

Chapter -1

INTRODUCTION

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India, whose economy is dominated by agriculture, has 68.84 % of its total population living in rural areas according to 2011 census. Rural sector on the one hand is endowed with rich local resources which are self-sufficient and its agricultural products serve as the backbone of the country. On the other hand, the rural sector of the country is characterised by low income levels, poor quality of life, inadequate productive skills, malnutrition, lower life expectancy, illiteracy, unemployment, etc. Therefore, most of them suffer abject poverty which in turn is a barrier to agricultural development and socio-economic progress in general of the country. Although, in the post-economic reform period, India has grown economically faster, her performance in the reduction of poverty and socio-economic disparity in the rural areas has remained dismal. Such situation reflects that there is a need of scholarly work and more attention of social scientists and policy makers to focus on policy analysis on concrete measures for the socio-economic growth and benefit of such disadvantaged societies in the country. There is also a need to stress and make an indepth study on the socio-economic conditions of such societies in relation to the obstacles they face, the support system they receive and to explore the scope of professional social work for the development. Any development plan must begin by concentrating on the socio-economic conditions as socio-economic conditions are the key indicators for the growth and development of any backward society.

The government of India in order to bring such weaker sections of people on par with the rest of population have launched and implemented various programmes the result of which may best be understood in the words of our first prime-minister J.N. Nehru “we should judge the results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is evolved”. The present research was undertaken to study the socio-economic conditions of Mao Naga farmers; to identify and analyze factors affecting the socio-economic conditions of Mao Naga Farmers; and examine the role of Government Programmes in improving the socio-economic conditions of Mao Naga Farmers.

The introduction chapter of the study consists of three parts. The first part deals with a brief introduction of the origin and history of the Nagas. The second part

deals with the origin and history of the Mao Naga tribe. Then, the third part briefly deals with the significant features of the Mao Naga tribe in general.

1.1: History and Origin of the Nagas

The word 'Naga' is a generic term referring to a group of around 60 tribes called as the 'Nagas'. Traditionally, the 'Nagas' live in four states of India: Nagaland; Manipur; Assam; and Arunachal Pradesh. They also inhabit in our neighbouring country Myanmar. The origin and meaning of the word 'Naga' is still shrouded in obscurity because various opinions expressed in this regard remain a controversy. Moreover, due to plurality of opinion, the exact origin and migration of the Nagas also cannot be ascertained.

Some scholars opined that the word 'Naga' might have been originated from the Kachari language because the Nagas were known to the Kacharis as '*Nahngra*' (meaning Warrior or Fighter). Since the Naga forefathers lived without cloths in the olden days, there are writers who put forward their opinion that the word 'Naga' must have been originated from the Hindustani word '*Nanga*' which means 'naked'. But the Khassis and Garos were also said to be living without clothes during those days but were not called as Naga. The Assamese language '*Noga manuh*' also means a 'naked man'. Others opined that the word must have come from word '*nok*' which means folk in some tribal dialect. Nagas simply distinguish themselves as users of plates carved out of wood.

According to Shimray (1985), a Naga scholar, the most plausible theory as to the origin of the word 'Naga' is one which has Burmese connections as the Nagas had migrated from Burma to the present hill country. This is supported also by historical facts. The Nagas, men and women, had the traditions of making holes in the ears for ear decorations. The Burmese called that group of people with holes in ears as 'NA KA' meaning 'pierced ears'. The anglicised word for NAKA became NAGA. The reason for it is that the Britishers first came into contact with the Burmese since 1795 and with the Nagas in 1832. It is, therefore, obvious that the British explorers heard about the 'NAKA' group (pierced ears) of people from the Burmese. Thus, it is sensible and practical to believe that the word 'NAGA' originated from the Burmese word 'NAKA'. Another view is that a group of people having perforated holes in the ears had one time left 'Chiang Mai' area in Thailand in the remote past and were said to have gone towards Burma. This group of people was simply known as 'NAKARI'

in Thai meaning ‘people with holes in the ears’. Shimray, in his comprehensive effort to study the origin and culture of the Nagas also writes that the Nagas must have come from the sea coast or atleast seen some islands or the seas, which is strengthened by the life-style of the Nagas and the ornaments being used till today in many Naga villages. The Nagas being left undisturbed for such a long time have retained the culture of the most ancient times till today. Besides, the facts that the Nagas have many customs and way of life very similar to that of those living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc. indicates that their ancient abode was near the sea, if not in some islands. The long war-drums hewn out of huge logs also feature very much with the islanders. It is also a fact that Nagas ate almost all living sea creatures.

