

**THE TRADITIONAL LOTHANAGA
POLITY AND SOCIETY AND THE
IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE**

A THESIS

**SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

Y. BEN LOTHANAGA
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

To



NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG-793014
SEPTEMBER, 1996

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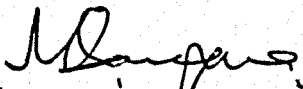
CERTIFICATE

Certified that the subject matter of this Thesis is the record of work done by Shri Y. Ben Lotha, and the contents of this Thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to him, or, to the best of my knowledge, to any one else, and that the Thesis had not been submitted by him for any research degree in any other University.

In habit and character Shri Y. Ben Lotha is a fit and proper person for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SHILLONG

THE 3rd. SEPTEMBER 1996


(Milton S. Sangma)
Supervisor

Department of History

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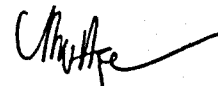
I also express my deep sense of gratitude to my beloved parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives and friends for giving me inspiration, encouragement and enthusiasm to pursue with my research work. I especially thank my parents, Yishumo and Rodila, for their constant prayer and also financial support. I also take this opportunity to thank my brothers who supported me financially without which this thesis would not have seen the light of the day. I am very much indebted to all of them.

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(Y. BEN LOTHAS)

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CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Location

The district of Wokha is situated on the mid-West of the state of Nagaland and adjoins the Sibsagar plains of Assam on the West, Mokokchung on the North, Zunheboto in the East, and Kohima district in the South. The district is intercepted at the heart by latitude 26°8' North and longitude 94°18' East.¹ It has an area of 1,628 square kilometres. The total population, according to the 1991 Census, was 82,612 and the density of population per square kilometres is 51.²

Origin of the name 'Wokha'

According to one traditional story of Lotha migration, the ancestors of Lotha people come to their present place from Khezakenoma across the Angami and Rengma areas and at last they assembled at Wokha, a place which was then not yet named as Wokha, but was named so later on; 'Wo' or 'Owo' in Lotha means number of people, and 'Kha' means counting. Thus Wokha means 'counting the number of the people'. So the place in which the

-
1. B.B. Ghosh, Nagaland District Gazetteers, Wokha District, 1979, p. 1.
 2. Basic Facts, 1993, Nagaland, p. 5.

Lotha ancestors had assembled and counted themselves of their number was named as Wokha. It may be noted here that, during their migration the Lothas lost their true number and so they collected in one place and counted themselves.³

Topography

The topography of Wokha district is like any other areas of Nagaland, forming a mountain terrain characterized by the ranges of hills running from North-east to South-west. It is interesting to note that Doyang, flows through the middle of the Wokha district and it crosses all the three ranges of the district.⁴

Ranges

The district is dominated by the following three ranges: Bhandari range, which is the outer range also called lower range. It is a prolonged chain going northwardly upto Japukong range in the Mokokchung district. This range of the South Western side, generally slopes down to the plains of Assam.

Sanis range - This is also commonly called middle range. This middle range is merged with the Changkikong range on the north in the Mokokchung district.

Wokha range - which falls in the upper area of the district lies in the eastern and northern parts of the district.

3. B.B. Ghosh, op.cit.

4. Ibid., p. 2.

It is also called upper range. It is a long chain of ranges and has emerged from Rengma area in the Kohima district. It gradually bends eastward till it reaches river Doyang. Otherwise it would have joined with Akuluto range in the Zunheboto district on the other side. Wokha town, the headquarters of the Wokha district, falls in the middle part of this range. The altitude of the Wokha is about 1,500 metres and it is the highest altitude of the inhabited areas of the district.

The highest peak in the district is Wokha mountain which is locally called Tiyi Elung, and on the foot of which is situated Wokha town, the headquarters of this district. The altitude of this peak is 1,969.61 metres and it is an apex of the Wokha range itself. The peak is believed by the Lothas and some other tribes like the Semas, Rengmas and the Aos, to be repository of their deceased,⁵ which is locally called EchUkvU (the cave of dead). A resource person and social worker of the tribe Pimomo Kikon adds that, in the caves of the mountain is the Land of the Dead where the Lothas believe they all go after death. Six bracelets for the men and five bracelets for the women are all that is required to show to the "great mother" at the entrance of that misty land. The villages on the ridges of Wokha mountain are all large and hard. Through each village runs the "Path of the dead" leading straight up to the mountain.⁶

5. Ibid., p. 3.

6. Interviewed with Pimomo Kikon of Yimpang village at Wokha on 13th October 1994.

Behind the discovery of this 'Cave' in the remote past was associated with a mysterious story. It goes like this, once upon a time there was a fatal epidemic (said to be Small-Pox) spread throughout Lotha country that claimed almost all the children affected by the disease. So one day a stricken old man who was also lone survivor in his family from Wokha village, went to see if there is cave of dead at all. After a long search, to his surprise, found a cave in a steep rock which was difficult to reach. So he collected rope like cane and with the help of that cane climbed down and reached the cave. There he found like footprints of children scab of small-pox and also domestic flies around the cave. From there he confirmed that there is a cave of the dead and the spirit of the dead person came to this cave not only from the Lotha area but also from Ao, Semas, Rengmas and the Angamis. It is also said that near the cave, jhumming cultivations were also carried out by the spirit of the dead ones, making noises and sometimes calling each other, as when they were still alive. They also cultivated different kinds of seasonal crops. All these could be heard and seen by the neighbouring villages like Yimkha, Longla, Yanthamo, N. Longidang, etc. Through all these activities in the past, forefathers came to the conclusion that indeed there exists the cave of the dead or the land of the dead and till today people strongly believe that there is a cave of the dead in the Tiyi mountain.

Another mysterious existence found in the past was river fountain near the cave of the dead from root-like tail of a cow continuously dropping water swinging to and fro that formed a rivulet, which was said to be one of the tributaries of a big river in Lotha area, locally known as Tchupvi. One significant thing of this belief was that whoever succeeds in getting a drop into his palm would have to suffer and not live long. It is due to this reason that people in the past did not dare to collect water from the fountain, for it might cost their lives. It is also important to mention here that, river that formed due to continuous dropping of water was known as 'the river of the dead'. It might also happen that if some unfortunate people touched this river with stick or fishing was done, suddenly stormy weather would occur and rain heavily around that locality destroying the standing crops etc. It was due to this reason that when the Britishers came to know of the belief of this mysterious existence and its effects, they passed an order to the effect that no one should be allowed to fish in that particular river. For effective enforcement of the order a fine of Rs. 50/- was imposed to the offenders for breaking the law. This mysterious existence is still believed by the people and also the fine imposed by the Britishers still holds good for the people of that area of the Wokha district.⁷ On its summit, it is said, lies a fine and mysterious

7. This story was narrated by (1) Mhonimo 70, (2) Renjamo 74, (3) Mhonchiimo 77, of Yanthamo, on 4.2.93.

fruit garden, where one can enjoy the fruits but could not take them home. If so, one would not find his way back home or would fall untoward incident on the way. There is also the traditional story of the mystic origin of a certain defied stone. According to this story, there was a stone on the peak which wandered from the peak and has finally settled on a site between Akok and Lakhuti villages (in the middle range), and can be seen by all the passers-by even today. The stone is called 'Tiyilong', which means 'the stone of Tiyi'. In the past, criminals took an oath before that rock at its present site, in the presence of the Lotha Chiefs.

Due to the steep nature of the hills, there are not many valleys in this district. However, near the plains of Assam, where the hills are low, there are a few valleys. The most important of them are Baghty and Tchurang. Tchurang valley is in the lower range and in Akok-Mekokla area. Baghty is also in lower range and is comparatively big and the land is fertile. It adjoins the plains of Assam.⁸

The district is drained by several hilly rivers of which Doyang (Pofu), Chubi and Nzhu are more important.

There are no rivers navigable by large boats throughout the year. The Doyang river, which forms the eastern boundary

8. B.B. Ghosh, op.cit., p. 3.

of the district (i.e., Hill District), flows in a general direction from south to north through the Lotha and Angami country, till it falls into the Dhanswari in the extreme north-east of the district which is navigable by boats of two tons burden in the rainy season. Doyang, the biggest and also the longest and most important river in the district - its tributaries on the west bank are the Rengmopani or Zubra, the Zulu and the Siju.⁹ The river then enters Zunheboto district still flowing northwardly. It later on forms a boundary line between Sema and Lotha areas. This river finally falls in the Dhansiri river in the plains of Assam. Doyang is not only important river for the Wokha district alone but is also equally important river for the whole state of Nagaland. In the valleys along the Doyang river the modern system of cultivation like terrace and horticulture has been carried out successfully, especially in and around Pangti village. Most important places are "Pofu Hayi" and "Tentsu Hayi".

Chubi and Nzhu are also important rivers in the district forming important tributaries of Doyang river and also varieties of fishes are to be found in these rivers. Lakes are few in the district. The important and natural lake in the district is 'Totsu Wozhu' situated in the southern part of Phiro-Shaki area in the upper part of this district. Though small in size,

9. W.W. Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. 2, New Delhi, Reprinted, 1990, p. 175.

during leisure many people delight in angling in this lake and also varieties of hill fish abound this lake. There are some other natural lakes in the middle range but they are small and are less important.¹⁰ As far as waterfall is concerned there is no permanent ones in the district but several occurs during monsoon.

Climate, temperature and rainfall¹¹

Wokha district enjoys monsoon climate with a difference. The difference found is that unlike the adjoining plains of Assam the winter is cold in the district and summer is warm in the day time and rather cold in the night. In winter, the night temperature comes down 4° to 2° Centigrade in December, January and February, the coldest months in the year. Rainfall in the district is on the average 2000 m (80") and it falls for about five to six months of the year with greatest concentration in July and August.

Towards the end of winter season, in the months of February and March, the sky is clear throughout the day with occasional cloudiness in afternoon but clear again at night. These are the windiest months in the year. Towards the end of March the wind dies out. A few drops of rainfall is found even in February and March and a little more in April and May. Then

10. B.B. Ghosh, op.cit., p. 4.

11. Wokha District Gazetteer, pp. 14-15.

sets in the monsoon from the month of June. Sometimes hailstorms occur at this time and it suddenly becomes cold. South-West monsoon sets in, in the middle of June and the same continues upto September. During the summer season the average relative humidity is 80 per cent which sometimes goes upto 95 to 100 per cent, and as such it is very damp in this district during monsoon.

Actual hot day appears in July, August and September during sunny days only, and not during rainy or cloudy days. The average maximum and minimum temperature of Wokha district in July are recorded at 27.15° and 16.96° respectively. The pleasant season starts from the months of October. Sometimes storms occur during the onset of South-West monsoon in March-April and again during onset of North-East monsoon in the months of September-October. It seems unlikely but it is a fact that whenever there is depression of Bay of Bengal, Nagaland and so this district gets clouded sky, drizzling and rainfall.

Frost falls in Wokha mountain and its adjoining areas like Wokha and nearby villages in December and January. During these months mornings are bright, but almost everyday by 11 a.m. or 12 noon the sky becomes clouded and it continues till evening and the night sky is clear again. The gaiety spring can be felt only in the month of April.

Thus the analysis of climate reveals that practically two seasons, winter and rainy, dominate the year. Spring and Autumn are nominal and shortlived. Summer is generally hot, but inside the house the heat is not felt much in the upper part of the district. But the heat is felt more in the lower part of the district especially Bhandari and Baghty areas.

Flora¹²

The average altitude of Wokha district is 1200 metres. The temperature is low keeping it cool throughout the year. At this climate, it should have been quite sufficient for keeping the vegetation green forever. But it is not so, because of two things: Firstly, because of the hilly condition of the land the water does not stand and due to porosity of the earth the retention power is much less. Secondly, the trees and plants cannot stand the cold. As a result, many trees, and the undergrowth grasses and shrubs dry up in winter. By February it looks like a dry land. But from March onwards it becomes green again.

Under these circumstances, Wokha district consists of both deciduous and evergreen forests. Most of the trees are deciduous. They shed the leaves from November onward and grow it again in March. But there are some trees which do not shed all the leaves, and this keeps green forever. In the lower altitude the trees are more evergreen than deciduous. So

12. Ibid., p. 9.

we see that there is a mixed vegetation of evergreen and deciduous trees. Thus we can say that the district consists of the following kinds of forest:

- (a) Evergreen upto the altitude of 1000 metres.
- (b) Mixed deciduous and evergreen from above 1000 metres.

Fauna

Major part of the district being covered by forest and jungles it is natural that there will be lots of animal life. In fact, it was that there was plenty of birds and animals and reptiles. But in the wake of modern civilization which has brought guns to this region after the Second World War (1939-45), and the use of catapult, those have been killed indiscriminately. And so the fauna wealth is now no more a wealth but practically some 'Museum Pieces'. However, the following birds and animals are found in the jungles of this district: white vulture, grey jungle fowl, common peafowl, common green pigeon, blue rock pigeon, spotted dove, koel, spotted owlet, great horned owl, house swift, pied hornbills, wood picker etc. The common animals found are: barking deer, Himalayan black bear, wild goat, wild cat, Indian porcupine, tigers, jackal, leopard, wolf, python, land tortoise, stag, elephant and other snakes, gayal or mithun etc.¹³

13. W.W. Hunter, op.cit., p. 177.

Origin and Migration

Like most other tribals, the Lothas, do not have a written record of their past and this led many to question whether the Lothas have at all a history or not. With the passage of time, many Lothas experienced a crisis of identity faced with the question of who they were and where they came from. There is a feeling of rootlessness precisely because of a lack of knowledge of their origin. Thus reconstructing the history of society dispossessed of any written record, such as that of the Lothas, is an extremely difficult task requiring unique and unconventional methodology geared to meet this particular problem. From beyond the mists of time, the Lothas have preserved and handed down their history, culture and customs from one generation to the succeeding ones by word of mouth in the form of folktales, songs and genealogy. It is encouraging that in spite of all the difficulties involved, the oral tradition has been recognized as a keystone in the reconstruction of the tribal societies. To quote Professor Vansina:

Whether memory changes or not culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation. How it is possible for a mind to remember and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, messages, and instructions for living which manifest continuity over time is one of greatest wonders one can study, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral tradition should be central to students of culture, ideology, of society, of Psychology, of art, and finally of history. 14

14. Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History, Wisconsin, 1985, p. 11.

The early history of Nagas is shrouded in obscurity, so also is the early history of the Lothas. With an illiterate tribe like the Lothas who did not have written language and documents on which dependency could be placed for their origin and migration of the tribe on the statements of the tribal elders now living or on the basis of the traditions collected, that is, on knowledge which has come down to them from their ancestors, handed down from father to son through successive generations. Secondly, an attempt is also made from available source of materials collected from different shades of opinions of writers and scholars.

In spite of several attempts made by different writers, the problem of the origin, composition and migration of the Naga tribes still awaits solution. The commonly accepted or the main traditions of the origin and early migrations of the Lotha Nagas are varied and mutually inconsistent which states that the Lothas and Ahoms were once one people who migrated from a place called Lengka somewhere north or north-east of the Naga Hills, the exact site being unknown. They soon split up into two bodies, one of which became the plainsmen of the Brahmaputra valley and the other the Nagas of the hills. The usual tradition, however, gives the Lothas an autochthonous origin, and is almost identical with that told by the Angamis of themselves. The story goes that there were three brothers -

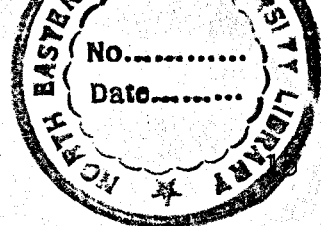
Limhachan, Ezomontsu and Rankhanda, the ancestors of the three phartries of the tribe, came out of a 'hole' in the earth near the miraculous stone of Khezakenoma. It is said that, if one load of rice dried on this stone it becomes double.¹⁵ Owing, however, to the indecent behaviour of a couple the virtue went out of the stone, and the Lothas set out on their migrations, taking with them a little piece of the stone, which is still, said to have preserved at Pangti.¹⁶

Most of the Naga tribes have more or less the same story that they came from a 'hole' in the earth. History teaches that the early people were living in the caves in the remote past. So also the Nagas in the remote past might have lived in big 'hole' or Caves. Lotha Nagas have a long and detailed story as to how they came out of a hole in the earth with the help of a dog. According to the mythology, as narrated by several elderly persons from different villages of the Lotha areas,¹⁷ the Lothas were living in the underground world where actual settlement was established but also there was a monster who attacked the helpless villagers. The mythology unmistakably mentions the names of the persons involved and the monster

15. Yishiimo of L. Longidang, interviewed on 27.12.92.

16. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 4. (Similar view is also shared by Pimomo Kikon).

