

KHASI SOCIETY OF MEGHALAYA

A Sociological Understanding



A.K. NONGKYNRIH

This book presents a holistic perspective of the intricate relationships between the four important social institutions (Kinship and Marriage, Political, Economic and Religious). It not only explains the dynamics and the significance of each institution but also outlines how these institutions influence the patterned behaviours in the society. The author has used micro level results of a five-year study in a rural setting to describe the Khasi society. The book will be useful for scholars, development practitioners, policy-makers and general readers.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Meghalaya was carved out as an autonomous State with the two hill districts of the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills of Assam in 1970, and became a full-fledged State in January 1972. It is one of the smallest States in India and is strategically located in the north-east. It has an area of 22,429 sq. km approximately. It is a strip of land spread along the northern boundary of Bangladesh and is bounded by that country on the south and partly from the west. The length of the international boundary is about 423 km. The State is surrounded on the other side by Assam. Access to the State is mainly by road from Assam. The land surface of the State mostly comprises of steep hills and deep gorges, with valleys and plains land being very limited. The total population of the State as per 1991 Census is 17,74,778 as against 13,35,819 in 1981. Nearly 81 per cent of the population of the State live in rural areas. As per 1991 Census, the State has a total of 5492 villages indicating a rise of 12.04 per cent over the 1981 Census. The population of Meghalaya is predominantly tribal.

The table on the next page shows the area and district-wise population of Meghalaya. The State is richly endowed with natural resources. The most abundant natural resources are coal, limestone and industrial clay. Other commercially exploitable mineral deposits are kaolin, feldspar, glass, sand, etc. The State also has rich deposits of uranium. The heavy and long monsoon sustains intensive and varied flora. Forests cover a land surface of 8510 sq. km or about 37.5 per cent of the total area of the State as per

District	Districts headquarters	Area	Population
East Khasi Hills	Shillong	2748 sq. km	5,37,906
West Khasi Hills	Nongstoin	5247 sq. km	2,20,157
East Garo Hills	Williamnagar	2603 sq. km	1,88,830
West Garo Hills	Tura	3714 sq. km	4,03,027
Jaintia Hills	Jowai	3819 sq. km	2,20,473
South Garo Hills	Baghmara	1850 sq. km	77,073
Ri-Bhoi	Nongpoh	2448 sq. km	1,27,312

1981 Census. The area of reserved forests under the control of the State Government is however small, being only about 4 per cent of the total forest area.

Meghalaya's economy is primarily agricultural, engaging around 75 per cent of the total population. With the increase in population over the years and the corresponding decrease in availability of land for agricultural purposes, the incidence of landless labour and the resultant poverty has risen substantial (Government of Meghalaya: Annual Plan 2001-2002). With this brief background on the state, I will now introduce the study conducted.

Before I introduce Kongthong (the village where I conducted the field work) I would like to examine the definition of the term 'village' in the social anthropological and sociological literature. For this purpose, I identified some of the important studies available in the discipline. Out of the nine studies picked up on Indian villages, eight are monographs and one is an edited work containing a number of articles on different villages.

Srinivas defines village (in the context of South India) particularly as "a group of houses and huts huddled together in a confined space with fields and gardens stretching all around A village in Coorg proper is real in the sense that its boundaries are known to elders and the people of the village see themselves as a unity against other villages." (1952, p. 7). He further explains that "the members of a village have to cooperate on certain occasions such

as weddings, funerals, festivals of the village deity, harvest festivals, hunts, dances, and thatching a newly-built house. Rivalry between villages is still prevalent, and formerly feuds (*maradali*) between villages were frequent.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.)

Srinivas thus conceives of a typical Indian village in its physical and social aspects. In physical terms village is a concrete entity visible in terms of the residential quarters (‘houses and huts huddled together’) surrounded by agricultural and horticultural area (‘fields and gardens stretching all around’). Each village has an individuality of its own carved out by its boundaries. In social terms its inhabitants express a corporate unity when they participate collectively in the events affecting individual families residing in the village (‘weddings, funerals, thatching a newly-built house’) or on occasions of importance for the village as a whole (‘festivals of the harvest, festivals, hunts and dances’). Unity or solidarity of the village population is also visible in cases of external threats from other villages (formerly feuds (*maradali*) between villages were frequent).