In many South East Asian countries where civilization had not invaded were found many customs and practices very much akin to those of the Nagas such as head hunting, tattooing, morung system (youth dormitory system), platform, burial, looms, and terrace cultivation. In respect of all these, the Nagas were very much akin to the *Dyaks* and *Kayans* of Borneo and Sarawak (now Indonesia and Malaysia respectively), *Battaks* of Sumatra, the *Igorots* of Philippines, *Kal-Mon-Annam* of Indonesia and certain groups of Formosa. The physical features like the brown yellowish colour and the prominently high cheekbone of the Nagas look very similar to that of the people of the Southeast Asian countries. Just as the custom of the Nagas in the past, it was also the custom of the tribes of Igorots to chop off the head of the victims in battle or murder and carry them home as trophies that become the objects of feasting and celebration. Just as the Nagas, the *Dyaks* of Borneo also grew rice on the steep hillside. It is said that some tribes in Thailand keep a peculiar coiffure which shaves off the male head keeping the hair in the middle of the head like the crest of the ancient Greek helmet. Tangkhul Naga had similar coiffure. Till recent years, Mao Naga (fortune teller) also had the same. Besides, it may also be added here that the word ‘Naga’ is used in Philippines. The heart of the Bicol Region of the Philippines is called Naga City.

The Nagas valued the rare small stones of oval or triangular shapes which have been polished and looks oily. Such stones are found in Malaysia, Indonesia and Burma. It is believed that such stones are gifts of God and have power – some for wealth, some for war, some for fame and other for bad luck including madness, etc. Such polished round stones are found in the house of the village chief of Makhel in

Mao where the Nagas are believed to have settled before dispersal. It is said that people witnessed such stones making strange sounds and movements when the Japanese were coming to Naga area during the Second World War in 1944 and the Naga area primarily became the battle spot of the Second World War. Studies have shown that the use of polished stone (Celts) shows traces of Naga culture of the Neolithic age. Studies have also proved that there is unmistakable evidence of Palaeolithic culture in the Naga areas. Besides, there is a record that the smooth stone tools from Nagaland preserved at Oxford and Cambridge University are regarded by many writers as evidence of a rich Neolithic culture.

Thus, Shimray states that the various tribes of the Nagas have now accepted Makhel as the place from where they dispersed. One distinct practice of the Nagas is that they should erect stone monuments and also plant sacred trees wherever they settled. There are many historical facts such as stone monoliths and sacred trees planted by them at MAKHEL before dispersing to different directions as enumerated below:

- a. A menhir called *Tamaratu* in Mao which means a dispersal stone. This stone is found in the heart of Makhel village of Mao area. It is said that originally this stone bore a visibly engraved mark of a man dragging a bull, a cock, tiger's head, a shield and a spear but is now invisible.
- b. A Wild Pear tree (called *Chiitebu* in Mao) is also said to have planted during their dispersal. This tree is found in a Mao village called Shajoba, contiguous to Makhel village. At the time of their dispersal, they took an oath at the side of *Chiitebu* that they will unite again one day. In olden days, the falling of any branch of this sacred tree was strictly observed as taboo in all parts inhabited by the Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma and many other Naga tribes. During such incidences, nobody was allowed to go to the field in order to appease the gods and also in token of sorrow or fear of the unseen spirit. The Nagas were forbidden to cut even a branch of this tree for the fact that the one who breaks a branch of *Chiitebu* is said to have died on the spot and also for the superstition that rain and storm may start instantly.
- c. A very old Oak tree at Makhel continues to remain sacred to them. Sir J. Johnstone in 1871 placed the age of the stone at that time to around 750 years (Welman, 2011, p.24).