17. District Cultural Office, Wokha. No. DCO/WKA/Pln-Res/2/91-92 (Correspondence for Research Work).



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in the episode and the ultimate discovery of the world - the overground world.

The legend goes that one day, Rankhanda sons Limhachan, Limhathung and Eyimo (who was dumb and deaf) went to the jungle for hunting with their dog. There they chased out a porcupine in one deep and narrow passage, seems to be underground hole. Three brothers kept following the footprints of the dog. This narrow passage was long enough that they took rest nine times while crossing this hole or passage. As they followed the footprints of the animal at the end of the passage or hole they found a new earth. Soon after they found water pond and nearby they also found goose-berry (chukithitong) and chilly trees bearing fruits. So the two brothers plucked the goose-berry and chilly and was given to Eyimo for testing if those were poison. After eating the goose-berry and water Eyimo expressed by beating his chest as a sign of good taste and liking to his brothers Limhatung and Limhachan. After that he (Eyimo) tested the chilly and gave expression of hotness in his mouth to his brothers. Having tested both, nothing happened to Eyimo so Limhathung and Limhachan also started eating the goose-berry and chilly as Eyimo did. After that they collected the fruits and went back to their place. On reaching they gave their father Rankhandan for testing and the father appreciated the taste of the new fruits. Then their father said to them, 'the place

which you found is a new good place for us to live, so let us go there and make a new village without the knowledge of monstrous devil (Khyuham).' They secretly fixed the day of migration. But the leader of the devil who was called Khyuham came to know the day they fixed. Since the date was fixed, on the appointed day all the Lothas migrated to a new place and the Rankhandan and Khyuham were to proceed last. So Rankhandan asked Khyuham, 'My friend you are the elder, so you should enter last in the narrow passage hole and you please pass me my mithun head through the hole.' But the mithun head blocked the hole by which Khyuham could not come to the newly migrated place. In this way Khyuham, the monstrous men-eater was left behind and Kyong tribe safely migrated. So having no alternative to come out from the hole Khyuham said to Rankhandan: 'My friend you left me behind therefore you should not forget to worship me in all the works you do with different gifts comprising of hen, eggs etc. in order to get more blessings in your daily life and for your future generations to come'. Then the rest of the population followed and were surprised to find the limitless space at their command for they found a virgin land. This is how the Lothas came to the present home land. According to this legend and tradition, following are the names of places where Lothas are believed to have stayed at one point of time in course of their migratory period:

1. Longvu (cave or hole) to Mongolia.
2. Mongolia to Mansoria.
3. Mansoria to Lengka.
4. Lengka to China.
5. China to Burma.
6. Burma to Kongkong.
7. Kongkong to Manipur.
8. Manipur to Kangpokpi.
9. Kangpokpi to Mao thana.
10. Mao thana to Phitson long (Kezakhenoma).
11. Phitsonlong to Japvu hill.
12. Japvu hill to Kohima (Khayima).
13. Kohima to Senza.
14. Senza to Nirhuma.
15. Nirhuma to Chichuma.
16. Chichuma to Chemung (Tsemenyu).
17. Chemung to Honohoyonton.
18. Honohoyonton to Pensikya.
19. Pensikya to Redutongti.
20. Redutongti to Kisuyo.
21. Kisuyo to Tiylongchum (Wokha Hill).

The fact that they come out of a 'hole' leads to the theory that at one time they had crossed incredibly deep gorges of the high mountains fighting out their way through the tower-

ing mountains, stalked and ambushed by wild animals. There is a legend of a huge tiger which had blocked the gateway and with great difficulty they could cross it after having killed the tiger by adopting various ingenuities. This ingenuity of killing the said tiger includes use of arrows. It therefore, appears that after roaming in the Irrawadi valley and the South East Asian countries in the Neolithic age, the Naga group had reached the hole in the bronze age (3100-2000 BC) or early Iron age (1200 BC). For killing savage tiger of that time, some sort of iron implements were required and must have been used in their arrow.¹⁸ Some opine that the deep gorge in the high mountain the Nagas passed through may be the Himalayan mountain for, according to their view, the Nagas migrated from the North and settled first in the Assam valley and were forced out to the jungle hide-outs by the superior culture bearers.

Another theory of migration route among the Lotha Nagas was given by Rev. Zanao, Pastor Lotha Baptist Church Kohima a senior most Reverend of the tribe and he said, going by the chronology of the Bible the whole population of the world migrated from a place called Bable according to the language of the people to different parts of the world. During that time Lotha Naga tribe having distinct language from the rest

18. R.R. Shimray, Origin and Culture of Nagas, New Delhi, p. 18.

of the world get separated and reached the present place. Accordingly in the beginning the Lothas were from the same parents but for the convenience of marriage and alliances the children of the three sons named, Limhathung, Limhachan and Ezomontsu were permitted to get married and as such population grew slowly. According to this story of origin and migration, names of the places where the Lothas once lived during their migration are given below:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. Bable (Shiner) Lisan
meta Phonglan | 16. Himalaya (Gonga) |
| 2. Lanka | 17. Chupsuyo |
| 3. Russia | 18. Chusulyu |
| 4. Turkey | 19. Limyon Yan |
| 5. Ural | 20. Khutsa Yan |
| 6. Siberia | 21. Tssiden Bokyan |
| 7. Mongolia | 22. Yoren Yan |
| 8. Koko meta | 23. Tepfutsa Yan |
| 9. Terumju | 24. Shungna Yan |
| 10. Tssiphoyo | 25. Phitsonlong Yan |
| 11. China | 26. Maodhana |
| 12. Kongkong | 27. Monsu (Monkum Yan) |
| 13. Burma Ochongo | 28. Khayima |
| 14. Burma Opomo | 29. Sensa Wozhu |
| 15. Manchuria | 30. Nirupa (Nurhuma) |
| | 31. Chuichuma (Chiechema) |

32. Tssikya-Phonglan

34. Kisyunyu (Nsyunyu)

33. Honoho

35. Jemung (Tseminyu)

From here the Lothas divided into two groups: one towards Phiro and the other towards Wokha. It is said that from this two places Lothas spread the whole of present Lotha country.¹⁹

Naga stories of origin have two aspects. One aspect is essentially mythological, and describes the supernatural origin of mankind from a stone (in the case of Konyaks, for example, a pumpkin or a giant bird). The other aspect described in detail actual movements of the people in the Naga Hills. As one might expect, these stories suggest movement from all directions. Like the Ilongot of the Philippines, the Nagas seem to be able to recall historical movements in considerable detail, both within the Naga Hills and from beyond, though of course there are no doubt, elements of myth included in such stories too.

A tradition tells us of a Naga migration during the early period where the principal Naga tribes emerged in these hills for a permanent settlement. Five of the tribes of the migrations are the Angamis, Rengmas, Semas, Aos and the Lothas.

19. Rev. Zanao - Presented a paper during Lotha Students Union Shillong, sponsored Seminar at its Celebration of Silver Jubilee on 17th September 1993.

These tribes maintained that their paternal ancestors were brothers of the same parents. According to this tradition, Khezakenoma in the South of Nagaland was the first centre where from the tribes dispersed to their respective settlements. The first to set off according to this tradition was the Aos, next comes the Lothas, followed by the Semas and the Rengmas. The Angamis and Chakhesang tribes were the last to come and they settle in the adjoining Mao area.

It may be noted that the Aos are called Cholimi by Semas meaning 'who went ahead', while the Lothas are known to them as Chuwami, which means who preceded. The Angamis are called by the Semas as Tsungaumi, which means 'left behind'.²⁰

Another migrational route of the Lothas was narrated to me by one Shri Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki village. He said the names of places in the long course of migration before reaching the present abodes as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Mongolia to | 7. Mongma |
| 2. Lengka | 8. Terumchu |
| 3. Kongkon | 9. Numkuchuro |
| 4. Tichungpen | 10. Burma |
| 5. Lankuchuro | 11. Manipur |
| 6. Tssipoyeokuk | 12. Kangpokpi |

20. Hokishe Sema, Emergence of Nagaland, New Delhi, 1986, p. 5.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 13. Phitsson | 17. Chokoton |
| 14. Japfu Phonglan | 18. Chemung |
| 15. Khayima
(at this place, the Lothas
were many in number that
the chief could not
enumerate them and so
they called the place
<u>Khayima</u> which in Lotha,
means uncountable) | 19. Honohoyonton |
| | 20. Kisuyo |
| | 21. Tiyilongchum
(they left this
place on account
of water scarcity) |
| 16. Sensa | 22. Hayimong |
| | 23. Lungkhumchung |

According to him, the Lothas spread out to the present settlements from the last place where they halted for nine hundred years.²¹

Yet another popular tradition among the Lothas of their migration route was also told by an elderly man of the tribe Mr. Pimomo Kikon, Ex. Teacher and social worker at Wokha town, who claims to know the history of the Lothas. The traditional history also vary. This tradition says that the Ahoms and the Nagas came from the same place but the Ahoms entered Brahmaputra valley (Assam) via Patkai Hills and the Nagas settled in the hilly place where they are seen today. He also substantiated his point by saying the Mekhong (wealth) was also

21. Interviewed with Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki village on 14 September 1990.

divided among them in the course of their migration.²²

The fact that the Lothas came from Manchuria via Burma and Manipur is known from their songs as given below which they used to sing and even now also some people sing it while harvesting the paddy on the first day of the season.

On Mansuria vanathung ronsi

Oh Kutch (Burma) vanathung ronsi

Oh Thungpocheura (Manipur) vanathung ronsi etc. etc.

It is translated in Lotha as 'Let the Prosperity as was in Manchuria, Burma and Manipur be on us' Ronsi is prosperity and akin to goddess Lakshmi who can give wealth and as such this song is sung for more wealth.²³

There are many theories and tradition about the origin and migration route how the Lotha reached the present place. Whatever may be the case, one thing is common to all the theories and traditions given by different people and writers about their route was that they all seemed to have referred to a particular place Burma (now Myanmar). This brings us to a point where one cannot overlook what Stonor has observed when he says, "The Lhota (Lotha) are undoubtedly one of the oldest elements among the Nagas; it is certain that they were in

22. Interviewed with Pimomo Kikon of Yimpang village at Wokha on 28th September 1990.

23. Interviewed with Chiporao of Longsa on 18th Sept. 1990.

the Angami country before the arrival of the Southern component of the tribe.... Every village I have asked told me they came from the direction of Burma."²⁴ At this juncture we can analyse and say that the exodus of the Lothas might have taken place somewhere in Mongolia or Manchuria.

At the time of investigation I also came across an elderly man of the tribe named Etsorhumo Ezung who claims to know the history of Lothas and he said that the Lothas once crossed a river in Burma (now Myanmar) by boat. He also said that before they reached their present place, they were once living nearby the sea and from there they have collected the conch shells and cowries etc. marine articles and said that it had come through generation to generation from their original settlement and has not been purchased by anybody in their present abode.²⁵ A similar opinion have been shared by Shimray when he said about the migration route of the Nagas that, the hypothesis that the Nagas must have come from the sea coast or at least seen some islands on the sea 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

24. R.C. Roy, Man in India, Vol. 28, No. 3, Ranchi, September 1948, p. 176.

25. Etsorhumo Ezung, Interviewed on 13 January 1994, Wokha Town.

times till today. Their fondness of cowrie shells for beautifying the dress, and use of conch shells as ornaments (precious ornaments for them) and the fact that the Nagas have customs and way of life similar to that of those living in the remote parts of Bornio, 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 like the canoes so common with the islanders.²⁶

Again in this connection Horam has also given an observation about the likely route followed by the migrating Nagas when he says, 'there can be little doubt that at one time Nagas must have wandered about before they found their present permanent abode; from their myths and legends one gathers that there is a dim relationship with the natives of Borneo in that the two have a common traditional way of head-hunting; with the Phillipines and Formosa through the common system of terraced cultivation and with the Indonesians, as both use the loinloom for weaving cloth. The embroidery on the Naga cloths resembles the kind done on Indonesians clothes.'²⁷

W.C. Smith has shown 13 outstanding characteristics of the Tibeto-Burma tribes of Assam, (until 1st December 1963,

26. R.R. Shimray, op.cit., p. 13.

27. M. Horam, Naga Polity, p. 28.

Nagaland was also a province of Assam) whom he attaches racially to the 'Indonesians', i.e., the peoples of Malaya and the Islands of Indonesia. These are: (1) Head-hunting, (2) Common sleeping houses for the unmarried men, which are taboo to women, (3) Dwelling houses built on posts and piles, (4) Disposal of the dead on raised platforms, (5) A sort of trial marriage, or great freedom of intercourse between the sexes before marriage, (6) Betel chewing, (7) Aversion to milk as an article of diet, (8) Tatooing by pricking, (9) Absence of any powerful political organisation, (10) The double-cylinder vertical forge, (11) The simple loom for weaving cloth, (12) A large quadrangular or hexagonal shield, and (13) Residence in hilly regions with a crude form of agriculture. All these traits are of course not found among all the Indo-Mongoloids (whether of Bengal and Assam or of Nepal) of today, but there is evidence to show that there were at one time spread or current among most or all of their tribes. Some of these traits would appear to be genuine Mongoloid origin. Others like the common club, and betel-chewing, would seem in all likelihood to have been adopted from their habitat in Burma (Myanmar) and Assam.²⁸

But where the most commonly accepted route of migration of the Nagas lies is that, the tradition and comparative

28. Vide: S.K. Chatterji, Kirata Jana Krti, Calcutta, Revised Ed., 1974, p. 57.

philology in pointing to North-Western China between the upper courses of the Yang-tse and of the Hoang-ho as the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races, and they entered Assam through the courses of the rivers Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and Menam and mountain passes of Assam and Burma through the north-east and south-east. When they found the speakers of the Mon-Khmer speech occupying some hilly regions, and therefore, the latter driven into different directions. Some of them travelled to Nepal and Tibet, some occupied the foot of the Himalayas from Sadya to the Punjab in the west, and the rest occupied the hills of Assam, some took possession of the Naga Hills and whose speeches we call for convenience the Naga group.²⁹ Julian Jacobs was also of the opinion that "the general expansion of the Mongoloid people throughout South East Asia (including the North East India), may have begun as much as 10 to 12,000 years ago, possibly from a region of North China. This movement has continued into recent historic times."³⁰

When and how the migration and settlement of the various branches of the same family took place is uncertain; but as we have noted, the weight of evidence proves that the

29. G.A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. I, Part I, Delhi, Reprint, 1973, pp. 41-42.

30. Julian Jacobs, The Nagas, Stuttgart, 1990, p. 10.

migration of tribes is to be attributed to different periods in the history of the land and that most of them, if not all, came after the intrusion of the Aryans from the West. It was after their distribution and occupation of particular areas that they came to be known as Nagas, Bodos etc. and the areas of their occupation were known by their tribal names. Even after their settlement, migration from one place to another continued till recent times. The classical writers, beginning at least with the first century AD, seem to refer to some tribes almost in their present habitat.³¹

The places of origin of the various Naga tribes remain an unsolved mystery till today. The fact that many of these tribes have been wandering races, moving from place to place over the span of centuries, has not helped in tracing out their origins. Different scholars basing their surmises on the Naga art, material culture, language tonals etc. have theorised that the Nagas have had some links with Indonesia and Malaysia, they belong to the Tibeto-Burma family, are the first stage of migration group from North-West China. They constitute a return group of migrants from the Polynesian islands, etc. However, these theories are remotely inferential theories and in the absence of substantive evidence - theories remain inconclusive.