In another of his works Srinivas distinguishes between two types of villages in India—the nucleated villages, and the dispersed villages. In a ‘nuclear’ village, “the houses and huts are huddled in the middle and the fields lie all round” (1955, p. 10) while in the dispersed village the houses or huts were surrounded with the farm land which separated these houses from other such houses which were similarly surround by their farm lands. Interestingly enough, Srinivas contrasts these two types of villages on the basis of the problem of defending the village from dacoits and wild animals. In his view the responsibility of defence in a nucleated village lies with all the people of the village together whereas in the case of the dispersed village the responsibility lies with the kin-group owning the farm and its servants because the threat is faced by individual farm.

It seems that the categorization between the nucleated and the

dispersed villages is not comprehensive or general enough to be accepted as a valid criterion to define village in sociological terms. It is not clear whether responsibility of defending from dacoits and wild animals is the distinguishing criterion as a prerequisite to two different types of villages, that the responsibility of tackling this problem therefore is shared differently. Moreover, Srinivas does not highlight any other explanation for these two types of village organizations. He only suggests in passing that "it would be interesting to find out if dispersed villages are associated with large unilinear groups and marital institution among the farmers." (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Srinivas made a study of a village called Rampura in Mysore. Categorizing this village as a nucleated village he describes the structure of relationships amongst the village population and stressed the community aspect of the village population.

Bailey (1957) in his book *Caste and Economic Frontier* also talks in terms of the 'Indian Village Community'. Studying Bisipara village in its historical context Bailey finds that the village is linked with the State only through its fiscal system. The politico-administrative system of the State did not influence the life of the village community. He argues that "... Indian village community can be seen as the progressive extension of an economic frontier. In the literal sense the commercial frontier transcended political boundaries" (1957, p. 6).

Mayer views the village Ramkheri and Malwa as a nuclear settlement, "... spatially separate from other units, and on the other, an official unit based on a Government policy which makes use of this spatial separation for the enforcement of law and order, tax collection, etc." (1960, p. 147). On the one hand, Mayer looks upon the village as a social unit while on the other hand, he treated the village as part of the region which existed even beyond the level of the circle of villages. He maintained that "in any analysis of either caste or kinship, the data from a single village are not enough, and the influence of the wider locality must be assessed" (1960, p. 9).

Dubey (1967) puts Indian village in the context of a 'wider social system' and views it as a part of an organised political society. He argues that "an individual is not the member of a village community alone; he also belongs to a caste, religious group or tribe which has a wider territorial spread and comprises several villages" (1967, p. 5). On the other hand, Dubey also emphasizes the corporate nature of the village population. He explains that it was possible to classify Indian villages in distinct types on the basis of their (i) size, population, and land-area; (ii) ethnic composition and caste constitution; (iii) pattern of land ownership; (iv) structure of authority and power hierarchy; (v) degree of isolation; and (vi) local traditions. Such a classification was necessary, in his view, for a proper understanding of the social structure of Indian villages.

Ishwaran (1968) also favours classification of Indian villages on the basis of the size, land distribution, economy, caste and religion. In terms of size he labels the village as small, medium and large. Pattern of land distribution shows villages where land is owned by cultivators; land largely owned by village landlords; or land owned by landlords but living outside the village. From the point of view of the economy he envisages two types of villages: villages where the entire population is engaged in the same type of occupation; and the other type of villages consisting of members following different occupations. Similarly, he talks in terms of single caste villages or multi-caste villages; villages which are religion-wise homogeneous or heterogeneous.