- d. Pipal tree, also known as the bodhi/banyan tree (called as *Marabu* in Mao), considered as a sacred tree is believed to have sprouted from the tomb of the first woman who died at Makhel. The folk story says that one beautiful girl called *Dziilimosi*iro sat under this tree when she got conceived by the clouds and gave birth to three children viz, Tiger, God and Man. That is why the Nagas erected *Linotu* (3 stones). This tree to this day is sacred to the Nagas and reminds them of the legendary account of the origin of mankind. Even to this day, the belief goes that the end of the world will come when this sacred tree dies. Astonishingly, the leaves of this tree do not wither away at one time as other trees do. While the leaves in some branches wither, the leaves in other branches bud throughout the year. Even today the villagers value the leaves of the *Marabu* for observing 'genna' meaning forbidden. A declaration of *genna* leads to abstention from regular work (Neli, 2012, p.41). If one spits or urinates near this sacred tree, he would die of '*Maphao*' i.e an illness with body swelling and stoppage of urine and stool. The direction of the dead branch of *Marabu* indicates the calamity which will take place in the same direction.
- e. Three Monoliths called '*Linotu*' are the stones of dispersal of Naga situated at *Chizelophi* a few miles away from Makhel, representing Tiger, Man and God. The stone monoliths were erected at the time of their parting. It is said that the tiger stone has fallen which indicates that the tiger has become extinct in recent years.
- f. A sacred shield made of animal skin (some say elephant skin, some other say buffalo skin) at Makhel headman's house has a magical power. Even a touch and a look at it bring rain and storm instantly. It is said that an Englishman who ignored the warning and carried away the shield during the Second World War was forced to throw away the shield as he became infirm temporarily during that heavy storm and rain. For the fear of rain and storm, the shield is not exposed to the people, but once in year taken out with great care after necessary rites for cleaning and oiling with awe and reverence.
- g. Numerous other small stones such as war stones, famine and calamity stones, rain and thunder stones are also carefully preserved. This kind of polished stones which have oily looks is found in Burma, Indonesia and Malaysia also.

From all the above indications, Shimray concludes that the Nagas settled at Makhel for some period of time and later dispersed to various places where they are living today. Thus, though there are other opinions expressed about the origin and settlement of the Nagas, it is natural to believe that Makhel remains one of the original places in any case.

Makhel or so called as *Makhrefii* in Mao language is also the oldest village in Mao. The village has been known to the Mao people as a place where a Tibeto-Burman/Chinese race called the Naga, the Meitei and the Ahom are believed to have initially arrived en-masse at Makhel in Mao through immigration from South East Asian countries/China. And thus they were the aboriginals of the state of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam in India. On reaching Makhel, a water-shed point towards the south and towards the north, they assembled for sometime and dispersed towards various destinations. Despite the fact that Makhel is the water-shed point, its area and location is not a sharp edged point but an irregular flat area higher than the northern and southern side. While the ancestors of the Ahom group went back towards the north (Assam) through the river *Chuherii* which conjoins the Doyang river through which they at first reached Makhel along with their kindred groups of the Meitei and the Naga ancestors, the ancestors of the Meitei group proceeded further towards the south (Koubru Valley) where the enchanting Stone Seat of the Meitei ancestor lies. The enchanting Stone Seat of the Naga group called *Mokhulerii* fell down from the back of the Naga ancestor near the river *Chuherii* and never to be lifted again with all efforts on the way before they reached Makhel. And it was understood that the behaviour of the Stone Seat was signifying that the Naga group must inhabit the surrounding area of the Stone Seat which is flat on the top and a circumference of about one and a half feet wide like *Mora* in Manipuri and *Mokhulerii* in Mao language. Therefore the ancestors of the Naga group settled down at Makhel and its vicinity as far as *Tobufii* where the flat wide enchanting stone multiplied the quantity of rice spread over it in the morning for drying in the sun. According to Mao traditional folklore, the population of the Naga ancestors grew in large numbers that spread 700 (seven hundred) households in the eastern side and another 700 (seven hundred) households in the western side besides the unspecified number of households in the northern, southern and central part of the habitation.

Nevertheless, Kathiprii (1996) writes that to claim that Makhel (*Mekhro*) is the place of origin of mankind and all the Nagas, as some people used to say, is another

question where we have to be careful too. Except the Tenyimia group of people plus few Tangkhuls of North West Ukhrul District and some Semas, no other Naga claim to have originated or migrated from Makhel (*Mekhro*). Actual descendants of Makhel (*Mekhro*) are the Memai, Poumai, Maram, Thangal and the Zeliangrong tribes of Nagaland. The Ao, Chang, Sangtam and Phom Nagas claim “Lungtrok” near Chare village under Tuensang district as the place of their origin. Majority of the Tangkhul Nagas claim Hunphun (Ukhrul) and Longpi under Ukhrul District of Manipur as their first place of settlement after their migration from Thonkdut in Burma. Other Naga tribes may have their own stories of origin and migration. As such it may not be correct to claim that all the Nagas originated from the same place and not to speak about Manipuris and *Mayangs*, or other tribes.

