability and cohesiveness of Thai society is natural outcome of historical, political, economic, religious and social forces that are interconnected with each other. All these features have helped to establish national stability.

To conclude, Thailand is predominantly an agricultural country, industrially backward, due to lack of transport facilities, she has to depend for goods other than agricultural, on foreign countries.


By exporting rice, rubber, tin and other minerals, the country has to acquire foreign exchange for importing goods. All this keeps Thailand in a line of backward countries. Thai people being freedom-loving people, desire that economic development should proceed at a faster speed. For this the country is trying to develop infra-structure for agricultural and rural development. Among other adopted means, cooperation and Cooperatives are playing an important role in the country's economic development. On this background the study of cooperative movement in Thailand seems to be essential. To undertake this study it is essential to select the area, Cooperative societies and their members in a systematic manner. This has been dealt with in the next chapter "Research Methodology".

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