For Beteille (1971), the physical structure of a village reflected its social structure so much so that the distribution of population in the village in territorial divisions depicted characteristics of similarities and differentiation in structural terms. He looked upon Sripuram as "... essentially a cluster of inhabitants having a certain geographical and social identity" (1971, p. 24). Beteille introduces the notions of 'revenue village', and 'land tenure' in his analysis of Sripuram. For revenue purposes Sripuram was grouped with

Melur, a neighbouring village. In spite of its own separate social existence Sripuram was inter-related with Melur in the sphere of land tenure. He explains that:

The inter-relation makes itself most clearly felt in the sphere of land tenure, since there is no way of distinguishing between land belonging to Sripuram and that belonging to Melur. People from both Sripuram and Melur as well as a large number of outsiders, own land in this one revenue village, which is named after Melur. Also, people from Sripuram own land in a number of other revenue villages particularly in two of them which are close to Sripuram (1971, p. 23).

Now it is possible to look at Sripuram in two different ways: (i) in terms of revenue administration it is a constituent of the revenue village consisting of Melur, Peramur and Vishnupuram; and (ii) constituting in itself a village with its own distinct physical and social identity. In the second sense we can talk in terms of the social structure of Sripuram while in the first sense we talk in terms of the inter-relation of Sripuram population with that of other similar physical and social entities.

Mukherjee (1971, p. 16) in his work, *Six Villages of Bengal* presents an account of various studies done in Indian villages from 1920 to 1950. He explains that the attention of various scholars was turned towards the Indian villages in the early part of the twentieth century as a result of the involvement of Indian farmers in the Indian freedom struggle by Gandhiji. But most of these studies were concerned with economic life of the rural folk. Mukherjee argues that such studies were conducted without an aim generalizing on the Indian rural scene. On the other hand, the scholars made no attempt at linking the economic life in the Indian villages with other aspects of the social structures of rural societies.

Mukherjee points out a change in approach to the study of

Indian villages from the 1950s. Such studies conducted mainly by social anthropologists and sociologists highlighted the social and cultural aspects of village life—the aspects which were missing from the studies on the economic life in the Indian villages.

But Mukherjee still remains unhappy with the studies on Indian villages. In his view, if the studies by the economists (during 1920-1950) had missed out the non-economic dimensions then the studies conducted by social anthropologists and sociologists (from 1950s onwards) had not done justice to the economic dimension of the rural life. He writes, "I thus comment on the lack of a balanced view of the dynamics of rural society and on the incomplete picture of rural life we are presented with ... a composite picture of rural society has yet to be exposed, therefore" (1971, p. xvi).

For him it was important to establish a relationship of causality between the economic and the social aspects in the society in order to understand the organisation of that society. Through this approach, he advocated that, we could understand the structure and function of the society and it was through such an approach again that we could give direction to change in the society. He said, "... until and unless the 'economic' and 'social' perspectives towards 'Village Studies' meet at critical points, it is not possible to obtain a composite understanding of village life and a balanced view of the dynamics of rural society" (1971, p. viii).

Arora (1972) in his study of Bhilalas of Alirajpur conceives of the social system of Alirajpur as consisting of two sub-systems—the rural system and the urban system. This rural-urban dichotomy was used by him even in his definition of the village. By the rural system he means, "all those actions and inter-relations, which are centered around life in villages constitute the rural system," whereas he thought of the urban system "... as a complex of all those actions and inter-relations which are centered in towns and commercial villages" (1972, p. 2). It is interesting to note that in

analytical terms his distinction between the two systems rests mainly on the differences in terms of dominant modes of production and occupation. That is why, he asserts that, "for our purposes the village may be defined as that kind of a community in which the dominant modes of production are agriculture and allied occupations" (1972).

He further made a categorisation of the Adivasi villages as dispersed villages in contrast to the villages in the plains of northern India termed as nucleated villages. However, he did not throw any more light on this distinction. In his study he observes that the territorial boundary of the villages did not coincide with the social boundary of the villages. In his opinion, the physical notion of the village gained prominence due to administrative recognition of the village boundary. He stresses that "... the articulation of the political social unity of the tribals rests on the hamlet as the basic unit. At the same time the administration tends to treat the villages as the basic unit of rural life" (1972, p. 6).