Today the Nagas mostly live in the state of Nagaland. A good number of Nagas live in Manipur also i.e in the four out of nine districts of Manipur. To repeat, fewer Nagas live in the adjacent areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. And there are Naga tribes living also in Myanmar. However, according to D’Souza, the exact number of Naga tribes cannot be ascertained because of the processes of fusion and fission taking place among them (as cited by Christina, 2006, p.22). According to a booklet published by Ministry of Information and Publicity, Government of the People’s Republic of Nagalim, 22nd July, 2007 with a title ‘Naga Homeland in Danger’ (the politics of constitution making in Mynmar (Burma), “the Nagas share a close history, racial, social and cultural affinity with the South East Asian people. The Nagas are neither Indian, nor Burmese, by race or culture; neither historically nor politically” (as cited in Nepuni, 2010, p.23). Like most of the population of this region, the Nagas belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. But they differ from other Mongoloid racial groups of the region on account of their social and cultural features. The various Naga tribes differ from one another in terms of language and other cultural and political features (Jamir and Lanunungsang, 2005, pp.16-23). However, according to Mao, (1996), even today, except for slight changes and differences most of the traditional culture like customs, folklore, folk-dance, dresses, house designs, etc. are similar and quite akin to one another among different Naga tribes.

1.2: History and Origin of the Mao Naga Tribe

A. Debate on the Term – ‘Mao’

Mao is the name of a Naga tribe in Manipur. The language spoken by the Mao tribe is also called as Mao and the traditional land area inhabited by the Mao people is also called as Mao. Thus, **Mao as a tribe** is an officially recognised Scheduled Tribe under the Indian Constitution (Schedule Tribes) Order, 1950. They reside in the confederacy of 32 villages recognised by the Government of Manipur most of which are concentrated in their traditional habitat, i.e Mao area. A good number of the Mao people are also settled outside Manipur. The Mao people call themselves as “*Ememei*” in their language. **Mao as a language** is officially recognised and is one of the tribal languages introduced in educational institutions in Manipur upto matriculation level. The language of the Mao is written in Roman script. **Mao as a place** is the traditional habitat area of the tribe. It is situated in the Northern part of Manipur under Senapati District and adjacent to the Southern Angami Naga tribe in Nagaland. The area is located in the border of Manipur and Nagaland, connecting Manipur to Nagaland and to other parts of the Country through National Highway No.39 and that is why Mao area is also called as the gateway to Manipur. Mao remains an important historical place because it is believed that the Naga forefathers originated, migrated and settled from a Mao village called ‘Makhel’.

The origin of the term ‘Mao’ remains unknown and continues to be debated among scholars though different views have been expressed. But the most acceptable view according to the Mao people is that the children of a great grandfather called Memiio are known as ‘Mao’. The details of this belief have been enumerated subsequently supported with connected legendary accounts prevalent among the Mao people and the views expressed by some scholars. Ashuli (1976) asserts that “It is interesting to note the origin of the term ‘Mao’. Some are of the opinion that the term is given by the Britishers taking from China but this theory or opinion is ill-founded and baseless; it is only an action or expression to motivate seditious mode among the Mao Nagas. The generally accepted view of the origin is not from any other source but is either from the Meities or from the Marams (another Naga tribe living in Manipur, a neighbor of the Mao Nagas). The Meiteis used to

call the Maos as 'Ngamei' and the Marams called as 'Maomei'. It is believed that the Maharaj of Manipur and the Marams had friendly relation in the past. Through this Maram people, the Meiteis might have learned or noted down the term 'Mao' for official record by dropping word 'Mei'. But in those days the use was not as common as it is used today. It has become a common use only after the coming of the Britishers to Manipur. So, it should not be confused with the Maos in China" (as cited in Singh and Maheo, 2010, pp. 16-17).