31. P.C. Choudhury, The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D., New Delhi, 3rd Ed., 1987, pp. 83-84.

The People

Nagas are not a composite people. They speak many languages. They differ widely in dress and other cultural traits, as well as in physical features. They belong to Mongoloid stock but yet there are great differences in the details between one tribe and other as well as between different people of the same tribe. Some are tall some are short, some have got comparatively sharp features and some not. Some are yellow in complexion and some are brown. Some have got straight hair as well, some have wavy hairs. Yet in spite of all these differences, they may be classified as Tibeto-Burma group of Mongoloid people. As Julian Jacobs say, "Physically, the Nagas are predominantly Mongoloid. That is to say, they have the straight black hair, black eyes epicanthic eye-fold and other features of the huge spread of Mongoloid people, who now inhabit areas as diverse as China and Amazonia."³²

The ethnological evidences indicates that the Lothas, like any other Naga tribes, have Mongoloid features. The colour of their skin is generally dark-brown and a few of them are yellowish in colour. Majority of Lothas have high nose, oblique eyes and straight hair. They are generally slim and moderately tall and the women as usual are a little shorter than men.

32. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 10.

Though all the Nagas have Mongoloid features there are differences in minute details between one and the other tribes. The differences is so explicit that the people of one tribe can easily be distinguished from others by its facial appearances and physical structure, not to speak of dress and language.

Linguistically, the Lothas were placed under one of Mongolian races of the Tibeto-Burma groups of languages. Their language differs from village to village, but this is principally a matter of intonation and pronunciation. As a whole the language has no marked dialects, though it might be equally true to say that every village has its own dialect,³³ which is known in accent when spoken. The language spoken by Lothas themselves is known as 'Kyongyi'.

In the past, the Lothas, Aos and the Semas, are believed to have possessed a Naga script which is said to have been written on dried skin of an animal and it was carried by their forefathers during migration through Patkai ranges. Written on such skin, it was convenient enough for the purpose of rolling. But as this script was not kept under proper custody due to negligence time came when it was eaten up by a dog. According to tradition, all the elderly people who had written them had died by that time and owing to the loss of

33. G.A. Grierson, op.cit., Vol. III, Part II, Rpt., 1967, p.284.

memory, the script could not be written again.³⁴ However, it was towards the end of 19th-century that the Lotha language was reduced to writing in Roman script.³⁵ While others say that they had cooked, by mistake, the piece of an animal skin on which their script was written, the piece of an animal skin on which their script was written, and ate it up. After that their script could not be rewritten, on account of nomadic habitation, while the Meiteis like the Tibetans, Chinese, Dravidians, Aryans, Arabs, Greeks and Romans still maintained with great care, their writings in their script on religion and other subjects than historical chronicals that we are able to see them today.³⁶

Wokha district is the home district of the Lothas. A worked out from the 1991 Census the district is inhabited by 82,612 people. Out of this, there are also non-Lothas (both tribals and non-tribals) but the number is negligible, and the overwhelmingly majority of the people of this district are Lothas. The other Naga tribes and non-Nagas living in this district are mainly on government services and private business, but their number is very small. According to 1991 Census, there are altogether 95 villages in Wokha district including Wokha town. The lone town in the district has 14,377

34. Interviewed with Nkhanyimo Ngully of Tsungiki on 14.9.1994.

35. B.B. Ghosh, op.cit., p. 9.

36. Asoso Yonuo, The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study, Delhi, 1974, p. 9.

population and is inhabited by heterogeneous people.³⁷ There are some Sema villages in the South Western part of the district adjoining Assam plains. Besides that, there are also some Mikir (Karbi) villages in the northern part of the district. There are some Nepalis who have their own residence at Wokha town and elsewhere but the exact number cannot be ascertained.

Nagamese, a form of broken Assamese which is used in other districts of Nagaland is used here as a medium of expression and also a means of communication between the Lothas and non-Lothas speaking people in the district. Now-a-days broken Hindi is also commonly used in the district. English, the official language of the state of Nagaland, is generally used among the educated people. Many of the non-Lothas permanently settled at Wokha town or other urban areas (like Bhandari and Baghty), have learnt Lotha language and speak it fluently.

Clans

The Lotha Naga tribe has three phratries divided into clans and which are in some cases further split up into kindreds. In the olden days, it was followed strictly that a man ought to take his wife from a phratry other than his own.

37. Census of India - Primary Census Abstract, Nagaland, 1991.

On this Lotha opinion and custom was quite clear and followed. But today, due to the disintegrating nature of the society such restrictions and barriers which were established by the forefathers, the age-old strict social systems, could not be followed. Therefore now, it is correct to say that, 'a man ought to take his wife from a clan other than his own'. The Lothas, like any other Naga tribes, practised both patriarchal and patrilineal system.

The following are briefly the phratries and clans (in random order) of the Lothas. The three phratries are: Ezomontsi, Tonphyaktsi and Limhathling.

Names of the clans among the Lothas are given in alphabetical order:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Enni | 10. Kithan |
| 2. Ezong | 11. Labon |
| 3. Humtsoe | 12. Merry |
| 4. Jami | 13. Mozhui |
| 5. Jungi | 14. Murry |
| 6. Khuvung | 15. Ngullie |
| 7. Khenjung | 16. Odyui |
| 8. Kikon | 17. Ovung |
| 9. Kinghen | 18. Patton |

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| 19. Rangthang | 22. Tsophoi |
| 20. Shitiri | 23. Tungoi |
| 21. Tsanglai | 24. Yanthan. ³⁸ |

It is not known for how many generations Nagas have settled on their present land. But it can be surely said that they came from outside, at one point of time. So was the case with the Lothas. Except few Semas who have permanently settled and some non-Lothas who are working as government servants and businessmen, Wokha is the home district of the Lothas. As we have seen, the district is rich in flora and fauna. No division or difference is to be found among the Lothas in language. Also with exception of little difference between upper and lower areas, equal distribution of climatic conditions prevailed throughout the district. Equal political and social system prevails except in phratries and clans making the inter-clans marriage possible.

38. N.T. Ngullie, Kyong Tathi Juli (The Lotha Naga Customs and Cultures), Wokha, 1994, p. 105.

CHAPTER II
INSTITUTION OF TRADITIONAL CHIEFTAINSHIP

INSTITUTION OF TRADITIONAL CHIEFTAINSHIP

Evolution of Chieftainship

The institution of chieftainship appears to have grown out of the collective needs of group life, which characterized tribal living in India as well as other parts of the world. The Lothas were the first few migrants to have come and occupied the places where they are found today. During the migratory period they came in different batches and had their own leaders, who also at that time played the role of a religious leader. Therefore, a sort of leadership had emerged even during the migratory period of the people. But it is not possible to state clearly where and how in the past this institution took concrete shape. But, again it can be reasonably asserted that this happened at quite an early stage of evolution in their group life. As B.B. Ghosh has observed,

after their migration till 1876 when the headquarters* of Naga Hill District was set up at Wokha, the people were not under any paramount power. They were living under virtually village states and were engaged in inter-tribal and inter-village warfare. This

* In 1866, Naga District was created with Samaguding (present Chumukedima) as its headquarters. It was again shifted from Wokha to Kohima in 1878 the present capital of Nagaland.

was a period of lawlessness and also there was no law enforcing authority for the entire population of the Lotha. Anybody could cut-off the head of any person of any village and tribe. It was not because of enmity but as a matter of valour and heroism that a person entered into a head-hunting expedition. After bringing the hunted head or heads into the village, the hunter used to be acclaimed as a hero of the village. 1

Moreover, it was the time when every Naga tribe aspired to be the strongest of all. Such was the situation and it was in no way safe for a tribe or village to live without a leader or a chief.

An attempt has been made here to explain the socio-political structure of the Lothas which ultimately led to the evolution of the system of chieftainship among them starting from the smallest unit such as the family. With the increase in the number of families and also clans, the population of the area or territory also increased which ultimately led to the setting up of a village. This obviously gave rise to the increase in the number of functions, each village having independent functions of its own.

The institution of family is as old as man himself, and the smallest and without doubt the first social unit was the family or "household". Among the tribes it has been observed that the family tie is an important integrating

1. B.B. Ghosh, History of Nagaland, New Delhi, 1982, pp.34-35.

factor. The Nagas and also the Lothas did not migrate from one place to another. They were in fact, known to love permanent dwellings and one wonders as to why which they live in the days gone by. Unfortunately we have no written chronicles of the Lotha way of living and yet we have good reasons to believe that, up to now it has undergone little or no change.

Having described the basic composition of a typical family and the mode of formation of new families we came to the head of the family. Unlike the Khasis and Garos the Lotha family, without exception, was strictly and purely patriarchal. The father is, therefore, the head of the family and as such, has certain duties, responsibilities and powers. He must provide for, look after and maintain the position of the family. An intelligent, brave and eloquent head of family was respected even outside this small circle and these very qualities might entitle him to an important position in the clan, village and tribe. He represented his family in the clan meetings and in the traditional and indigenous village court. This practice is seen and is continuing even today.

In the days when villages were constantly at war, each village was ruled by a chief or 'ekhung'² assisted by an

2. Yananyimo Ngully (92) of Tsungiki village, interviewed on 14 September 1990.

informal council of elders.³ But unlike, 'the Konyaks whose chief has the autocratic power',⁴ the Lothas have a still more democratic form of village government. It is also contradictory to that of the African Political system, whose chief has the power to act independently in the society. Aylward Shorter, in his book East African Societies, wrote a chapter on 'Chieftain Societies' and the existence of powerful and autocratic chief, where he said, "if the man in the street knows nothing else about the traditional political institutions of Africa, he is nevertheless sure of one thing - Africans are, or were, governed by Chieftains or chiefs. The idea of 'Chief' was strong in the minds of the British who colonized East Africa".⁵ He goes on to say that "the English words 'Chief' or 'chieftain' suggest the political rule of a single man, or the supreme command of a military leader."⁶ In the case of the Lothas the powers of the Chief were checked by the will of the people and also by the norms of the democratic processes. According to Ekyimsao Ngully⁷ and Pimomo Kikon⁸ of Niroyo and Yimpang villages respectively, the origin and evolution of

3. M.C. Murry (68) interviewed on 30 December 1990 at Sanis.

4. Christoph von Furer Haimendorf, The Konyak Nagas - An Indian Frontier Tribe, London, 1968, p. 47.

5. Aylward Shorter, East African Societies, London & Boston, 1974, p. 39.

6. Ibid.

7. Interviewed on 21 September 1990 at Niroyo village.

8. Interviewed at Wokha 28 September 1990.

Lotha chieftain was very much associated with the founding of new villages. In the past, in the case of migration and also in the special circumstances of a village over-grown, water scarcity, looking for fresh vegetation for the population, failure to settle disputes, disputes or quarrel between villages and village due to misunderstanding and more importantly for strategical advantages from attack in head-hunting, though by doing so, sometime, they suffer much in obtaining a supply of water, besides entailing a great deal of labour in building a new village in the clearance of jungles and in finding out a suitable building site.

It is said that, before the deserting group of the population move into the new village they had to 'nominate' a leader whom they found to be fit for the post from among the elderly men of the group. This nominated leader from among themselves was called the chief or ekhung who was a mere 'figure-head' of the village, for his power was curtailed by the democratic systems of the land.⁹ Therefore, he could be rightly called 'nominated chief'* having no autocratic power over the people and administration of the village or community.

9. Tenpyomo Murry (69) - Interviewed on 23-12-94 at Lio, Longidang village.

* For the convenience of writing I shall be using as 'Chief' or 'Ekhung' in my writing.

In support of the above theory in the evolution of the Lotha chief, an elderly man of the community named Yananyimo Ngully¹⁰ of Tsungiki village, who claims to know the existence of chief among the Lothas narrated the following reasons on the origin and evolution of a village chief and asked:

1. Without a chief, village cannot be established.
 2. Without a chief, who will settle the land dispute, if arises.
 3. Without a chief, who will settle the disputes arising out of the killing of animals for no reason.
 4. In the village, without a chief who will judge and give the final verdict in the cases of murder.
 5. In the village without a chief, who will look after and supervise the village administration and also settle the disputes out of misunderstanding that may arise from time to time.
 6. To protect the village from enemy attack.
- Therefore, he said a chief was required in the village. Thus came the institution of chieftainship in the Lotha society.

From the above, one may assume that the chief had the

10. Interviewed on 14 September 1990, at Tsungiki village.

autocratic power or all and all in the village administration but it was not so, though on certain occasions he might be compelled to act in that way. He also goes on to say that, of late, even though the British officials started coming to the villages, the Lothas were ruled by the chief in every villages nominated by the people themselves, a man of highly respected and well-known person in every field. He was called a chief as he has got to be a leader in the war and had to supply, particularly salt, if someone was in short supply. During that time salt was highly priced, for it was available in Assam only, no ordinary man could procure it easily all the way from Assam valley to Naga Hills. He also supplied food if anyone fell short of it. During that time money was scarce, therefore, he supplied anyone who was in need of weapon and other implements for different purposes. He was the judge and settled various disputes. Therefore, he was practically a chief and administrator of the village. In my study area, interviewed with cross-section of people and this view was supported by many others. Among them one who deserved to be mentioned was Yishumo Lotha,¹¹ a respectable old man from Lio, Longidang village. He also said that the people also felt the need of centralisation of all those functions in the hands of

11. Interviewed on 23rd December 1991.

one person/group of persons or authority to supervise the welfare of the people and the administration of the village. Otherwise, administration would have been in a mess. It was under these circumstances and feeling of necessities that the question of a village chief or ekhung, village council and other village offices came into existence among the Lothas.

In Australia the natives are distributed in a large number of small groups, each of which occupies, and is supposed to possess a given area of country. The natives refer to these local groups by the name of the locality, which each of them inhabits, but not entirely of individuals who describe themselves by the name of someone, animal or plant. There are various local groups of Kangaroo people and each one of these groups has its headman or as the natives call it, its Alatunja. However, small in number a local people will always have its Alatunja. Within the narrow limits of his own group the local headman or Alatunja takes the head; outside of his group, no Alatunja has of necessity any special power. If he possesses any generally recognised authority, as some of them undoubtedly have, it is due to the fact that he is either the head of an important group or in himself famous for his skill in hunting or fighting or for his knowledge of ancient tradition and customs of the tribe. Old age does not by itself

confer distinction but only when combined with special ability.¹² This qualification of becoming Alatunja or headman in Australia was quite similar to that of the Lothas selection of chief or leader in pre-modern period, where no ordinary man could become leader in the village.

The authority wielded by an Alatunja is of somewhat vague nature. He has no definite power over the persons or individuals who are members of his group. It is he who calls together the eldermen who always consult him concerning any important business, such as the holding of secret ceremonies or punishment of individuals who have broken tribal customs and his opinion carries an amount of weight or which depends his reputation. Baldwin Spencer writes thus:

He is not of necessity recognised as the **most** important number of the council whose judgement must be followed, though if he be old and distinguished, then he will have great influence. 13

The Alatunja has ex-officio a position which enable him to wield considerable power not only over the members of his group, but over those of neighbouring groups as well. However, this position he can enjoy only if he is a man of great personal ability and the headmen of the neighbouring

12. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen. The Native Tribes of Central Australia, N. York, 1968, p. 10.

13. Ibid.

groups are inferior in personal ability to himself. This very practice is rarely to be found among the Lothas except during the war with the enemy neighbouring tribes where leagues of villages are formed and the voices of bigger villages were given more weightage for fear of being defeated by the enemies, otherwise they had the independent functions of their own.

Qualifications

According to M.C. Murry¹⁴ of Sanis, Renashio Kikon¹⁵ of Tsungiki and Mmhonsao¹⁶ of Yimpang village respectively, in the days of forefathers, for the efficient and smooth functioning of the villages the post of Tongti or ekhung and chochang for secular administration and for the religious activities and sacrifices, the post of Pvuti and Yinga came into existence. But to be nominated to these chairs, there were certain minimum qualifications or conditions and procedures or norms to be followed if there were contestants, though it was rare. Again to be nominated to the post of Pvuti the qualifications and selection procedures were different from those of the secular leaders.