We can therefore see that for Arora what appears to be of importance was the set of inter-relationships in the community and these relationships were found to cut across the physical boundaries of the villages. He uses the term village apparently as equivalent to the term rural system and visualizes it in terms of the predominance of agriculture as mode of production of the community. Even the distinction between dispersed and nucleated villages seemed perhaps to have been used to distinguish between the Adivasi villages with the villages in the plains in north India.

In the views of the eight authors, discussed above, we do not find a consensus between any two views on the defining character of the term 'village'. However, the majority of the views converge on the social aspects of the village and the physical aspects. Some authors, however, considered the various functional aspects as additional features, e.g., the defence of village, village as a corporate unit, or village as a unit for revenue collection. Only a couple of

authors made an explicit reference to the size of the population of a village.

Physical aspects of an individual village give the village an identity as a concrete entity as against the other villages. This individual identity symbolized by a specific name is understood and accepted by the inhabitants of the villages as well as outsiders in terms of its physical location and boundaries. In broader terms the physical space associated with a village has been divided in terms of its use as: (i) the space used for residential purposes where homesteads are constructed; (ii) the space used for the purpose of agricultural activities; and (iii) the space lying barren and unutilized but which might have been in use earlier or might have a potential for future use. Villages have been classified on the basis of (i) whether the cultivable land surrounds an individual homestead or a cluster or (ii) whether all the homesteads are clustered together and agricultural land is earmarked away from the space used for homesteads.

Physical space use for residential purposes is used significantly in multi-caste villages where the division of physical space reflects the social distance between various caste groups. Census clarification of the villages is another popular scheme of classification. (Census of India). The various decadal reports of the census beginning from 1871 show a gradual enlargement in the definition of village. However the main characterizing feature in all the definitions has been the area (physical) demarcated for revenue purposes. The Census Report of 1921 made an interesting observation when it contended that the houses were located without any reference to the civic unity or corporate life and there was nothing in their arrangement which could enable these houses to get a label of village. What is interesting here is that without being explicit the report seemingly assumes civic unity or corporate life (the social/functional aspects) as a criterion for village.

But a distinct shift is noticeable in the Census Reports since

1951, i.e., after India became an independent sovereign country. For the first time the term 'village' was defined separately for two distinct purposes—one for the purpose of the census and the other for the administrative purposes. For census purposes a village was characterized as a cluster of houses with a distinctly recognised social identity. For the administrator the village still remained as a mauza for the purpose of land revenue.

Since 1961 onwards the census reports replaced the term village by the term 'rural area' and adopted the administrative definition of a revenue village as a uniform definition on the grounds of convenience.

Coming to the social aspects, we notice that the village studies put emphasis on (i) the structural and functional aspects of the village population; and (ii) the extra village linkages of the population. On the first point different studies discussed the issues variously in terms of the size of the population; the organization of the population in caste-structure in multi-caste villages; occupational structure of the population and the Jajmani relations; the kinship structure of the population; the organization of economic and political relationships; the arrangement of houses from the point of village-defence; and the functional unity and corporate nature of the village population. Issues on the second point, seen at the regional and state levels separately, deal with the kinship and marriage relationships; village economic activity as playing a part in the extra-village market economy; and participation of the village population through local political bodies (Panchayats, etc.) and as electorates for the Legislative Assemblies and Parliament under the democratic set-up of the various political processes in the country.

In the light of the above discussion, it may not be wrong to argue that village has been adopted as a unit of study in such cases where the focus is on the internal structure and dynamics of the relationships of the population within the village. Here the scholars

seemed to be convinced that their findings could enable them to generalize on the Indian society as a whole. Therefore, following the method of induction, empirical studies of individual villages in different parts of the country were carried out. Such studies did provide data for the purposes of comparison and classification.

Following the same argument we decided to conduct an empirical study of a Khasi village. Kongthong was chosen at the first instance for the simple reason that it has been classified in the Census of India as a village, and it is designated as a village in the context of the traditional political institution of *Hima*. Moreover, this particular village is located in a remote corner of the East Khasi Hills and has yet to receive the influences of the nearest urban area (Cherrapunjee) in various ways.