In early days, the so called Mao people led a confined and purely pastoral life. They remained secluded from the rest of the world yet self-sufficient. That perhaps is why they had no idea or least interest to reason or object or it did not bother them as to why outsiders started calling them as Mao people. Moreover, they were then illiterate and ignorant. But in the contemporary context, learned scholars from the tribe like Nepuni (2010) have come forward with opinion that it is important to retain the true identity and original name. He writes that "when we peep into the history, the own people do not know when they came to be called as 'Mao tribe' and what it means. There is not a single place that is called Mao, and there is no people called by such a name as Mao, nor there is any area that is known as Mao". His opinion deserves a special attention not because he is a Mao or *Shopfiime* but because of the fact that the Mao people are originally called as only "*Ememei*" or "*Shopfiime*" and never Mao. The people of the tribe still call themselves as *Ememei* in their language. There are different myths and theories which explain the origin, migration and settlement of *Ememei* and *Shopfiime*. According to Singh and Maheo, (2010), at the moment the most acceptable endogamous term happens to be '*Shiipfomei*' although the term 'Mao' still continues for official purposes (p.17). In the opinion of Nepuni, (2010), the existing pronunciation and terminology as '*Shiipfomei*' or '*Shepoumai*' is unquestionable. Till today old people in different areas have called themselves as the descendants of *Shiipfowo*. The Central Angamis named the so called Maos '*Sopfiimia*'. The southern Angamis have called them '*Sapumi*'. Therefore, he is of the view that if *Mao Naga tribe* as it stands recognised by government and in official records, can be re-organised as '*Shiipfomei*' instead of '*Mao Naga tribe*', it will stand for the true identity of the people.

B. Debate on the Migration and Settlement of Mao Naga

There are many folklore regarding the migration and settlement of the Mao Naga. Some of them are:

a) Legend on Two Suns

A legend says that there were two suns – *redzii* (male) and *rekrii* (female). At the time when the two suns were giving their energies, it was so hot that when a full basket of paddy was exposed for some moment in the heat of the sun, it used to get matured for pounding. Those days, it was inconvenient to expose their bodies in the heat of the sun or it was difficult to walk about with half naked. Babies used to even die when exposed in the sun. So they decided to kill the sun lest more babies would die of heat. People were scared to go out during the day but one day *Morona* (an orphan) had shot the *redzii* with an arrow and as a result of that the *redzii* had died and disappeared. The *rekrii* felt sad and refused to appear. Now the people found that it was very inconvenient for them to work without the light of the sun and they complained. They struggled to find the means of how to please the *rekrii* and found that the only way to please her was the cock. An agreement between the people and *rekrii* was reached and it was decided that the cock should crow at dawn, sun rise, midday and before the sun set. Accordingly the cock was asked to crow and after that the *rekrii* began to appear. From this legend, Ashuli (1970s) in his manuscript has interpreted that there may not be two suns but the meaning of the legend can be interpreted as the change of the climate. Perhaps in the dim and distant past, before settling at *Makhrefii* (Makhel), the Mao people might have settled at a very hot place. Because of the hot climate, they might have decided to move towards the hill side forgetting the name of the place but remembering only the heat of the sun. In the hills they found a great change in climate i.e very cold. When comparing the two places they found a gulf of differences and as such they regarded the first place as having two suns.

b) Legend on *Koburidzii* (Missile – Like Gun)

There is an amusing legend that our ancestors possessed a missile –like gun (*Koburidzi*) which could hit the target even if the target was not aimed at. It is said that the gun had been covered and hidden with a block of stone lest it kill all mankind. This shows that our ancestors might have seen or has the knowledge of the big gun or cannons before their migration to ‘Makhrei’,

something which could link them with the Chinese as it is said they were the first to invent gun powder (Mao, 1996, p.25).

c) Legend on Origination and Settlement

Another legend says that men came from a cave called “*Ochikoso*” (a long tall cliff) in northern Angami area. Men here refer to the forefathers of the Nagas, the Meiteis/Manipuris (*Mikriime*) and the Ahoms (*Kolamei*). (*Kolamei* in Mao language means the plain people. Here *Kolamei* refers to the Ahoms in Assam only and not other plain people race of Aryans and the Dravidian). They followed a course of a river called *Chiihrii Korii* – River (Lower Punanamei village people and Chowainu village people call it as *Chiihrii Korii* where as the same river is called as *Chuherii Korii* by upper Punanamei village people. This river is known as *Dziyi* in Angami and Doyang in Assam) and taken its rise at near Tadubi but a tributary of it, taken its rise between Tobufii and Kaibi known as *Harii Korii* (Harii river). This river flows into Assam via Wokha (a District in Nagaland). Following the course of this river, they moved towards the south. They carried with them *Mokhulirii-bu*, (enchanted Stone Seat which is flat on the top and a circumference of about one and a half feet wide like *Mora* in Manipuri and *Mukhulerii* in Mao language). But when they reached at a place called *Khriibu*, (Southeast of Pudunamei village) this *Mokhulirii-bu* had fallen down and never possible to be lifted again even with all efforts of men. It was understood that the behavior of the stone seat was signifying that the group must inhabit the surrounding of the stone seat. *Khriibu* is a too steep area to be settled and moreover no water is found over there. Therefore, they decided to move little forward and settle at Makhel which is a vicinity of where the stone fell and its vicinity as far as a place called *Tobufii* where the flat wide enchanted stone multiplied the quantity of rice spread over it in the morning for drying in the sun. Perhaps they remained at Makhel for quite a long time. In course of time Makhel became congested that they could not live together there. So, before they parted, they assembled at *Chiitebu* which they planted at Sajouba (1½ kms in the north of Makhel) and had an *anophro* (secret meaning). A resolution was then adopted that whenever any branch of the *Chiitebu* is found broken either by the natural forces or by the hands of men or animals, *mani* (genna) should be declared in all the villages. They should abstain from work on the days they heard the