14. Interviewed on 30th September 1990.

15. Interviewed on 15th September 1990.

16. Interviewed at Kohima on 1st October 1990.

To fill the posts of secular administrators the qualifications seemed to be more or less the same with only little difference in the case of their age. The following are some of the most important qualifications:

1. For the post of ekhung or Tongti minimum age must be 45 years.
2. That of chochang must be 40 years of age.
3. He should be well-known and distinguished warrior who has taken more enemy heads.
4. He must know, at least, the customary laws of the tribe.
5. He should have wealth to welcome and entertain quests and should have attained high-social status by holding community feast from time to time.
6. He must be a clean man and the villagers as a whole must have a strong confidence in him. He should also have a clean generation record.
7. He must have a diplomatic genius.
8. He must be an all-round experienced man.
9. His wife should be well-mannered.

Procedures of selection

It was a pre-determined selection. The electorate especially the elderly people in the village having learnt

that a candidate possessed the essential qualifications proposed him to be the ekhung or Tongti and it was rare that the candidate refused the proposal. But if he did so, and if the villagers insisted on his acceptance, then the candidate would demand a commitment from the people that they would obey his orders and commands, in course of his conduct of village administration and maintenance.

Though such occasion and situation was rarely to be found, when there were contestants for the posts, the following procedures and norms were strictly followed by the forefathers.

Firstly, the villagers would gather firewood for each candidate and then all the adult members (no age was fixed and also except slaves/servants, murderers and war captives) of the village assembled after which they would lit fire and observe closely as to whose smoke was going straight up in the sky then he would ultimately, be the winner for the post.

Secondly, they would tie cocks for each candidate and whose cock crew first would become Tongti or Chochang.

Thirdly, if there was no cock then they would keep chicken in the roost after which they would listen carefully from whose roost cackles first would be the winner for the respective posts.¹⁷

17. M.C. Murry. Kyong Opo motsu tchuli tssolan phyolan motsu Osi Yitsso Kako, Sanis, 1985, pp. 23-24. (The Culture in practice and customary laws of the Lothas).

Thus, from the very nature of the evolution of the political institutions it may be concluded that, the Lotha forefathers practised the most efficient process of selecting a chief or a leader in the villages. At the same time one may also claim with confidence that it was free from any sort of corruption or unhealthy practices.

From what had been stated above, it can be deduced that; first, the question of 'noble blood' did not arise at all in selecting and nominating a chief among the Lothas as was found among the 'Konyak Nagas.'¹⁸

Secondly, the selection of a chief or ekhung etc. need not necessarily belong to the founder clan or family of the village, as was found among the Sema Nagas.¹⁹

Thirdly, among the Lothas, no clan of a chief ever existed, nor even heard of, as was found in the case of the Mizo - the 'Sailos'.²⁰ Hence, all the clans in the village had equal rights, and privileges in setting up of a candidate for the office, from any clan or family out of the clans living in

18. C.V.F. Haimendorf, op.cit., p. 52.

19. J.H. Hutton. The Sema Nagas. Published by Direction of the Government of Nagaland, Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1968, p. 149.

20. B. Pakem. The Changing Power Structure of the Political Institution of Chieftainship in Mizoram. The Journal of NEICSSR, Vol. V, No. II, Shillong, 1981, p. 1.

the village. As Chijamo says,

In our Lotha society the strongest in the battle and the greatest performer of feast of merit could become the head of the administration. The ablest and the wisest ruled the society and were chosen on the basis of merit such as head trophy, intellect, influence, and wealth. 21

Law of Succession

Among the Lothas, each village was a separate state ruled over by its own chief, nominated while founding a new village. It is said that formerly powerful hereditary clan chiefs had existed, but it is almost disappeared altogether and a more egalitarian government is found', observed Julian Jacobs.²² The post was never hereditary among the original clan nor succession was among particular clan or along a particular family line. This was a clear contrast from what we find among the Hapalang community of Myanmar where E.R. Leach writes, "each village had an hereditary headman, whose lineage surname was in most cases the same as that of his village."²³ But again he also goes on to say that "this does not imply that everyone in the village was of the same lineage as the headman."²⁴ This makes us to conclude that the headman's

21. Chijamo (92) of L. Longidang. Interviewed on 26.12.93.

22. Julian Jacobs, The Nagas, Stuttgart, 1990, p. 72.

23. E.R. Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma, London, 1964, p. 68.

24. Ibid.

village or domain should not necessarily be established with the same clan or lineage, as Leach says, "most villages contained members of half a dozen or more different lineages,"²⁵ but its succession.

In a democratic society like the Lothas the Law of succession of the chief was through nomination who has the required qualification by voice vote or raising their right hand. As Mills says, "... the most suitable man became chief by force of character..."²⁶ to be found a difference from the Semas and the Konyak Nagas. Therefore, it can be safely concluded with regards to the question of succession that, it was neither hereditary nor primogeniture but it was on the basis of nomination or chosen from among the most eligible elderly man of the village.

While among the Sema Nagas, though in certain cases we find the younger brother of the chief succeeded him and enjoyed the privileges, Hutton vividly says that,

the generally accepted rule, however, is that the eldest of the original chief's sons who remains in the village ultimately succeeded his father and is again ultimately succeeded by his own son, the interludes of brothers and uncles being temporary, and not affecting the general succession. 27

25. Ibid.

26. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, Kohima, 2nd Edition, p. 96.

27. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, London, 2nd Edition, 1968, pp. 148-49.

The law of leadership succession among the Shan villages of Myanmar seemed closer to that of the Lothas when Leach writes, "leadership in a Shan village appears to depend mainly upon age and natural capacity. The headship may pass from father to son but not necessarily so. Headship is not confined to any one lineage."²⁸

While among the Rengma Nagas the law of succession is found to be little different from the rest. As Mills writes, "the office of the chief was hereditary in the clan, but not in the family. It did not necessarily pass from father to son, but to the most suitable man in the leading families in the clan."²⁹ Again he goes on to say that, "in cases of gross misrule public opinion could even deprive the whole clan of the right."³⁰ The latter point made it clear that the Rengma chief did not have dictatorial power, but administered according to the wishes of the people, like that of the Lotha chiefs.

Powers and Functions of the Chief

Though it was village-centred administration, much before the advent of the British into the Lotha area, the Lothas were well-organised and ruled among themselves. The

28. E.R. Leach, op.cit., p. 214.

29. J.P. Mills, The Rengma Nagas, Directorate of Art & Culture, Second Ed., 1982, p. 138.

30. Ibid.

position of the chief in the village was that of a benevolent ruler. All those lived in the village were looked upon as his own children. He was bound to help them in their adversities, counsel them in their difficulties, reward them in their achievements and at the same time punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. The villagers, in turn were to obey his orders and commands, though he was not an autocratic ruler. In short village chief was, the chief judge, the chief administrator and also chief commander at the time of war and head hunting.

The important powers and functions of the chief which he executed, with the consent of his subordinates and also the villagers can be studied under the following heads:

Military Power

'As the Secular Head, his functions were numerous'. At the time of head huntings his primary concern was for the defence of the village', ³¹ observed Shimray, about Naga village chief. According to Mills about Lotha chief, "His main function was that of a leader in war, and his perquisite all the spoils brought home from raids".³² Similar was the case with the Angamis whose chief was a nominal figure in times of

31. R.R. Shimray, Origin and Culture of Nagas, New Delhi, 1985, p. 53.

32. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 96.

peace and his power was recognised only in times of war. As Hutton writes, "at best the chief's position probably gave him no power except on the war path.... This orders are obeyed so far only as they accord with the wishes and conveniences of the community".³³ In the case of the Kachin society of Myanmar the chief did not take part in the actual combat. Leach writes, "... military and paramilitary activities, the chief, even when they initiated a quarrel, did not themselves take a leading part as soldiers.... The Kachin chief like the United States president is commander-in-chief. Neither of these social persons is expected to fight in battle".³⁴

Hence, one cannot separate the Lotha chief's military powers from that of head-hunting expeditions. Therefore, one of the most essential qualifications to be a chief was a 'distinguished warrior'. As Mmhonsao says,

The chief was the leader or the commander and gave orders and directions, during wars, to the villagers and especially the 'Chumboe' who were unmarried young boys slept in the Bachelors' Dormitory. These Chumboe were especially trained to be alert and good warriors, during natural calamity and wars. Therefore, the village chief or headman was also sometimes known as the 'warlord'.³⁵

33. J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, Published by the Direction, Government of Nagaland, London, 1969, pp. 142-43.

34. E.R. Leach, op.cit., pp. 186-87.

35. Interviewed with Mmhonsao of Yimpang village on 1st October 1990.

At the time when inter-village and inter-tribal war and head-hunting was going on and the chief as its leader, his military power could not be alienable from it because success and failure much depended on planning, tactics and diplomacy of the chief. In order to keep away from dangers and to protect the village from any attacks, the chief was responsible for the effective defence of the village, for peace and prosperity of any village depended on the ability of the village to keep enemies and attackers at bay.

The military power of the chief would be incomplete unless a mention is made about the role of the chief and his relation with the neighbouring villages. As Mills writes,

Though heads were not taken, prisoners were captured in affrays - between Lotha villages, and were kept in the 'Chumboe' in a sort of stocks consisting of a heavy log out to receive a man's ankle, with a bar of wood to keep the foot from being withdrawn. These prisoners had to be well-fed and looked after till they were ransomed by their friends. 36

In course of my investigation and interview with cross-section of people, this point was further strengthened when Mmhonsao said, "if there had been a dispute between two Lotha villages, as directed by the chief, the people of his village catch any victim from the other village and demands ransom".³⁷

36. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 105.

37. Interviewed with Mmhonsao of Yimpang village on 1st October, 1990.

Judicial Powers

Prior to the advent of the British, the chief was the supreme judge and tried all cases, civil and criminal in consultation with the informal body of village elders.³⁸ In the case of the Kachin chief of Burma (Myanmar), his judicial power or role can be said as Leach writes, "... if it is a civil offence such as bastardy or adultery, the chief is not necessarily immediately involved, but if the debt is not arbitrated quickly violence may result and then the chief will be directly involved."³⁹

The traditional Lotha village court of justice was composed of the chief and the village elders. Before the existence of the established court its meeting and proceedings were held in the chief's house or in the open space particularly set aside for the purpose, and was presided over by the chief himself.⁴⁰

The proceedings of the cases tried by the court were never put down in writing. This was due to the absence of modern educational systems. In dealing with the cases, the chief and the elders were guided entirely by the Lotha customary laws. The decision of the chief varied according to

38. Renashio Kikon. Interviewed on 16th September 1990, at Tsungiki.

39. E.R. Leach, op.cit., p. 185.

40. Interviewed with Ekyimsao Ngully of Niroyo on 13 February 1992.

the gravity and nature of the offence and customs of the particular village. Since money was scarce, in most cases, fines were generally paid in kind and the fine realised went to the judges which they spent in feasting.⁴¹

The Lotha chief was not above the law rather he was guided by the custom, because if he acted against the will of the people then it might cost him his post. Among the hereditary chieftainship society of the Mizos, this was very clear as Pakem writes,

In the judicial matters, the powers of the chief were quite limited since the chief had to work within the framework of the traditional system he had to face a number of customs which his people valued and cherished. Hence, in dealing with court cases he could not simply go against the established customs of his predecessors in particular and his people in general. Even the chief himself might be tried by a customary group trial ('tlangchil') if he happened to exceed the usual norms of the society, and the excuse of being overdrunk could not save him. Hence is the example of Mizo concept of justice that even the chief was not above the law. Everybody was then equal in the eye of the customary law of the land. 42

For civil justice, the chief was also given certain discretionary powers to be dispensed within his jurisdiction,

41. Ibid.

42. B. Pakem, The Changing Power Structure of the Political Institution of Chieftainship in Mizoram, The Journal of the NEICSSR, Vol. V., No. II, Shillong, October 1981, p.2.

if the matter was brought to his notice. For example, the cases with other villages, if any, the chief and his council in consultation with the chief or headman of that village set in the appointed place and time and settled the cases and disputes amicably or with nominal charge of fines against the culprit village.⁴³ This arbitration was corresponding to that of the settlement of disputes among the Kachin community as Leach says, "the judicial body of a village cluster or domain is thus a body of arbitrators rather than a bench of magistrates; its function is to give a ruling as to what would be a fit and proper settlement of the issue in dispute."⁴⁴

The occupation of the Naga Hill by the British did not bring drastic change in the judicial system of the village. The British knew fully well that effective administration and control in this difficult terrain would be a great task and involved risks of life. They, therefore, thought it expedient to continue the indigenous system of administrations through the various officials of the villages.⁴⁵ But the cases like criminals later were taken up by the British system of administration.⁴⁶

43. Interviewed Lenthio Murry of Longsa on 29 January 1992.

44. E.R. Leach, op.cit., p. 184.

46. Interviewed Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki on 15/9/90.

47. Government of Nagaland, Nagaland Code, Vol. I, Kohima, 1970, p. 151.

Police Power

Prior to the advent of the Britishers there was no such kind of police in Lotha village government, which could be attributed to today's modern term. But due to the personal influence of the chief and his nature of functions in the village one can say that he also acted as the police officer. The chief being the head of the police force, used the villagers as his constables. Any villager who committed crimes or offence, any breach of law and order, was arrested at the order of the chief and tried before the chief-in-council. Criminal law was strictly observed and the chief's order was always properly carried out by the villagers especially the young boys who slept in the Chumbo. To quote Yananyimo Ngully,⁴⁷ "the British local authority was in favour of continuing this system."

The police power of the Lotha village chief would be further strengthened by showing the overall picture of Nagaland, which was formerly known as the Naga Hill District of Assam:

According to the traditional system in Nagaland, Police justice was done by the village authorities. The police made its entry into Nagaland in 1888 when the first police

47. Interviewed on 14 September 1990 at Tsungiki village.

station was established in Kohima. While the traditional system is being continued and strengthened, the police force has been organised on the modern lines to cope with the new challenge. 48

Legislative Powers

A certain extent of legislative powers were also enjoyed by Lotha Ekhung in pre-colonial time. All matters relating to issue of ordinance, rules and all other instructions were made by ekhung with the assistance and consultation of his informal council of elders. These ordinances were followed as a convention and no written records were maintained, but were strictly observed and carried out by the villagers, since he was doing for the welfare of the village and society as a whole, those who disobeyed the order were punished. Clearing of inter-village path, path leading to the jhums; constructions and maintenance of village water tank (tchukha) were done on the ekhungs order with assistance from the village pries (Pvuti). These age-old traditions and practices are still followed in the village till today. Again, he along with priest arranged time and date for observance of the traditional social festivals such as Pikhuchak ceremony in the beginning of the year to receive blessing for the year,

48. Nagaland - 25 years of growth and development, A Silver Jubilee Commemorate Issue, p. 28. (Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Nagaland, Kohima, 1988).

also Loroe Tokhu (Loroe - Lady and Tokhu - Festivals) - this festival was observed just after the harvest was done after which the girls were given in marriage to their choice. These orders were proclaimed by the council members, in the evening before the villagers go to bed, in every khel, for the works to be done the next day.⁴⁹

Besides, military, judicial, police and legislative powers of the chief, there are certain other duties of administration to be carried out by him. The head-hunting and ruthless disregard of life which characterised the Nagas, as also the Lothas naturally checked the social intercourse of the tribes. But among the allied villages, communications and other needy relations were admirably maintained by improving the hill-path, bridging the streams and social lives of the people. This was possible due to the able administrative ability of the chief. It was also his duty to send and receive messages to and from friendly or hostile villages and tribes and to disclose the nature of the messages, to the village elders and the village at large. In the days of head-hunting, whenever the attackers were fair enough to have a declared warfare, all challenges for a proposed attack were sent to the chief who was to return suitable reply and confirm and give a

49. Interviewed with Lenthio Murry and Chiborao of Longsa on 18 September 1990.

50. Ibid.

date for the actual combat. He was thus, in a way the spokesman of the village and this demanded his skill in diplomacy and judgement.⁵¹

The village watchman on sighting an approaching enemy would rush to inform the chief who in turn would issue a proclamation ordering immediate closure of the village gates and summoning the warriors to get ready and if necessary to assemble without delay to meet the danger.⁵²

It was also the duty of the chief to look after the general welfare of the people and to help them in times of various needs. Keeping this in view, only the wealthy man was nominated to the post. As also Hunter says, "their rank and title is not hereditary, but depends upon the wealth standing and personal qualifications of the individual."⁵³ With the consultation of the village elders, the chief also helped the needy peoples. Due to this reasons, though he was only the mere 'figure head', of the village, still he was respected by the people. Visitors to a village must notify the purpose and duration of their visit to the village chief or headman and pay him respect. The chief in turn would make the visitors

51. Interviewed Khungmomo Ngully of N. Longidang at Wokha on 28 December 1991.

52. Interviewed with Yishumo of L. Longidang on 23.12.93.

53. W.W. Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. 2, District of the Naga Hills, 1879, p. 180.

welcome and guarantee their safety, during their stay in the village. This was necessitated in the days when one's head was not safe on one's shoulders. This guarantee of 'safe conduct' was a weighty thing. All visitors were first brought to the Ekhungs house who arranged for them to be looked after either in his house or in the house of another wealthy man of the village. "The ekhung also got in touch with the chumboe and arranged for their entertainment."⁵⁴ Naga hospitality is well-known and a visitor was and is generally provided with food, drink and merriment.