The author with his team adopted the technique of non-participant observation for data collection in this study. To begin with contacts were established with the Block Development Officer (BDO), the *Sordar* of *Raid* Kongthong, and the *Syiem* of *Hima* Sohra. The BDO had provided the necessary background information about the village in particular and the region in general. The *Syiem* made available the various documents relating to the organization of the villages under the *Hima* and was kind enough to put the resources of the *Hima* at our disposal. The *Sordar* introduced us to the village headman. We were given a list of all the households in the village from the register of the village *dorbar*. With the help of this list we started a door-to-door census in the village. In all, a period of ten months was spent intermittently in data collection. There were 66 houses in the village out of which one house was uninhabited. This particular house was not an abandoned house but was usually kept under lock and key by its owner, who has settled in the city of Shillong. The owner stayed in this house during his occasional visits to the village.

For the purpose of discussing household composition we shall therefore take into account only 65 houses which were considered

as inhabited houses. The total population of the village living in these 65 households was 307 persons. There were 156 males (50.81%) and 151 females (49.18%) out of the total of 307 persons in the village (Table 1).

Table 1. Sex-wise distribution of population in the village

Population	Frequency	Percentage
Male	156	50.81
Female	151	49.18
Total	307	99.99

Table 2 shows the distribution of household-wise population. Household population shows a variation from a single member (6 households) to as many as 10 members in the household (1 household). These single-member 6 households had in 5 cases a single old parent living alone because the married children had moved out to their residences of procreation. In the remaining one case a young unmarried woman was living alone after the death of her parents. It is interesting to note from this table that 26 households (40%) were inhabited by 2-4 members each while 26 households (40%) were inhabited by 4-6 members each. Looking differently we could find 44 households (67.7%) inhabited by 2-6 members each. However, on an average we may say that about 5 members lived in a household. There were relatively less number of households with 7 or more members residing in each. We can therefore say safely that the household size in the village was 4-6 members generally.

Table 3 describes the age-wise distribution of the population in the village. The age-group 0-5 has the maximum frequency of 54 (17.47%) while age-group 15-20 has the second largest frequency 42 (13.59%). When we look at the various age-groups in clusters we get the following picture. More than half of the population 182 (59.28%) belongs to age group 15-60 years, physically the most active part of life. If we consider 15-40 years

Table 2. Household-wise distribution of population

No. of members in households	Frequency of households	Percentage
1	6	9.23
2	8	12.30
3	10	15.38
4	8	12.30
5	11	16.92
6	7	10.96
7	2	3.07
8	6	9.23
9	6	9.23
10	1	1.53
Total	65	99.95

Table 3. Age-wise distribution of population

Age categories	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5	54	17.47
5 – 10	35	11.32
10 – 15	21	6.97
15 – 20	42	13.59
20 – 25	30	9.70
25 – 30	27	8.79
30 – 35	12	3.68
35 – 40	12	3.88
40 – 45	20	6.47
45 – 50	17	5.50
50 – 55	8	2.58
55 – 60	14	4.53
60 – 65	5	1.61
65 – 70	7	2.26
70 – 75	3	0.97
Total	307	99.99

of age as constituting the youth of the society then 123 persons (40.06%) in the village belong to this age-group, whereas those falling between 0-15 years of age are 110 in number (35.83%). It is interesting to note that there was a sudden decline in population from 40 years onward with only 69 people (22.47%) of the age 40 and above. The age structure of the population can be shown differently by classifying the total population of the village as follows: between 0-25 years there were 182 persons (59.28%); between 25-50 years there were 88 persons (28.66%); and 50 years and above there were 37 persons (12.05%). We can therefore safely observe that the majority of the village population was quite young in age. We found that in the village both male as well as female adult population were engaged in various occupations. Out of 193 persons engaged in gainful work there were 104 (53.88%) males and 89 (46.11%) females (Table 4).