news of it. This practice is still said to be in vogue among the Mao, Poumai, Angami, Chakasang, etc. which is a sign of respect and remembrance of their ancestors' pledge at their assemble which also symbolises their solidarity and integrity as people. After the adoption of the resolution, the *Kolamie* chose the north, the *Mikriimei* chose the south and the Nagas were to remain in the centre i.e Makhel and its surroundings. Mao people continue to inhabit the origination place.

d) Legend on the First Woman of Mankind Called Dziilimosiuro

According to a publication of Mao Naga Research Committee, in the beginning God created a woman. Her name was Dziilimosiuro. She lived in Makhel village. One day while she was sitting at the foot of the banyan tree, the spirit of god came in the form of a cloud from afar that is from south eastern direction to her and overshadowed her. Thereafter she conceived and gave birth to three sons namely. *Okhe* (tiger), *Ora* (god) and *Omei* (man). Again when the season came for Dziilimosiuro to lay down at the foot of the said banyan tree and as before a cloud appeared from afar and conceived for the second time and she gave birth to a son and named him Alapha (the father of *Kolamei* – plain people). Likewise she gave birth to two other sons and named them, Chutowo (the father of the Meiteis, a non-tribal race called as *Mikriimei* in Mao) and Khephio (the father of the Nagas). The Nagas are the descendants of Khephio. Thus, (*Orasii*) this Banyan tree to this day is sacred to the Nagas and reminds us the legendary account of the origin of mankind. Even to this day, the belief goes that the end of the world will come when this sacred tree dies. Astonishingly, the leaves of this tree do not wither away at one time as other trees do. While the leaves in some branches wither, the leaves in other branches bud throughout the year. With regard to the progenies of Khephio, Nepuni writes from the saying of an oral tradition that Shiipfowo was the eldest son of Khephio. The progenies of “Shiipfowo” are *Ememei* (Mao people), *Lepaona*, *Paomata* and *Chiiluve*. (P-5)

To draw a single solid conclusion basing on the above legendary accounts and views may not be possible because all stories differ in respect of details and the legend which is most likely to be true also cannot be ascertained because it has been handed from generation to generation only by spoken words that today the same story can be told by different people conveying messages with slight differences. However, the

significance of such legendary accounts cannot be ignored as well. While some part of legends may sound fictitious and unscientific, one also observes from the different legends above that stories may differ yet they imply the same person, place and river, etc. Those are: Dziilimosiuro - who is considered as the first woman of mankind; Makhel - The oldest village of Mao where Nagas are believed to have assembled before dispersing to different places. Evidences still remains are wild pear tree (*Chiitebu*) and other monoliths in and around Makhel which has been mentioned; Khriibu – a place where *Mokhulerii-bu* (stone seat) felt down and never possible to be lifted it up. (It has been known to the old people of Mao that the stone still remains at the same place; *Mokhulerii-bu* - It is a sacred seat of stone, carried with reverence by the ancestors during migration which was to be installed where they would later choose to settle. The place where this sacred stone was placed symbolised the extent of land covered by them. The Mao people before becoming Christianity used to carve the exact model of sacred stone seat out of a particular species of wood (*Chubiso*) and used as seats for people who ceremoniously offer feast of merits to people /village during special occasions; Chuherii River - known as Doyang in Assam, the route through which our ancestors migrated and reached Makhel; and Origination from the north - The migratory legends above assert north to be the place of origin. Thus, considering all these legendary accounts, it is natural to believe that our fore-fathers migrated from the north through *Chuherii* River and settled at Makhel before dispersing to various places. According Mao, (1996), “there is a story told, of how, when someone asked our fore-fathers about their origin and where they came from, they used to point towards the north-east direction. No one can deny the fact that our forefathers migrated from the north-east and yet, obviously because of their sagacity determined to hide their original migratory movements and decided to maintain their own separate identity and prestige as a people, a nation. Accordingly while sojourning at ‘Makhrei’ village; they resolved not to disclose and to keep ‘secret’ of their original migratory movements. It may be for this reason; the place or village was termed as ‘Makhrei’ meaning ‘secret’ in Mao”.