Limitations

With all the powers concentrated in his hand, however, the village chief could not be a dictator as he was bound by the various tribal customs and unwritten laws which were rightly followed. The chief had no power to over rule them. At this time he was merely a nominal head more in the nature of a ceremonial institution, than anything else. In any disputes, he had hardly any choice as he had to bow down to the precedent cases, the customs and the practices of the society. But, though he might not be vested with any tangible powers he might possess personality than his office.⁵⁵ Thus, the village

54. Interview, Tenpyomo Murry of L. Longidang.

55. Ibid.

ekhung among the Lothas did not enjoy any special privileges worth the name. Hence he was just the mere 'figure-head' and in real function of the village administration, he was puppet in the hands of the village elders and will of the people and administered at the consent of the subjects.

Privileges

As a benevolent administrator, the protector and guardian of his village, he enjoyed certain privileges. He was highly respected by all. There was no clear-cut assessment as such in this matter but whoever wanted to give him anything out of goodwill such as, grains from the field during harvest, vegetables, meat (wild or domestic) especially 'trapping of wild animals'* and fish catches from the river were free to do so. The villagers, especially 'the chumboe' helped him in his field from labour seasonally.⁵⁶ This confirmed Horam's statements when he says,

... villagers were eager to display their gratitude and affection by deeds, and would till his fields, do other odd jobs for him, give him the heads of all animals killed in the village, etc. This practice took root among the Semas, Konyaks, Lothas as well as Tangkhuls and in time became an almost

* This privilege also enjoyed by the Mizo chiefs. Vide-Dr. (Mrs) N. Chatterjee's, The Mizo Chief and His Administration, p. 16 (Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1975).

56. Interview with Mmhonsao on 1st October, 1990.

compulsory practice. But it must be borne in mind that these privileges were given to the deserving chief voluntarily by grateful subjects and nothing more. 57

Construction of Ekhung's House

Village ekhung also enjoyed privilege in the construction of his house with free labour and essential building materials collected from the jungle by the villagers. He in turn as a benevolent attitude and gesture, would provide food to the villagers who came for the construction of the house. This was done after the work was completed by the evening. But it was not a compulsion or compulsory that every villager should go and work as it was just a voluntary act.⁵⁸ The act of such public responsibility and obligation on the part of the Lothas was corresponding to that of the Kachin community of Myanmar, as Leach writes,

The house of the chief or of the village headman normally serves as a public guest-house at which any casual travellers is entitled to hospitality. The maintenance of the chief's or headman's house is thus to some extent a public responsibility, villagers, as already mentioned, have an obligation to assist in the building and repair of the chief's house. 59

57. M. Horam, The Naga Polity, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 83-84.

58. Nkhanyimo Ngully, interviewed on 14.9.92 at Tsungiki.

59. E.R. Leach, op.cit., p. 117.

There was a difference in constructing ekhung's house from the house of the commoners' (Kishuroe). For the house of ekhung the size was much bigger and was also built in a commanding position and view of the village. Also the house had the roof decorated with crossed bamboos of which the ends are split and splayed a part known as Yingpenro. This was a conventional representation of human hands, and the right to have the roofs of their houses ornamented in the way was in the olden days confined to man who had succeeded in bringing enemy heads home from a raid.⁶⁰ The fundamental difference between the chief and commoners' house among the Kachin community was also found as Leach says, "... the fact that the house of the chief contains a special compartment known as Shrine room...."⁶¹

Death ceremony

Another privileges enjoyed by the Lotha ekhung was that, special treatment was given at the time of death ceremony. When he was about to die then suddenly he was given chicken that he would squeeze the chicken to death at his hand and after his death the chicken was tied and hung by the neck above the head of the corpse, and after the burial with a wooden coffin, the wings of the chicken were cut-off and stuck

60. Interviewed with Khungmomo Ngully of N. Longidang village on 7th January 1991.

61. E.R. Leach, op.cit., p. 108.

up on the left wall of the house and the body either thrown away or given to the buriers to eat. It was believed that it may go clucking along the Road of the Death (Echuilan) and give warning that the deceased was coming.⁶² It also said that a dog was led into the house on a string and the string put into the hand of the corpse for about a minute. After the body has been buried, the dog was killed in order that it might go barking down the Road of the Death and frighten away the ghosts and spirits of enemies and tigers slain by the dead man during his life-time. The flesh was eaten by the buriers. A grave about six feet was dug in front of the man's house. The body was buried fully dressed, and often decorated with all the ornaments worn during life, if the deceased so desired. Nothing of foreign manufactures may be born by a corpse.⁶³ It was believed that both the chicken and the dog would lead the spirit of the death person to the land of the death (Echüli) under Wokha Hill.

When the small hut over the grave was completed his wooden dao holder and bear's hair wig, cloth, cowrie, lengta, ivory armllets, etc. are hung and his spears were struck upright on the grave. Again, on his grave all the trophies he acquired were hung. After every formalities were completed,

62. Interview from Thungmomo Ngully of Pangti on 10.1.91.

63. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 157.

pigs and cows were slaughtered and all his life time friends would feast together. This time all his achievements in life, developmental works he had done and his goodness were remembered and recounted by the villagers, with this Death Ceremony came the end of the chequered life of the chief.⁶⁴

With the gradual extension of their administration, the British also appointed, beginning in 1882, village chiefs according to local practice and the customs of various communities. "The government's interest was served best if they could be recognised and appointed to assist the colonial administration in the carrying out of their respective village administration."⁶⁵ Although the chiefs were given due recognition as undisputed leaders of their traditional societies, their recognition as village chiefs was made mainly with the intention to make them loyal agents of the colonial administration at the lower reaches.⁶⁶ Thus, while continuing as leaders of their people, they at the same time became an important link between the British government and the tribal masses. This same pattern became a general practice of the British rulers in Naga Hills.

64. Interviewed from Thungmomo Ngully of Pangti village on 10th January 1991.

65. H. Horam, op.cit., p. 81.

66. Piketo Sema, British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, New Delhi, Second Ed., 1992, p. 31.

CHAPTER III

TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COUNCIL

TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COUNCIL

Formation

In Naga society, although there were chiefs as the head of the village, the actual village administration was carried on by the village council. They had a council of elders representing each clan. The chief's house was the court of law and the office of administration. There was no separation of powers. The council was all-in-all in all matters, policy making for war, administration, law making etc. As each village was an independent state, the chief's court was the final court of justice.¹

Prior to the advent of the British into the Naga Hills, the village administration was performed by the village chief along with the council of elders or the councillors. It was the principal organ of the village.

Even after independence, until the passing of the 'Nagaland village and Area Council Act of 1978', by the government of Nagaland, there was no modern term known to us as village council. But due to the nature and style of

1. R.R. Shimray, Origin and Culture of Nagas, New Delhi, 1985, p. 57.

functioning of the village affairs, right from the inception and the beginning of the social life of the people, this institution began to take shape in the form of apex body of the village-state and, this very institution began to function as an efficient agency of the village administration and development since then.

According to M.C. Murry, among the Lotha Nagas, before the advent of the British administration into Lotha area, the Lothas were living in the independent village-state without any interference from any external power. At this period of history every village was under the control and care of the village elders and officials such as Tongti-Chochang, who were the village chief or headman and administrators and together with Pangkiden, who were the clan and khel representatives, elected or nominated from their respective clans or khels, constituted and formed what was known as Pangki-Hoho or the 'village council', which is modern term, for the administration of the village.² This is lucidly substantiated by N.T. Ngully when he says, for the administration and the protection of the village, Tongti-Chochang were elected and these people administer the village as per the long standing customs and practices of the Lothas.³

2. M.C. Murry, Kyong Opo Motsu Tchuli Tssolan Phyolan Motsu Osi Yitsso Kako (The Culture in Practice and Customary Laws of the Lothas), p. 1.

3. N.T. Ngullie, Kyong Tathi Juli, (The Lotha Naga Customs and Culture), Wokha, 1994, p. 16.

The most important reason for forming the council of Elders or the village Council, was to inform the chief in all affairs and daily happenings in the village, and to assist the chief in the numerous village administration. It is by now, one can correctly assume that the authority of the chief was not absolute. Therefore, even though the power to govern and administer the village was vested in him, he ruled with the aid and assistance of the Council or the councillors.

Butler rightly observed that, the Naga chiefs 'were leaders of public opinion'. '... The government of every Naga tribe' he added,

is a purely democratical one, and whenever anything of public importance has to be undertaken, all the chiefs meet together in solemn conclave, and then discuss and decide upon the action to be taken, and even then it often happens that the minority will not be bound by either the wish or act of the majority; and as to any one single chief exercising absolute control over his people, the thing is unheard of, 4

It is here in the meeting every member is allowed to speak or take part in the general discussion. As Shimray observed,

What was important and unique was the participation of the general public in the deliberations on any public issue giving a

4. Alexander Mackenzie, The North East Frontier of India, New Delhi, Reprint 1981, p. 86.

chance to every one to have a say. This was direct Democracy, the true and pure democracy in reality and in practice. This system of direct democracy was prevalent among the Lotha and Rengma Nagas also although with some slight variations. 5

Holroyed, Political Assistant, Sibsagar, give a true representation of actual facts when he says: "Each clan is ruled by its council and no important measure concerning the welfare of the clan undertaken without the consent of the elders..., and no operation undertakes till it has been carried out by the council."⁶ These points clearly explain the prevalence of a democratic system of village administration and the role and importance of council of elders or the village council during the pre-British period.

Procedure of selection

The method of selection or nomination of the council members might differ from tribe to tribe but the common or uniformity in all Naga tribe was that every Naga tribe had some sort of village body in which the entire village is represented, usually clan wise. Every Naga village has several clans residing in it. Each clan has its khel or khels, clan head and clan elders. When the time comes for electing a new

5. R.R. Shimray, op.cit., p. 58.

6. H.K. Barpujari, Problem of the Hill Tribes North-East Frontier 1822-42, Vol. 1, Gauhati, 1st Ed., 1970, pp.7-8.

council the chief fixes a time and place for the purpose. The clan head was the first man of the clan. He was, therefore, naturally its unanimous choice as representative in the village council. If, however, he was old, infirm or otherwise incapacitated, he may suggest the name of another able and young man. Each clan usually sends one representative unless it was large enough to justify larger representation in which case it sends more than one. The heads of the different clan then communicate with the chief, who received the names of the representatives.⁷ Thus there was no election in the accepted sense of the term. It is also important to note that ever since the inception of the council there has not been in any case council of Elders or councillors being represented by women. For it is said that the women were not eligible to be a member of the council.⁸

In the selection or nomination of the elders the chief had no say but as it is said it was customary and practice to give representation to all the clans and from the 'Khels' (Yankho), residing in the village. A large clan and also a large 'khel', because of the larger population might send more than one representation but care was, however, taken to ensure representation from each clan and khel and sent influential

7. M. Horam, The Naga Polity, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 84-85.

8. Interview with Chumbemo Ezung of Longsa on 29.1.92.

persons who could speak or voice for the clan and khel in particular and the village as a whole, and therefore, the fittest person was sent.⁹

It is striking to see that there was smooth and easy transaction of power from one person to another, where it should have involved a lot of misunderstanding among them for want of respect, privileges and share of meat they received from time to time either in the form of fine exacted from the convicted ones or as gifts or presents from the villagers. This was a clear reflection of efficient administration and having high respect for authority and government by the villagers, so called - the illiterates. But the informer complained that, "nowadays the generation and people have changed a lot and so the people have no respect for their elders, government or any authority",¹⁰ which is the reflection of deterioration of society and age-old system of village administration to a great extent.

The instances of quarrel and reluctance to vacate the post of elders have come to light in the case of Ao's when Mills writes, "when the time comes to vacate office there was almost always a violent quarrel. The office holders, reluctant

9. P.E. Ezung, Nkolo, Nchung Kyong Liphong Phisa Yansa, (Ancient and Modern Administration in Lotha Area), Published by Mrs. Abeni TCK, Kohima, 1993, p. 22.

10. Interview with Yishumo of L. Longidang on 27.12.92.

to relinquish their power and shares of meat, argued that time was not yet up, while the younger generation were eager to take their place."¹¹

Size of the Council

The council was intended to be a small and compact body where decisions might be taken quickly. The large all-village meetings, however, when held, proved to be full of loud and heated arguments dotted with bursts of laughter and though these seemed to go on intermingably. In the light of this, it would be appreciated why the number of members in the council was kept at the minimum.¹² It is also important to remember at this juncture that since the council members were drawn from both clans residing in the village and the number of khels, the size of the councils varied from village to village.

Tenure

During the Pre-British period, people were illiterate and not yet developed scientific knowledge and as such advance arrangement and planning for proper conduct of council was not made as it has been now. As such the Lotha Pangki-Hoho or village council had no knowledge of critical arrangement and

11. J.P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, London, 1973, p. 181.

12. Interview - Chijamo of L. Longidang on 23.12.90.

therefore there was no time fixed or tenure for the council members. It is said that the members remained in the office or held the post as long as he commands the confidence of the people, from where he represented.¹³ Hence it is important to note that, "although he might hold office for a long time but the office was by no means hereditary".¹⁴ It is only when "Nagaland village council Act was passed in 1978, the tenure of 5 years for the members was fixed".¹⁵

Conduct of Business

The procedure for the conduct of business in Pangki-Hono was regulated by the chief from time to time as the situation so demanded. In the conduct of business and proceedings no written records were maintained, as it has not yet developed among the people.¹⁶ Although sometimes chief's house might serve as a place for holding meeting but there was no proper house where the meeting could be held. Usually there used to be a place set aside for the purpose, sometimes with bench made out of bamboo or stones.¹⁷

13. Ibid.

14. Interview with Yishumo Lotha of L. Longidang village on 23.12.90.

15. Government of Nagaland - The Nagaland Village and Area Council Act 1978, p. 2.

16. Interview with Pimomo Kikon on 13.10.1994.

17. Interview with Yishumo Lotha on 23.12.90.

Qualifications

There are certain qualifications one must possess to become a member of the Pangki-Hoho. They are as follows:

1. To be a member Tongti and Chochang, one must have attained the age of 45 and 40 respectively.
2. Should be permanently residing in the village.
3. Should be a wealthy man to entertain guests and to throw community feast from time to time. He must be also an all-round experienced man.
4. His wife should be polite and have the quality to deal with everyone.¹⁸
5. He should be just, honest, selfless and always ready to help and sacrifice for the society.
6. He must have a sound mind and have a clean generation record.
7. He must be a man, who could deal with everyone, able to convince others and liked by many.
8. Last but not the least, he must know the customary laws, customs and procedures of the tribe.¹⁹

Privileges

Although there was no remunerations attached to the post of the Pangki-Hoho or the council of Elders, they were

18. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 23.

19. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 16.

highly respected by the villagers by virtue of the post. They also enjoyed in the feasting exacted as fines in the form of meat from the convicts while settling various disputes in the village, and also meat, fish and other vegetables, given to them from hunting and fishing etc., by the villagers. These were not compulsory but again as a sort of obligatory and voluntary acts by grateful subjects and nothing more.²⁰ It is also that, at the time when village administration was a government by itself, where there was no higher authority and power above them, it was a prestigious and respectable job to be nominated to the post of council of Elders (or 'Tongti' or 'Ephyoesan', another name which we find for the elders). It involved extra privileges and high respect from the village community and especially from where he was nominated to that post, for his role in the smooth functioning of the village and welfare of the people.²¹

Disqualification

The main reasons for which they could be disqualified were: firstly, he could be set aside for incompetence or mal-administration. Secondly, violation of laws and the established customs and practices of the village consciously or

20. Ekyimsao Ngully, Interviewed on 21.9.90 at Niroyo.

21. Interviewed with Yishumo of L. Longidang on 27.12.92.

unconsciously could be another reason for his removal. Thirdly, accident and old age resulting inactiveness in the administration of the village were other disqualification.²²

Powers and Functions

There is no recorded past history of the Lothas, prior to British administration, their oral tradition and practices show that they were an organised community. Every village had a village-government run by members of the village council known by different names such as Tongti, Pangki-Hoho or Ephyo-Esan, who are the spokesman of the village.

The powers and functions of the village council may be broadly divided into following categories: Executive or Administrative and Judicial.

Executive

In the administration of the village, they believed that the handling of the important issues required not an intemperate but a cool and experienced head. And the dispensation of justice to all was the primary concern of the administrative machinery, which was the council of Elders.

The council of elders from time to time decided disputes which were generally of two kinds, namely, private

22. Interviewed with Ekyimsao Ngully of Niroyo on 21.9.90.

and public. Private disputes could be those in which two or more persons were involved, for instance, a boundary dispute between A and B or between two families or clans. Public disputes were those in which the whole village was involved, for instance, damaging of trees in the village avenue or encroachment of village boundary by other neighbouring villages. The council was not only responsible for the settlement of all disputes, it was also responsible for the effective execution of its decisions. In case a person or a party failed to abide by the decision of the council, it took necessary actions against them and saw to it that all its decisions were carried out effectively. The council did not tolerate defiance of its authority. Any one guilty of breaking any time-honoured law of the land were accordingly punished.²³

Any Lotha is conversant with the traditional laws, customs and usages. Ignorance of the same found no excuse. Like any other tribal communities, Lotha society has innumerable taboos (gennas) involving Do's and Don'ts. Any unconscious or deliberate breaking of the same would bring down the wrath of all the powers of evil not only on the law-breaker but on the entire village community. In a superstitious community such as this it was imperative that the observance of law was strictly enforced. This was the executive function of the village council.²⁴ Punishment meted out to the taboo-breakers

23. Interviewed with Chiborao of Longsa on 18.9.90.

24. Interviewed - Chijamo Jami of L. Longidang on 26.12.93.

is mainly in the form of sacrifices of animals and other ceremonies to placate an angry supernatural power.

The executive or administrative functions of the village council was wide and varied. It included the maintenance of the village water supply and footpaths, construction of new paths and bridges across streams and rivers which are swollen during rainy season or were otherwise very difficult to cross. Sanitary systems and cleanliness surrounding the village were also important and looked after by the council.²⁵

Another important issues involved was the fixing of dates of all village festivals by them in consultation with the village priest. All these decisions were passed in the meeting and before the villagers go to bed for the night, they would proclaim in the village, at the top of their voice, what was to be done the next day.²⁶

The Lothas had an interesting custom since time immemorial the games of observing 'mass hunting' and 'mass fishing' days, but it has been exclusively participation of the menfolk. The days were fixed by the council. But these days, 'mass hunting' custom has almost disappeared excepting

25. Ibid.

26. Interviewed - Wopansao of Akok on 5.1.94.

some villages in the upper range, and confined to individual games, unlike that of 'mass fishing' which is still enthusiastically pursued, and one of the most important practices in the villages. Their return from these sports was naturally celebrated with the eating of the 'game' or the 'catch' and entertainment.²⁷

The village council also acted as a custodian and as welfare body, for they helped villagers who were in shortage of food - due to natural calamities and other related problems resulting in his difficult situation.²⁸

The administration of the council also included the decision taken for the year which side the villagers should go for jhumming cultivation, which is their mainstay. In the days when one's head was not safe on his shoulder, the Lothas instead of scattered jhumming cultivation they had to cultivate in one side of the village, nearby each other for the protection against any enemy attack.²⁹

The functions of the elders and chief went hand in hand. Therefore, when a quarrel arose between two villages, messengers were sent to fix a day, and if both sides so agreed the elders of the respective villages met on the path half-way

27. Interviewed - Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki on 15.9.90.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

between the two villages and settled the matter, exchanging drinks of 'madhu' (zutsu or rice beer) and eating together. If the responsibility for the quarrel could be fixed on any individual he was fined, and the fine was either divided among the elders of both villages or given to the village against which the wrong was done. For example, in the old days village such as Okotso and the Ao village of Longkhum were in a chronic state of war. It would occasionally happen that Okotso decided to cut their fields which lay towards Longkhum in the same year as Longkhum decided to cut their fields towards Okotso. Obviously cultivation would be impossible for either side unless a peace of some kind were patched up. The elders of both villages would feast together on the boundary and an armistice would be agreed upon to remain in force till those fields were finally reaped, when the game of war would go on as before. All preliminary negotiations between villages actually at war were carried on by ambassadors (lantsolanpen), of which there were two in each village. These had a permanent safe conduct, and it was believed that to kill one would bring dire consequences and misfortune on the slayer and his village.³⁰

On 6th April 1994, K.C. Pant, the Chairman of the Tenth Finance Commission at Kohima, while appreciating the

30. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, Directorate of Art and Culture, Govt. of Nagaland, Kohima, Second Ed., 1980, p.100.

works done at the village level he emphasized the role of the village council, which has inherited the old system of village administration and he said:

You have the advantage of a very well developed structure of administration at the village-level. This is partly an inherited legacy, but the state certainly deserves credit for marrying tradition with sound administrative practices in the shape of village councils and village Development Boards. This has been acclaimed as a success story.... These are in addition to the traditional functions of the village council relating to administration of justice interpretation of customary law and authority over common property. 31

The council also assisted the chief in matters of defence of the village and was expected to cooperate with him in all other matters relating to the administration of the village. The village council was also an effective check on the powers of an unscrupulous or tyrannical chief. In the olden days when a chief by sheer superior physical strength could assume the role of a king. In this case, the councillors being a group could and did control the powers of a dangerously mighty chief. When this was not necessary, they were very useful, at least proving that two heads were better than one. Where there were representatives of clans they could

31. Chipeni Murry (Ed.), The Warrior, Vol. 23, No. 4, April 1994, p. 7. Published by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Govt. of Nagaland, Kohima.

be relied upon to work for its welfare just as today the electorate of a constituency relies upon its representative in the Legislature to work for its well being.³²

It may be important to compare with some of the Naga tribes in the functioning of their village council in the field of administration. Among the Angamis the body of elders, though it may not be comparable in the modern sense of the term as 'Council', this body assumed the entire issues of administration relating to an adoption of social service programmes, defence or warfare and settlement of festivals dates. Priest had sacerdotal role and usually their spiritual guidance was essential in many issues connected with the village life. True, the Angamis have an elaborately tribal form of democracy which had an indigenous growth.³³

In the case of the Chakhesang a special emphasis may be laid on the way of the council setting. In the event the council was convened, it was compulsory that every male adult attended it, elaborate arrangement being chalked out in advance. Village criers passed out door-to-door in the village, announcing about the place and date of the meeting, the nature of business, they cried out in loud verboriousities and

32. Interviewed with Pimomo Kikon of Yimpang on 14.2.94.

33. H. Bareh (Ed.), Nagaland District Gazetteers, Kohima District, Government of Nagaland, 1970, p. 186.

incantation. Among the other Naga tribes, drum beats from the morung (Chumbo) howled out in the air, each distinctive transition of sonance conveying its own meaning whether it implies an emergency or a non-emergency meeting. The Rengma chief, a part from proclamation on the way explained above, may have summoned any council by sending a grass-knot as a token of message, one knot indicating, one day's notice. The token is circulated in turn to other persons or parties concerned. Among the Zeliang the proclamation was carried out in accompaniments of wind instruments and trumpets, the criers passed on the village in many rounds to remind the inhabitants. In all cases, whether Angami, Rengma, Zeliang or Chakhesang, attendance of the council was a must for every adult male and was attached to with great sanctity, except if he were sick, those who refused were severely punished. Volunteers and sentries were posted to see that order was carried out. People attended in the best of their fineries and resplendent dress.³⁴ Thus the true democratic system was extended and preceded the birth of the modern Panchayat system in India. This form of Naga democracy has been worked out through ages in line with the traditional genius of its founders.

Judicial

The most important function of the Council was

34. Ibid., pp. 187-8.

judicial. The chief or headman and the elders constituted what was known as the village court. It was the highest court of justice among every Naga villages. As far as possible, all disputes and differences between families belonging to the same clan were decided by the clan elders or at least all such quarrels except the ones which these elders fail to decide satisfactorily were referred to the village court. The various disputes and cases, e.g., theft, murder, defiance of customs and traditions to name a few, were settled according to the customary laws of the land.

Nature

Before the advent of the British into Lotha area, every village was an independent unit and the highest arbiter was the village court - to what we find supreme court in India today, which is the apex court in the country. And 'practically there was no case which could not be settled by the village court.'³⁵ This point comes identical with the pre-British Garo system of village administration and judicial system as Dr. Sangma writes,

All quarrels and complaints were settled by convening the meeting of the elders of the village. Whenever necessary, local enquiries and examination of witnesses were conducted by them. The decisions were arrived at by

35. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 87.

majority opinions of the members present as well as by the long established customs. These decisions were final and binding. There was no question of appeal to the higher courts as there was none. 36

Mode of Trial

During the Pre-British Lotha society when the case was reported to the village court, the court would fix the date when the case would be taken up and hearing of the statement from both the parties would take place. At this point, if an individual or party involved failed to turn up, after fixing the date by the court, would be fined or punished accordingly, for it shows disrespect to the court. Another interesting situation at this moment was that, the statement would be given or made only by the person/party concerned and no one should help them in giving the statement, including the family members or relatives. After this all the points would be examined by the court and then the accused or the culprits would be fined or punished according to the gravity of the crime.³⁷

It is also important to note at this juncture that when the court was in progress, to maintain the sanctity of the court and to avoid any disturbances from outside, no one

36.M.S. Sangma, History and Culture of the Garos, New Delhi, 1981, p. 51.

37.N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 87.

would be allowed to make noise or shout at the court proceedings and if anyone was found attempting or trying to disturb the case or heard making ill-remarks, would be fined or punished accordingly. Therefore, no one dared to disturb the proceedings of the case. This was so because the sanctity of the village court was to maintain as sanctioned by the long-established customs and traditions and convention of the Lothas.³⁸ Though many changes have taken place in different areas after the British, this very nature and practices of the court system is still to be found in the villages when the cases are taken up by the court.

Settlement of Disputes

In a society where there was 'head-hunting', murder would appear to be an act of valour and the murderer would have been honoured. But, this was not so because 'head-hunting' had its own law and therefore breach of other customary laws became a crime as the murder was not covered by the law of 'head-hunting'. Murder within the clan was very rare, but murder in the village did occur and also murder against the law of head-hunting did occur which often led to inter-villages and inter-tribes wars. T.C. Hodson, in his book, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, writes thus, "murder within

38. Interviewed with Thungmomo of Pangti on 9.1.94.

the clan is so rare and even that I have no information concerning the attitude of these groups towards the offenders in such a case."³⁹

When there was murder in the village, the council immediately assembled and the matter was taken up at the earliest. They would investigate the matter and if there was no deep-rooted cause or no hatred or enmity in the past between the two, the elders would go to the murdered family and asked for forgiveness and if the reply was negative, then they avenged with the same murder and the case was settled. But the matter did not end there. Even if the avenger was taken, the murderer and his family would not be allowed to take or draw water from the village tank before the fresh water rains in the village and also would not receive or eat anything from the murderer by the murdered family for the fear of 'mmyok'.^{*40}

Before the hills were administered, murderers were also punished either by turning the murderer and his family out of the village or by taking the whole of his property and dividing it among the rests of the village other than the clan

39. T.C. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, McMillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1911, p. 106.

* Among the Lothas this is the most feared serious and mysterious illness and instant death or mysterious sickness leading to blindness, sudden dysentery or the fear of inheriting the murderer's bad heredity etc.

40. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 52.

of the murdered man, who could never touch any of it. This type of act they would never forget. In this connection, Mills writes thus,

In no case would any relation of the murdered man ever eat with the murderer. If they did their teeth would fall out. Nor could the descendants of either side eat together. This breach can never be healed.... 41

The penalty given to minor assaults and injuries, not resulting death, were compensated by fines. Theoretically, the demand was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but after the initial indignations, if an injury had worn off, a fine of a pig or a cow was accepted.⁴² After the British administration in the area, the murderers were put into the jail for either limited years or for life.

In the case of stealing, a thief had to return the goods in full, or their equivalent, to the owner, and pay a large pig or cow or both to his clan for bringing bad name to them, besides paying pig or cow to the elders as a fine not to let him repeat or commit the same and also for settling the matter. Sometimes the habitual thief and troublesome children were punished with on a bed of nettle leaves.* When fine was

41. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 101.

42. Interviewed with Chijamo of L. Longidang on 23.12.90.

* Nettle leaf is wild plant with hairs on its leaves that stings and reddens the skin when touched.

involved and if he could not pay up he was sold as a slave. No punishments other than fining or selling into slavery or expulsion from the village were inflicted on fellow-villages. But a man of another village who broke a village emung (holiday) was put in the stock and had to be ransomed by his friends.⁴³

According to Mills, in the case of the Aos, for theft the value of the property stolen had to be restored and a pig paid to the elders. The payment of this pig stamped a man of a thief, and his descendants for ever could be reminded of the incident with impunity.⁴⁴ In ancient Garo society, there was practically no stealing or robbery, every family was self sufficient. But in a rare incident "if any person was caught in the act of stealing, he was killed"⁴⁵

In the case of disputes within the Lotha village both sides were summoned before elders, and what sounds like the prelude to a free fight took place. Both the parties, all the witnesses and most of the spectators talked at once at the top of their voices. However, after much shaking of fists and stamping and solemn affirmation from one side that they would

43. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 101.

44. J.P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, p. 194.

45. Julues L.R. Marak, Garo Customary Laws and Practices (Sociological Study), Shillong, 1985, p. 87.

never pay such a big fine, and from the other that they would never accept such a small one, a settlement was arrived at. Each side went in company with the elders to the others' house and drank 'madhu' (rice beer) and promised not to quarrel again. This was regarded as binding. In the old days, if one party would not pay the fine agreed upon, the other party simply went and looted his property and took it.⁴⁶ Nowadays cases which can be settled in the villages are dealt with in court.

In the case of the marriage, divorce, elopement, adultery or moral laxity, the cases were as far as possible settled within the two clans or families concerned with mutual understanding or with small fines. But if the cases could not be settled, placed the matter before the chief and his council then it would be settled according to the customary law that would naturally involve fines of pig or cow or both from the accused. All cases are heard in public. After the old man or chief had heard the relevant points of the case and arguments of both the parties a decision is reached and announced. The judgements are extremely just.

Oath on Land Disputes

From time immemorial every individual families, and clans had plots of land. And each plot was demarcated by the

46. M.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 101.

stones erected and other natural boundaries, like rivulets etc., and most of the disputes over land were caused by the shifting of artificial demarcation and claim on other plots of land forcibly to acquire more land by some selfish persons. But these cases were very rare. If there was any quarrel on this matter, chief and his council came to the front to help settling disputes. The council would investigate the matter and settle the disputes either by mutual understanding through strong witnesses or by an oath, which was invariably sworn on a little soil from the land in disputes - mixed with hair of the swearer. Whichever side would take the oath got the land. It was never consciously taken as all Lothas firmly believed that whoever took this oath falsely would die before he could reap the harvest from the land he had dishonestly gained.⁴⁷ Like-wise, different kinds of disputes between villages like ownership of Bomboð clumps and others were mostly decided by an oath.