Table 4. Sex-wise distribution of working population

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	104	53.88
Female	89	46.11
Total	193	99.99

The majority of the persons (178 = 92.22%) were engaged in single occupation while 15 persons (7.77%) were engaged in multiple occupations (Table 5). In the single occupation categories we found 165 (85.49%) persons (84 males = 43.52%; 81 females = 41.96% engaged in agriculture; 7 (3.62%) persons (5 males = 2.59%; 2 females = 1.03%) earning their livelihood by selling their labour as daily wage earners; 2 persons (1.03%) (1 male = 0.51; 1 female = 0.51%) working as school teachers; while 3 (1.55%) persons (3 males = 1.55%) earning their livelihood by doing contractual work of various kinds for the government. Only 1 (0.51%) woman was engaged in basket-weaving (Table 6).

Table 5. Occupation-wise distribution of population

No. of occupation	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Single	93	85	178	92.22
Multiple	11	4	15	7.77
Total	104	89	193	99.99

Table 6. Types of single occupations

Occupations	Frequency				Total	Percentage
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
Agriculture	84	43.52	81	41.96	165	85.49
Labour	5	2.59	2	1.03	7	3.62
Teaching	1	0.51	1	0.51	2	1.03
Contractual works	3	1.55	0	0.00	3	1.55
Basket-weaving	0	0.00	1	0.51	1	0.51

In the multiple occupation categories cultivation was practised by all besides other occupations. 4 persons (2.07%) (2 males = 1.03%; 2 females = 1.03%) augmented their income by basket-weaving; 2 (1.03%) persons (both males) combined their cultivation activities with apiculture; 1 (0.51%) (1 male) undertook contractual work from the government in addition to cultivation; 5 persons (2.59%) (3 males = 1.55%; 2 females = 1.03%) sold their labour on daily wage basis when they got time off from the cultivation activities; while 1 (0.51%) person (all male) each was engaged in teaching, carpentry and practice of herbal (folk) medicine besides cultivation (Table 7).

On examining the single occupation as well as the multiple occupation categories we found that cultivation of land in one form or the other was practised by the majority of the population (180 = 93.26). Out of these 180 persons there were 95 males

Table 7. Types of multiple occupations (other occupation in addition to cultivation)

Occupations	Frequency				Total	Percentage
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
Basket-weaving	2	1.03	2	1.03	4	2.07
Api-culture	2	1.03	0	0.00	2	1.03
Contractual works	1	0.51	0	0.00	1	0.51
Labour	3	1.55	2	1.03	5	2.59
Teaching	1	0.51	0	0.00	1	0.51
Carpentry	1	0.51	0	0.00	1	0.51
Folk medicine	1	0.51	0	0.00	1	0.51

Table 8. Distribution of agricultural (single & multiple) occupation and non-agricultural occupation

Occupations	Frequency				Total	Percentage
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
Agricultural	95	52.77	85	47.22	180	93.26
Non-agricultural	9	69.23	4	30.76	13	6.73
Total	104	—	89	—	193	99.99

(52.77%) and 85 females (47.22%) engaged in cultivation (Table 8). Looking at it differently we found that 84 men (80.76%) out of 104 working males, and 81 women (91.01%) out of 89 working females were engaged in cultivation (Table 6). Cultivation here covered activities related to horticulture, agriculture, and growth of forest produce. Horticultural activity was in terms of growing and maintaining orange orchards, banana gardens, jackfruit trees, and pineapple plants. Oranges and banana were their cash crops while jackfruit and pineapple both grown in scanty numbers were generally used for personal/private/home consumption and consequently may not be treated as part of their economic activity. In agricultural activity they were engaged in growing ginger, black

pepper, betel nut, betel leaves, job's tears and sweet potatoes as cash crops, while arum, millet, certain varieties of nuts and bay leaves were grown for consumption. Besides these, they also maintained kitchen gardens to grow tomatoes, beans, and chillies for self consumption. Growth of broom as a forest produce was the most important activity which was economically most profitable due to its widespread use in making broom sticks. Though this variety of broom had a characteristic of growing widely as a weed by itself, its marketable potential had induced the villagers to go for its properly cared-for cultivation.