According to the information obtained during an interview with N. Saleo, of *Pfosemei* (Pudunamei)village whose work is popularly recognised for his knowledge and contribution of Mao oral tradition, Shiipfowo had three sons namely: (i) Kapewo; (ii) Toliwo; and (iii) Chorowo. Chorowo had four sons namely: (i) Khrashi: (ii) Ahrowo: (iii) Kade: and (iv) Memiio. Khrashi, Ahrowo and Kade had one son each

while Memiio had three sons namely Pfonio, Pfoseo and Robviio. Originally, only the descendants of Memiio were called as *Ememei* (Mao people). But in those days, collective strength of men was a necessity to prepare for any kind of unpredictable eventuality (attack from enemies and wild animals). Perhaps, on account of such situation, the other three brothers Khrashi, Ahrowo and Kade came to be amalgamated with their brother Memiio and thus the whole descendants of Chorowo later came to be called as *Ememei*. The informant's own book titled *Ememei Kohrii Ko* (Mao Naga Culture), on Page No. 8 mentions about the three real sons of Memiio (i.e Pfoneo, Robveo and Pfoseo) about how their progenies should keep the memory of their ancestors till the end of the world for which three monoliths have been erected adjacently at T.B Hospital Khrokhro, one for Pfoneo, one for Robveo and one for Pfoseo that till today the three monoliths are notably seen.

Written records about the Mao Naga people have been made only with the advent of British. Hence studies done previously to trace the history of the Nagas have been done from the folk songs, folklore, folktales, adages which have been preserved and passed on from generation to generation. Mao (1998) has also pointed out that the Mao society by and large is a folk society (p.41). Prof. Lal Dena in the forward note of the book entitled, "Socio-Cultural History of Shiipfomei Naga Tribe" by William Nepuni writes "it does not necessarily mean that tribes without written records do not have history. They do indeed have history which is stored in the memory of the people. For the study and reconstruction of the history of such people, one has to rely on oral history". A considerable part of this research also relies on the oral history since written documents are not available yet.

1.3: General Features of the Mao Naga Tribe

The total population of Mao is more than a lakh. In early days, all the Mao people were farmers and lived in their traditional habitat i.e Mao. Till today farmers continue to live in the villages. However, with the passage of time, more and more people are moving towards urban areas for better life opportunities. This is because they have made a fast progress in education that today a good number of them are employed in the government offices and other private companies which necessitate them to live outside Mao. Furthermore since the community is not endogamous, there are instances of marriage alliances with the neighboring tribes and other outsiders because of which many Mao women are married off to non-Mao and vice versa.

The main occupation of Mao is agriculture with rice as the main crop. Like most of the tribes in the North-Eastern states, the Mao farmers practice shifting cultivation, a customary practice that they have been engaged in through generation. The other principal methods of cultivation by the Mao people include wet terrace cultivation, dry terrace cultivation and permanent garden cultivation. Though rice is the staple food of Mao, meat forms an important part of the daily food. Besides they prepare varieties of food such as bamboo shoots (which can be eaten when fresh, dried and fermented), fermented soyabeans, dried mustard leaves and other leaves. Edible wild products from the jungle such as fruits, flowers, vegetables, certain tree worms, animals and bees form an important part of people's diet. In recent times, there are ample varieties of vegetables production for their daily use such as potato, maize, cabbage, beans, brinjal, tomarillo, sesame, collard greens, leek, yam, pumpkin, squash, ginger, pigeon pea, millet, job's tears, oilseeds, gourd, cucumber, etc. Fruits like plum, peach, passion fruits, guava, peach, lemon, apple, fig, grapes, bananas, mangoes, walnut, mulberry, cherry, etc. are found in plenty and are used not only for household consumption but as saleable commodities.