Common Oaths in settling any dispute

At one time, oaths were also taken on the stones which were considered as sacred, (e.g., tiyilong). These oaths could not be taken lightly and one could be sure of the veracity of the swearer. But different ways of swearing were practised in different villages during the trial of cases. For example, in

47. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 54.

Yimpang village, the length of the accused or suspected person was measured on the ground and a piece of soil taken from that part of the measured ground. This accused or suspected person then swore that he was speaking the truth and that if he was swearing falsely he would die within six months, after which he bit the piece of soil and hair pulled out from his head.⁴⁸

One common method of taking an oath in times of any dispute was on a tiger's tooth. The reason was that if he was taking the oath falsely, he would be killed by the tiger before long. Therefore, one would not take an oath on tiger's tooth falsely for fear of being killed by the tiger. As Horam says, "The Lothas too will not knowingly swear falsely and their oaths may be relied upon."⁴⁹

Thus the administration and duties of the council members were numerous and varied, dealing and settling different kinds of problems and disputes, that is why, only the able man and person having clean generation record were nominated and 'in no case' says Yananyimo, "bastards and murderers were involved in the process of village administration",⁵⁰ for, if so, it will definitely have repercussion on the administrators.

48. Interview with Mmhonsao of Yimpang village on 1.10.90.

49. M. Horam, op.cit., p. 117.

50. Interviewed with Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki on 14.9.90.

Quorum and Voting

In the old days all the members are expected to be present in the meeting, whenever called, therefore the question of quorum did not arise and the decisions were passed in accordance with the customary laws and practices. But nowadays changes have made with the passage of time and, one-third of the total number of members shall form the quorum and the decision of the majority at the meeting shall be binding in all matters. Secondly, the voting shall be by show of the right hands, except in case of no-confidence motion when voting shall be by secret ballot.⁵¹

Present position

Before the coming of Britisher all these systems of self-Government was prevalent in every Lotha village. But with the advent of British administration some changes were brought in, although the basic principle remained the same, in the affairs of village administration by introducing the institution of Gaon Bura. The Gaon Buras are the village elders selected by the villagers and approved by the government. The Gaon Buras are the Liaison officers between the villagers and Government. As Murry writes, with the coming of the modern administration into Lotha area 'Tongti' (village chief) is now replaced by the Government appointee, elected by the villagers

51. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 1.

themselves as village chairman, Chochangden as the Gaon Buras and Pangkiden as village council members. All these members together formed the village council and administer the village in accordance with customary laws.⁵²

But the institution of Do-Bhasi, though originally meant for translating the language of villagers to the officers were endowed with judicial and police power as well. There were very few problems relating to law and order and whatever crime there was, it used to be brought to the notice of the British Administration by the Do-Bhasis and the criminals also were brought by them.⁵³ Now adays in every administrative headquarters (from Deputy Commissioner's court, down to Extra Assistant Commissioner's), we find Do-Bhasis court, for settling various disputes and the decisions are taken as per the long established customary laws, practices and conventions of the respective tribes.

The traditional system of village administration, in the olden days, did not have any written constitution or any guidelines as to how the administration should be carried out, but followed strictly the time-honoured practices and

52. Ibid., p. 2.

53. Zhangulie (Ed.), 25 Years of Nagaland Legislative Assembly Silver Jubilee Souvenir, (Assembly Secretariat, Nagaland, Kohima, 1989), p. 19.

convention of the land.⁵⁴ But with the passing of the 'Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act of 1978', by the Government of Nagaland, elaborate rules and regulations have been laid down by the government and the members of the council is bound to act and perform his duties accordingly, in conformity with the long-established convention and practices of the respective tribes which are still prevalent and maintained.

54. Tsenchio Ovung, Paper presented on the topic 'Lotha Culture', during Lotha Hoho sponsored seminar at Wokha on 11th January 1994.

CHAPTER IV

TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

The early migration of the Lothas to the present Lotha areas came to an end with the founding of a village known as Tiyilongchum near Wokha, 'about 900 (nine hundred) years ago',¹ after which, the process of expansion of different Lotha villages began with the gradual increase in population. Tiyilongchum, the first village of the Lotha Nagas, has now been deserted due to acute shortage of water supply and due to frequent destruction caused by the wild animals.² Therefore, the villagers had to look for another site suitable for the establishment of a new village.

Selection of the Village Site

While selecting a site for the establishment of a new village the following factors were invariably taken into consideration by the early settlers:

- (1) The site should be suitable enough to build a large village and for cultivation purposes.

1. P.E. Ezung, Nkolo, Nchung Kyong Liphong Phisa Yansa (Ancient and Modern Administration in Lotha Area), Kohima, 1993, p. 21.
2. Thungro Kikon (Ed), Kyong Baptist Yithen (Lotha Baptist News), Monthly Paper, Wokha, September 1990, p. 3.

- (2) Location ought be such that the village should be easily defensible from the attacks of enemy and wild animals.
- (3) There should be perennial water supply for the entire population.
- (4) It should have fertile soil for various crops and other vegetation.
- (5) Nearby villages, if any, should be friendly villages to have better relations.
- (6) Above all, overall environment should be suitable and conducive for starting a village.³

Founding of a New Village

In the past, in the case of migration and also in the special circumstances of a village overgrown, it was necessary on the part of the population to move to a new site where a new village was to be established. There were many factors leading to such steps entailing numerous problems and labour due to shifting of the village. The most important factors were:

- (1) Indefensible location (involving the whole population).

3. N.T. Ngullie, Kyong Tathi Juli, (The Lotha Naga Customs and Culture), Wokha, 1994, p. 13.

- (2) Water scarcity.
- (3) Land hunger.
- (4) Failure to settle some disputes.
- (5) Misunderstanding between the leaders.
- (6) Destruction often caused by the natural calamities.
- (7) Misfortune caused in the village agricultural crops and also population, due to failure on the part of the people to please the deities, may have also caused desertion of the village, by a part of the population.⁴
- (8) Later, with the coming of Christianity newly converted Christians and non-Christians often arose misunderstanding in the day to day functioning of the village affairs. It resulted in the establishment of a new village to avoid confrontation (L. Longidang village, in the lower range, was built in 1927 mainly on this ground, deserted from its old village, Akuk).⁵

While negotiating to go to new village the leaders never failed to take into consideration what type or group of

4. Ibid., p. 12.

5. Interviewed with Hakao Kithan (75) on 27.12.93 at L. Longidang.

people they should move along. They saw to it that the following category of people were included in this group.

- (1) People who have the aptitude of good administration and were far-sighted.
- (2) Man having good life record and reputation and also good heredity in wealth etc.
- (3) Outstanding warrior who has taken more enemy heads.
- (4) For the purpose of marriage-alliances and generation different clans should be included.
- (5) Man having clean generation record for ceremonial and invoking blessing for the population.⁶

Meaning of the Word 'Oyan' (Village)

The word 'Oyan' is literally translated as 'search'. It is said that after searching for a long time for the suitable location to set up a village entailing a lot of labour and pain they called it 'Oyan'. Secondly, in a particular Oyan they searched and found all types of people for the village administration and they named it Oyan. Thirdly, it is so called because all the materials needed for day to day life were found in the village, without depending

6. Interviewed with Thungmomo Ngullie on 9 January 1994 at Wokha.



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on other villages.⁷ Fourthly, no matter how far a man goes out of his village even covering the four corners of the world he always longed to come back to his village or at least remembered it, therefore, it is called 'Oyan'.⁸

Ceremonies connected with the founding of a new village

Having selected a suitable site with all the basic requirements to establish a village, certain divination rites and ceremonies need to be undertaken. At this juncture they would select a man who should cut a branch from a bush on the site. This very ceremony being a very delicate and brought certain misfortune to the performer, no one would like to be the one. Any how after initial hesitation and suspense as to who would be the one, a person was selected by the group to perform the rite. If the cut is a clean one, that is, in a single thrust of a dao and no leaves fall, the omen is good. If the branch is not cut through with one blow or leaves fall, the omen is bad. The omens being good he and his fellow colonists selected a man to be the priest of the new village, but this practice was not uniform in all the villages.⁹

While still retaining the old village as their head-

7. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 15.

8. M.C. Murry, Kyong Opo Motsu Tchuli Phyolan Motsu Osi Yitsso Kako, (The Culture in Practice and Customary Laws of the Lothas), Sanis, 1985, p. 1. (Also found in P.E. Ezung, op.cit., p. 21).

9. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 11.

quarters, they set to work to clean the jungle on the new site. After the jungle has been cut the founders made new fire with a fire-stick. Then the construction of the houses was followed by ceremonies and rituals.¹⁰

The actual movement of the family is also interesting. When the village was ready for occupation the colonists went there from the old village in ceremonial dress and fully armed, and each family would take a wood-torch at night and reach their new house next morning.¹¹ From the time they set out from the old village, the womenfolk and the children would be in the middle guarded by the menfolk and the warriors as protection against enemy attack. They would also take with them a branch from menkitong (head-tree) of the old village. This they stuck in the ground under the head-tree of the new village. They would also try their best to steal water from the spring of the old village. This was to ensure a good water supply in their new village. If they were lucky enough to be able to steal then they also put under their menkitong and in their 'morung' (Chumbo) luck-stone (Oha) from the old village, thereby ensuring good fortune for their new home. Again each clan would also take their own respective luck-stone to be gathered at the base of the village head-tree to ensure good

10. Ibid., p. 12.

11. Interviewed with Ekyimsao Ngully (98) on 13 February 1992, at Niroyo.

fortune. Apart from other essential things they would take along with their various kinds of seeds for crops to be sown in the new village.¹² Another significant part was that, before the deserting group left for the new village, they along with the remaining villagers would have a big feast. This last feast together they had was to ensure and to maintain friendship between the two villages in the days to come.¹³

Position and naming the village

With the exception of those situated on spurs running down from the great mass of Wokha Hill, a Lotha village is invariably built on the very top of a ridge. Unlike 'the Semas',¹⁴ the Lothas rarely called a village after its founder. An almost unique example is Mangya (Mungya), which is said to have been founded by Mangyasang. More usually some peculiarity of the site, or incident connected with the village, gave it its name. For example, Seleku is so called because many flying squirrels (selek) were found when the site was cleared.¹⁵ Niroyo is the place of a plant with red berries

12. Interviewed with Yishumo (81) on 23.12.93 at L. Longidang.

13. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 5.

14. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, Oxford University Press, London, (Second Ed.), 1968, p. 33.

15. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland, Kohima, Second Edition, 1980, p. 21.

called Niro. They found plenty of Niro while clearing the site and so was the name of the village.¹⁶ Longsa (Olong-stone, osa-platform) is so-called from a flat-topped rock near the eastern entrance of the village.¹⁷ Woroku (Woro-bird, Okvu-hole) is so-called because it is said that they found beautiful birds' nest in a hole. Wokha (Owo - number of people, kha - the counting), thus Wokha means - counting the number of the people, hence, the name of the village.

Communication

From village to village there were narrow paths along which men can only go in single file. As far as possible they kept along the very top of the ranges, for in the old days to use a path running under the shoulder of a hill would have to risk having a spear thrown at you from above. Small streams and ditches are bridged either by a single big tree or half a dozen stout poles laid side by side. Across broader streams, such as Doyang and Chubi, cane bridges were constructed.¹⁸ During those days vehicle was not even heard of but nowadays the situation has changed and modern means of communication have reached even the remotest parts of Nagaland, removing the problems of transportation and communication from one place to

16. Interviewed Ekyimsao Ngully on 13 February 1992 at Niroyo.

17. Interviewed Lenthio Murry on 29 January 1992, at Longsa.

18. Interviewed Khungmomo Ngully (82) on 13.9.90, at Wokha.

another. As Ghosh observed, in olden days there were incessant head-hunting raids perpetrated by the local people upon its neighbouring tribes. Other tribes also did the same against the Lothas. So for the sake of security, construction of roads were not encouraged. The need for a good road was also not felt since their contact with the outside world was very limited. So there was no proper road communication in this area before the British administration.¹⁹

The Lotha House

In the olden times Lothas constructed their house during spring when by that time the materials to be used (bamboo, wood etc.) are seasoned. Lotha houses are similar to each other. The walls are of bamboo and the roof of thatch (leshu) or palm-leaf (Oko, Leviston assamica).²⁰ The front of all but the poorest houses in semicircular, with a door in the middle of the semicircle. The roof of the front semicircular room (mpongki) slopes up to the roof of the main building. The floor of the sitting - out platform at the back is of bamboo without any covering of earth. The pattern of the floor of this platform varies according to whether the owner of the house has or has not dragged a stone.

19. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, Kohima, 1979, p.105.

20. J. P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 30.

In a Lotha household each wife has a separate sleeping cubicle with a fireplace (nchu) in the middle, for there was no separate kitchen and cooking is done inside the same house. A well-to-do Lotha usually possesses three wives. The main building of his house therefore contains three sleeping cubicles and a little store-room at the back. The cubicle nearest 'mpongki' is called 'Lhurhui' and is occupied by the third wife. The middle one is called 'Olongo' and is the abode of the chief wife. The back cubicle is called 'tachongo' and is used by the second wife.²¹

A corridor runs lengthwise the house from entrance to the rear for houses with open air platform behind. The house is congested with household articles. We find at the porch, mortars, troughs, firewood and perhaps agricultural implements. Stools, shelves, racks with contents of pots, platters and other utensils form the part and parcel of the house, while beds are made of planks or bamboo. Formerly beds used to be hewn of tree-trunks.²²

But with the advent of modern civilization the housing pattern has widely changed in the district especially in the urban areas. There is hardly any thatched house in the urban

21. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 33.

22. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 100.

areas, especially Wokha Town. All the houses, either Government or Private, are roofed with C.G.I. sheets (Corrugated Galvanised Iron) or plain sheets, and the way of construction of the building is very much modern. Even in the villages many buildings are found constructed in the modern way with many modern amenities like sanitary arrangements, electric fittings and other modern appliances.

Village Head Tree

Perhaps the most conspicuous object in a Lotha village is the head-tree, menkitong. It is usually situated on a mound well in the middle of the village. Against its branches were hung the heads of enemies taken in war, and at its roots are kept the mysterious luck-stones (Oha). These are counted and a fence is put round the tree whenever the oyantssoa (village re-building or renewing) 'genna'* is performed. The fortune of the village is regarded as in a way dependent on the menkitong. To break a twig off it would entail the performance of the oyantssoa 'genna' (village renewing 'genna'), which must also be performed if the menkitong dies or a branch falls. The place of the menkitong can never be changed. When a new village is founded a site is always selected on which there is a tree suitable for use as a menkitong. Under the new

* Genna - A very common Naga-Assamese word and one use in various senses. (1) A Naga ceremony, (2) "Fobidden" (e.g.) 'It is genna to take the head of a man of your own village').

tree must be put a twig stolen from the menkitong of the parent village though the parent village makes every effort to prevent this theft, as it entails the performance of the village renewing 'genna' and is very likely to bring bad luck to the parent village. A curious belief is said to have been prevalent in Phiro. As elderly man Thayio²³ informed,

Skulls which had fallen from their strings were often picked up and jammed into interstices in the hole of the head-tree. At Phiro the menkitong is growing round and gradually covering these old skulls. This is regarded as a sign that the days of head-hunting are gone, never to return.