The village Kongthong had only one school providing educational facilities up to Class VI standard. Beyond this the educational facilities were available to the village population about 45-50 km away in Cherrapunjee. Cherrapunjee offered educational opportunities up to the graduation level. After this, a student has to go to Shillong (about 60 km from Cherrapunjee) where the only University of the State is located. Those desirous of pursuing studies beyond what was offered by the village school had to stay in Cherrapunjee or in Shillong. The college in Cherrapunjee did not offer any boarding facilities to the students and therefore a student after passing Class VI (bordering on the beginning of teens) had to find private accommodation and arrange both boarding and lodging facilities for himself/herself. This not only created an extra expenditure head in the family budget of the parents but also presented additional burden of providing suitable conditions of stay for the children in a far away town.

There was a one-room building in the name of a school in the village. Its tin roof had several holes through which water used to trickle over the students in the monsoon. Its broken walls had patches of several small tin sheets straightened out from empty oil canisters. There were rows of wooden benches and desks for the students. There was only one teacher, popularly addressed as *Babu*, serving there for the last twenty-six years.

This single room school had no compartments inside it and all

students studying for different standards were made to sit together. Students belonging to a particular class were grouped together in their seating arrangements. We can say that instead of physical compartmentalizing in terms of different classrooms the teacher had separated them notionally into different groups.

The school held classes for five days a week in two shifts per day. The first shift was of three hours duration (6.00 a.m.–9.00 a.m.) and the second shift was of two hours duration (10.00 a.m.–12.00 p.m.). There were 44 students attending school in the first shift and 7 students were attending school in the second shift during the period of our field work. The students in the first shift were studying in classes A, B, I, II and III while the students in second shift were enrolled in classes IV, V and VI. It was very interesting to watch a single teacher handle students belonging to different levels at the same time. He would address himself to one class of students at one time and after explaining a few things he would engage them by giving some exercise to be solved in the classroom. After this he would shift to the next class of students. After completing one round with students of one class he would return to the first group to see the progress of the work assigned to them. The school had no extra-curricular or co-curricular activities for the students. After the school hours the students were free to go home or to the field to assist their parents.

Out of the total population of 307 persons in the village 49 (15.96%) were infants or children below the school-going age, while 59 youths were studying at various levels of educational standard. We shall therefore discuss the educational status of the remaining of 199 persons in the village. There were 90 persons (45.22% of 199) consisting of 46 (51.11% of 90) males and 44 (48.88% of 90) females who were illiterate. 109 persons (54.77% of 199) had received education at various levels and were now engaged in various occupations. 71 persons (35.67% of 199) had only pre-primary level of education and consisted of 43 males (60.56% of 71) and 28 females (39.43% of 71). 25 persons

(12.56% of 199) consisting of 10 males (40.00% of 25) and 15 females (60.00% of 25) had studied up to lower-primary level. 12 persons (6.03% of 199) with upper-primary level of education consisted of 5 males (41.66% of 12) and 7 females (58.33% of 12). There was only 1 graduate in the village who was a male (Table 9).

Table 9. Educational status of the working population

Educational status	Frequency				Total	Percentage
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
Illiterate	46	51.11	44	48.88	90	45.22
Pre-primary	43	60.56	28	39.43	71	35.67
Lower-primary	10	40.00	15	60.00	25	12.56
Upper-primary	5	41.66	7	58.33	12	6.03
High school	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Pre-university	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Graduation	1	100.00	0	0.00	1	0.50
Post-graduate	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	105	—	94	—	199	99.98

Notes: 1. Pre-Primary: Equivalent to Nursery & Kindergarten (referred to as Class A and Class B in the village).

2. Lower Primary: Class I to Class IV.

3. Upper Primary: Class V to Class VII.

4. High School: Class VIII to Class X.

59 young boys and girls were studying at different levels of education. Of these 59 children 50 (84.75%) were studying in the village school while the remaining 9 (15.25%) youths were studying outside the village. These 50 children consisted of 20 boys (46% of 50) and 30 girls (60% of 50); whereas the 9 children studying outside the village consisted of 8 (88.88% of 9) boys and 1 (11.11% of 9) girl.