Among the Mao Naga people, women play an equally important role in agricultural activities. In fact, a woman's role is seen as even more laborious because apart from the same amount of time engaged in tilling the land in the field with the male members, it is the mother who carries tiffin and agricultural implements in a basket on her back with baby on her front on way to the field and on returning from the field she carries firewood, agricultural implements and empty tiffin boxes in a basket on her back with the child in her front. Besides it is she who performs domestic chores at home before going to the field and after returning from the field. Such challenging roles of a woman are expected in the Mao traditional practice though she performs with love.

Egalitarian system remains an important feature of the traditional Mao economic life and social organizations. Much details of their socio-economic life have been covered in chapter 5 of the study. The same customary practice applied in the political set up as well and continues to be witnessed even in the contemporary context. Neither there is centralised authority exercised over the confederacy of the entire Mao community nor does the hereditary village headman possess judicial powers. The hereditary village headman is through patrilineal descent group and functions as the ritual head of the village. There is not even a permanent council at

village level or the whole Mao council level. However different types of leader exist such as the chairman, secretary, and village authority members at village level also at the whole Mao union there are chairman, secretary and other executive members. Such leaders are not hereditary but are chosen by the people through an informal process of consensus. Such leaders are chosen for their experience, wisdom and concern for common welfare.

However, elements of egalitarianism have begun to change subject to the influence of changes in religion i.e from animism to Christianity; in education and occupation i.e a shift from solely agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities; other ecological conditions; or in the nature of relationship with other communities or within their own dividing the society into 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Naturally being a welfare state, to fulfill its obligations to help the less advantaged, attempts to bridge imbalances and inequalities between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' have been a clear objective of the government. It is against this background that considerable government programmes in the form of monetary benefits as well as services and goods at local, regional, national and international level have been launched and implemented towards the development concerned of the vulnerable sections of the society which is also a *sine qua non* of the development as a whole. The present study brings out the socio-economic conditions of the Mao Naga farmers who occupy a lowest socio-economic status in the context of Mao society. It attempts to identify the factors affecting their socio-economic conditions while examining the role of government programmes as one of the major factors.

1.4: Mao Naga Farmers

The picture of agricultural sector remains grim as majority of the farmers constitute the bottom rung of the poverty ladder. According to the Eleventh Five Year Plan, half of those engaged in agriculture are still illiterate; 80% of farmers are small and marginal. The fate of their economy is inseparably linked with the development of agricultural sector. Since majority of them have a small operational holding of land, most of them live below or near the subsistence level. For them, stagnation has become a forced tradition. Population growth rate is higher than agricultural production growth rate. Therefore, generally farmers are not in a position to earn enough for their living by depending on agricultural products alone. This presents

formidable obstacles to development and socio-economic progress of the farming community in the country.

The poor farmers engaged in agriculture are not only constrained in terms of assets and resources. They come across various types of livelihood and other socio-economic challenges when they face a depressed agricultural scenario; or are deprived of newer opportunities in the globalised society due to lack of education and skills. More frequently normal health problems also occur due to low levels of nutrition and lack of access to health services.

88% of the total population in the North-East lives in rural areas. Population below the poverty line in 2000-01 was 35.13% against the national average of 26.1%. Senapati District of Manipur, which is the universe of the proposed study area has 88.6% of them engaged in agriculture whereas agriculture provides subsistence to 90%.of the total population of Mao people. The pressure of population on the limited cultivable land has remained very high. The methods and implements used in agriculture are of primitive types. Thus subsistence seems to be their motto. Studies have shown that fertilizer consumption in NER as a whole is also relatively very low in comparison to national average. This is mostly due to defective fertilizer distribution system, lack of supply, inadequate transport, storage and credit facilities, raising cost of fertilizers and the occurrence of primitive techniques of production. Moreover, it is said that green revolution is found to be unsuitable in the hill areas.

All in all; farmers are seen at the lowest level of development. It is also seen from the Review of Literature that there is a lack of relevant literature about farmers in Manipur. Infact, no study on socio-economic conditions of the Mao Naga farmers has been conducted. To improve the conditions of farmers, there is a need to study about farmers especially their socio-economic conditions as they are the key indicators for the growth and development of any backward society. In order to help the farmers, there is also a need to identify and analyze factors affecting the socio-economic conditions of farmers; and examine the role of Government Programmes in improving their conditions as government plays an important role for the development concerned. Therefore, it is relevant for the researcher to undertake the present study.

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