When we look at the distribution of these 59 students at various

levels of education we notice an interesting pattern with the minimum number of students studying in pre-university classes, which meant that no youth of the village was pursuing education at the graduation level or post-graduation level. This downward trend could be depicted in numerical form as follows: 25 students (42.37%) were studying at the pre-primary level (17 in class A and 8 in class B); 17 students (28.81%) were studying in lower-primary classes (10 in class I and 7 in class II); 8 students (13.55%) were studying in upper-primary classes (3 in class IV, 3 in class V and 2 in class VI). This was the position with the level of educational opportunities available in the village. There were 2 students (3.38%) studying in class VII at the upper-primary level in schools located in Cherrapunjee. 4 students

Table 10. Distribution of students at various stages of educational career

Stage of educational career	Frequency		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Class A	9	8	17	28.81
Class B	4	4	8	13.55
Class I	1	9	10	16.94
Class II	1	6	7	11.86
Class III	—	—	—	—
Class IV	3	—	3	5.08
Class V	—	3	3	5.08
Class VI	2	—	2	3.38
Class VII	1	1	2	3.38
Class VIII	1	—	1	1.69
Class IX	3	—	3	5.08
Class X	—	—	—	—
P. U. I yr	1	—	1	1.69
P. U. II yr	2	—	2	3.38
BA/B.Sc./B.Com.	—	—	—	—
Total	28	31	59	99.92

(6.78%) were attending high school in Cherrapunjee (1 student in class VIII and 3 students in class IX while none in class X); and 3 students (5.08%) were pursuing college education at the pre-university level (1 in P.U. first year and 2 in P.U. second year) (Table 10).

From the above description it is clear that both in the categories of those who had stopped pursuing their studies after a few years of education and those who were still pursuing studies at different levels, the majority of the persons seemed to be educated up to class III or had pursued their studies for a period of only five years. One of the major reasons seemed to be the restricted educational opportunities in the village. The school came up after the Presbyterian missionaries first established a foothold in the village in 1945. The school followed a few years later. It is interesting to note that in spite of various attempts the original date of opening of the school could not be obtained from any source. Even the seniormost teacher today could not help us much in this regard. He told us that when he first came to the village on a teaching assignment 26 years ago all that he had found was a small hut in the name of the school but no students. He had to take great pains in luring the children to come and study. He said with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that the regular habit of the young children of playing truant from the school could not shake his confidence and now his perseverance had resulted in not only a regular stream of young children getting enrolled in the school but also continuing with their studies. In his opinion and as per the faint memory of elders in the village, the school might have come up sometime during the 1950s.

Another fact to be noted here is that till almost the middle of the 1970s this school offered education up to class III standard. At the time of doing our field work the school offered education up to the level of class VI. This may be one of the reasons why most of the adults of the village had remained educated up to class III level. Even today after class VI it was a major decision for

the parents whether they could afford to send their young children to Cherrapunjee for further education or not.

In the light of the above observations we should not be wrong in concluding that aspirations for higher levels of education were linked with the structure of occupation and level of income to support the pursuit of education. The occupational structure of the village was such that it did not require high level of formal education in a school. There did not seem to be enough incentive on the part of poor parents to send their children all the way to Cherrapunjee for more education even if they so desired. Of course it was a matter of further observation to see what would happen if opportunities for education beyond class VI level were available in the village schools because there are some cases, howsoever few, where children did venture out to study up to graduation level.

There was no pressure generated by the village population on the church organization running the school, either to upgrade the level of education or create more facilities in the school at the existing level. However they said that demands for a better educational facility were raised in the recent past at the time of elections but the elected leaders never kept their promises. In any case an impression was gathered as if the villagers did not consider education beyond upper-primary level very significant. This impression received credence from another observation that generally the male children were seen assisting their parents in the field by the time they reached the age of 12-13 years. Female children around the same age as male children were also made to relieve their mothers of the domestic responsibilities so that the mother could also devote more time to economic pursuits. Of course some female children continued attending the school in addition to sharing a part of the domestic chores.

After introducing the village Kongthong and various demographic aspects of the population, we shall describe the various institutions in the village society in the following chapters.