Chumbo (Morung or Youth Dormitory) and its Importance

Every village, except the very small ones, is divided into two or more 'Khels' (Yankho). Sometimes, a little strip of open ground marks the division between different 'khels'. In some villages these 'khels' mark the divisions of clans. Sometimes some feature of the site gives the 'khel' its name, for example, Olongo (center) 'khel' or Hayili (level) 'khel' in L. Longidang. Usually a 'khel' appears to be nothing more than a convenient division of a village in which men of various clans live. One is completely free to go to another 'khel' if he wanted to. In the past, in every 'khel' there was a common bachelors' house or 'morung' or 'Chumbo' in Lotha, a

23. Informed by Thayio of Phiro (95) on 28.1.92 at Wokha.

building which played an important part in Lotha life. "It is tabooed or forbidden for a woman to go inside the morung".²⁴

The location of 'Chumbo' in every village is said to be the best site in the 'Khel'. The location should be such that it could not be easily attacked by the enemy.²⁵ It is a huge building and in the middle of the space covered by the verandah roof stands the main and front post (humtsen) which is elaborately carved with conventional representations of mithun head, hornbill, human head, female breast, elephants' head. Tigers' head etc. It is so because in the days of head-hunting all the planning, different kinds of wild animal killed, enemies head etc. are executed and brought to the 'morung'. It signified that it was the abode of the heroes.²⁶ As Julian Jacobs says, "the morung, or youths dormitory, is typically a huge building which physically dominates a Naga village, resplendent with carvings representing hornbills, tigers, mithun (bison) and human heads and sometimes with projecting bargeboards resembling wings or horns etc."²⁷

Morung is rebuilt after every nine years. Every morung has land belonging to it. With the rice from this land a pig

24. Interviewed Nkhanyimo Ngully on 14.9.92 at Tsungiki.

25. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 69.

26. M.C. Murry, Interviewed on 30.12.90 at Sanis.

27. Julian Jacobs, The Nagas, Stuttgart, 1990, p. 27.

and a cow are bought. There were usually killed on the day before the work of rebuilding is begun. Next day is the first of five days emong (means literally gathered together), which must be kept by the whole village. During these days no one may work in the field or any other work or bring into the village meat from a tiger's kill. If a stranger enters the village he will probably be ill, and he cannot leave it till the five days emong are over.²⁸

When the 'emong' was over, the priest (Pvuti) formally begins the breaking down of the old 'Chumbo', by pulling down a piece of thatch off the roof and throwing it into the ground. The priest aid (Yingae) then removes the luck-stones (Oha) from in front of the 'humtsen-tachongo' (inner main post) and lays them down a little distance from the 'Chumbo'. Then the whole building is dismantled and the work of rebuilding is begun again, with the initiation of the priest. As soon as the roofing is done the luck stone is brought at the foot of the main post by the 'Yingae'. A rough column formation by four led by the priest would slowly dance around the village, for more blessing. In the evening the carcasses of the pig and the cow will be distributed among all the male members of the khel.²⁹

28. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 26.

29. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

On the second day of the ceremony, a dog would be killed in front of the morung by the man reputed to be the finest warrior of the locality at the sight of the admiring throng. The more important of the day ceremony was that in the evening a mock fight takes place between the young men and women of the village both married and unmarried. The women pretend to push their way into the 'morung' while the young men keep them out. This mock-fight is believed to increase the fertility of the women who take part in it.³⁰

Dances and chants are performed on the third and the fourth day of the ceremonies. During the performance of these dances, women participated on certain ground only. There were cases of women who even after a long period of married life could not get an issue, in that case she would with the consent of the village-priest and the elders, participated in the dances. The lot-caster (Phyali-efung) would cast lot on her behalf and if it is found to be of good omen, he would instruct the lady to participate in the dance, and there were cases of women becoming fertile after the performance. Arhoni the wife of Yilumo Echongmongrui of Wokha village was barren for nineteen years and there was no hope of her conceiving a child, but after her participation in the dances on the third and fourth day of the ceremonies after the morung was built,

30. Interviewed with Chumbemo Emorari (77) on 29.1.92 at Longsa.

she conceived and later gave birth to a baby boy. He was named Orhyumomo.³¹ Lyod Rus writes,

I noticed a girl dancing in the procession of the men and on asking the reason, was told that it was the custom at Wokha for any woman who was barren to appear in the dance at the time of building of a new 'Chumbo', if after this she gets no children she never will. The poor girl was having much shame, all her female relations were walking by her side to keep her company. 32

After all these continuous ceremonies and feasts for four consecutive days, the fifth day is kept aside to be the rest-day (emong) on this day none would go out but rest the whole day.

Membership and Composition

It is composed of unmarried bachelors of the village. Its membership is opened to every boy from the time he is able to defend himself with dao and other defensive weapons till he marries. There were three categories of members at 'Chumbo'. They were: (1) Thekoren or new recruits, (2) Bangti, (3) Chumboramo or Morung chief.

31. Y. Mhonbemo Humtsoe presented a Seminar paper on "Chumbo (Morung) - Its Importance in Lotha Society", in the History Department, NEHU, on 11 September 1982.

32. S.V. Lyod Rus, SDO(c), "Mokokchung Nagaland", Noted in his 'Tour Diary', November 17, 1930.

(1) Thekoren or new recruits

When a boy is able to hold 'dao' or defensive weapons, he was enrolled as morung boy. Every evening, as a duty these boys have to bring firewood and water to be used at morung. Whenever their parents prepared meat at home, they brought some prices of meat, out of their share for morung chief as love and respect. Having served at this category for at least five to six years they would be promoted to next category known as Bangti.³³

(2) Bangti

Members of this group were second category in ranking below the morung chief. Bangti acted as teachers of the new recruits in every field and disciplined them. They also were the leaders in various fields and assignments.³⁴ Morung members were not allowed to marry till they reach this category. It is said that by this time one is matured and knew the responsibility in life and has learnt how to be adjusted with the society and were allowed to get married if they wanted to do.³⁵

(3) Chumboramo or chief of morung

As the title suggests he was the senior-most both in

33. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 6.

34. Y. Mhonbemo Humtsoe, op.cit., p. 12.

35. Interviewed with M.C. Murry at Sanis on 30.12.90.

age and in experiences among the members. Being the most experienced in diverse fields he passed orders and commanded all the morung boys and awarded punishment and rewarded in times of their failure and success respectively. To make sure that everyone is present, he would inspect and took roll call every evening and the defaulters were punished.³⁶

The life of morung was a training period for the members to become a responsible person in a society. The most important duties and functions and also the importance of the morung in the Lotha society were:

1. To defend the village from enemies and wild animals attack.
2. To help the needy villagers through labour or otherwise.
3. To bring more enemy head, captives and to lift up the name of the village.
4. Hunting and fishing.
5. Responsible for cleaning the village and also maintaining the approach roads, connecting the village from different places.
6. To help the villages whenever destructions were caused by the natural calamities.

36. Interviewed, Chijamo Jami (92) on 26.12.93.

7. It acted as a school - here they learnt social practices and beliefs, songs and dances musical instruments, games and sports etc. from their elders.³⁷
8. All the important festivals and rituals were performed around morung in the khel.³⁸

Here, it is important to recall Julian Jacobs' observations on Naga morung when he says,

It is a key institution of Naga society, though its importance varies between the different groups The morung fulfils various functions. It is a sleeping place for the young unmarried men and in former raiding days it served as a guard-house for the warriors. It is in some senses a school, since young people learn about social practices and belief from their elders The area around the morung is a social centre for the khel, and also a centre for important rituals especially where it is strongly associated with a log-gong, a huge gong fashioned out of a single tree trunk. In days of head-taking, a captured head would be brought to the morung or its log-gong, where the necessary rituals would then be performed. 39

Loss of Membership

The eventful morung days and his participation comes to an end with his marriage, once married, he leaves the

37. N.T. Nguillie, op.cit., pp. 73-74.

38. Interviewed, Chiborao Ezung on 29.1.92 at Longsa.

39. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 27.

morung to establish his own home with his wife. As V.V. Rao writes,

A youth as soon as he marries must leave the morung and live in his own house. When a member of the morung is engaged, the custom is to arrange a farewell party. The bridegroom receives special attention and respect from all members of the morung. They help him in building a house of his own. The morung will arrange a wedding feast and the young bridegroom reciprocates by inviting the members of the morung to his father's house. On the wedding day, the groom is accompanied by the members of the morung to the house of the bride and to the newly constructed groom's house. 40

Many historians and scholars refer to the morung merely as 'Bachelor's dormitory' without being able to establish its centrality in the total life of a Naga society, in general and the Lothas in particular. But a thorough investigation into the activities of morung lead one to conclude that it is the centre of all social, political cultural and economic activities around which the society revolved. In the olden days of Lotha society a 'Chumbo' was the centre of all activities. But with the coming of the British and the people's contact with foreign elements, the culture of the Lothas deteriorated. The spread of Christianity also did play a great role in its disappearance. According to Mhonbemo,

40. V.V. Rao, A Century of Tribal Politics, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1976, p. 135.

By the end of 1960's, 75% of the Lothas had become Christians and thus there were only few people in the villages, who continued to embrace animism or the tribal religion, and in spite of their great effort to bring up a morung in their villages, they could not do so because they were too small in number. The last 'Chumbo' in Lotha area was built in the Wokha village in 1962. But now there is no trace of standing building in the area on which morung was said to have been constructed. 41

Festivals

In the olden days, the Lothas had various festivals and ceremonies of which Pikhuchak and Tokhu emong are the most important and significant ones.

(1) Pikhuchak

The year officially opens with the Pikhuchak "genna". It marks the beginning of the agricultural year. It also marks the end of the current year and the beginning of another. There were differences between the Northern and the Southern Lothas in regard to the time in which they performed. The Northern (or the lower range) Lothas before clearing the jungle on their fields and the southern (or the upper range) Lothas after. But the uniformity was that, in any case it must be done before the rice is sown. 42

41. Y. Mhonbemo Humtsoe, op.cit., p. 14.

42. Interviewed - Ekyimsao Ngully of Niroyo on 13.2.92.

The Pvuti (priest) announces the day on which the ceremony is to be, and every 'Chumbo' (morung) buys meat, and each 'Chumbo' in turn the cock which is to be sacrificed. Before the announcement is made it has to make sure that, (a) no villager dies or bad news either, (b) no stranger present in the village, and (c) no meat should be brought inside the village gate from hunted animals. If a man dies after the announcement of the date by the priest it would be extended by six days and if a woman five days.⁴³

When the day comes, every house in the village prepares sufficient rice-beer, food and other essential things for the festival. The menfolk drank the whole day and in the evening (menfolk) assembled at the ritual place (among) meant for the ceremony, just outside the village.

The priest having completed the necessary formalities. Prays holding the cock in his left hand and a dao in his right, that nothing untoward incident should happen, while performing the rituals. They also select some youth for necessary assistance and these youths must abstain from all intercourse with opposite sex from the time he is chosen to the end of the ceremony. The priest, then cut the cock and see the entrails especially the intestine (hanrushum) for the

43. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 20.

omen.⁴⁴ After careful examinations if the large intestine is filled with hard and dark excreta the omen is good and the villagers will have a good harvest, the ensuing agricultural year. Secondly, if it is filled with gas, the omen is bad, and even if they put a lot of labour the villagers will not have a good harvest. Priest also examined the position of the dead chicken. If the chicken dies facing towards the Sema territory, then the villagers will have a triumphant expedition against the Semas. Likewise, with the Ao's or any other neighbouring tribes. But if the cock dies facing the plains (Assam) then the villagers will make more profit in their trade with the plains people. The priest also prays for more blessing in agricultural crops, hunting, fishing, raids and more children etc. in the coming year.⁴⁵

The outcome of the ritual being informed, the ceremony is over, and the villagers come back with great chanting and spent the evening drinking together. The next day is kept as an 'emong' (rest day) and no one goes to the fields, but a party, consisting of boys and some old men, go out on a mock head taking raid, performing rituals and shouts as if engaged with the enemy. Then come back to the morung. It is believed

44. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 9.

45. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 20.

that this mock raid ensures good crops and hunting and a high birth-rate for the village. With it concludes the 'Pikhuchak' festivals.⁴⁶

Tokhu Emong

Tokhu Emong is one of the most significant festivals of the Lotha community. The agricultural year closes with the Tokhu ceremony. The harvest done, the granaries full and now is the time to enjoy the fruits of one's hard labour. Friends are invited, animals killed. Past rancours are forgotten and new ties are made and bonds of closer intimacy are discovered. Wild cries of joy echo the green hills and narrow valleys. Therefore, sometimes it is also known as thanksgiving, forgiving and friendship festival. Earlier the festival is celebrated at different times in each village, having no fixed date, but now adays for the convenience and suitability of the community the festival is fixed on November 7 (seven) every year and the date cannot be changed.⁴⁷

The main features of the festival are community feasting, merry making, performance of traditional dances and songs, reconciliation, home visitation, etc.

The priest gives the signal for the start of the

46. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 90.

47. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 22.

festival. The priest accompanied by aids (Yingae) and baskets go round the village collecting contribution of unhusked rice from every home. As contributions are received, the priest takes a handful of it and showers prayer and it is only after this that he puts the contribution in his baskets. A portion of this collection is used to buy a pig and the rest is used for making rice-beer. The pig is then killed and cut unsigned for fear of crop failure and is distributed to the contributors. If any stranger happens to come to the village where Tokhu is being celebrated he remains there until the festival is over. He, however, enjoys the hospitality of the villagers with love and care. From the day when the unhusked rice is collected to 'Kichan' nothing must be killed or sold in the village, and no meat from a tiger's kill must be brought in. The eighth day from that on which the unhusked rice was collected is known as 'Kichan' (home visitation).⁴⁸

The ninth day is observed as the 'Tokhu Emong', on this day the whole village stays home for feasting and dancing. No one was allowed to go out of the village fence because it might bring bad fortune. Ranks and status of the villagers are indicated by the decorated dresses they wore. None could put on the dress to which he was not entitled or worthy of it. As it is feasting time animals were killed and

48. Interviewed Yisao Odyuo at Bhandari on 6th January 1992.

exchange of gift-cooked and uncooked meat between relatives and friends. The baby-setters were offered six pieces of meat, the best quality of rice-beer, taros and other presents to take home to their parents. This day is also spent as 'Rumphi', or visiting in big groups of every houses of the age-group companion who worked together throughout the year, enjoying drinks and meat. In course of 'rumphi' estranged friends and relatives reconciled and past quarrels are settled amicably and stronger relationship are connected.⁴⁹

Young boys and girls engage during the year are happily married after 'Tokhu', and even the married couples must refrain from intercourse during the festival.⁵⁰ It is because of this reason the festival is also sometime known as 'Yankhyingroe tokhu' (youths' festival). As Rhonbemo Murry writes in a magazine article entitled, "A Glimpse of social and cultural life of the Lothas in the Past",

'Yankhyingroe tokhu' was the biggest festival. The festival had to be performed at the end of every year. It would continue upto 9 days on the last day of the festival, all the youth in the village would be entertained in every house. In course of this nine days' festival the relatives and friends would entertain one another and exchange their nicely prepared

49. The Warrior, Vol. 22. Published by Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Govt. of Nagaland, Kohima, November 1993, p. 32.

50. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

food and drinks, such as rice, meat, wine etc. At this time, all would be very much cheerful at their ease to enjoy their resources which they had gathered from their fields, enough for them for the year. 51

The festival also provide the occasion to offer prayer for the departed souls. The family who lost any member during the year performs his or her last rites.⁵² All ornaments and other erected on the graveyards are removed and thrown away. The same night right after the cock crow the things removed from the grave including the small hut built on it were burnt to ashes. It is said that only after this last rites the relatives and the dead ones get separated.⁵³

Individual ceremonies

There remains to be described the social 'gennas', which play such an enormously important part in Lotha life. Beginning from the first small 'genna' they increase in costliness and importance till the ceremony at which two stones are dragged is reached. Every one of the doer entitled to wear a distinctive cloth. The wealth and consequently the importance of a man was gauged by the number of these social 'gennas' he had done, for the Lothas, like all the Nagas, is a great respecter of wealth and status.

51. "Khochi", Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Wokha High School, October 1969, p. 27.

52. Festivals of Nagaland, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Nagaland, Kohima, p. 14.

53. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 19.

The first social 'Genna' is called 'Ozhutana'. It is usually performed in the cold weather when there is certain amount of leisure from work. It is performed by a man before marriage. Here a pig is killed and offered to the clan people in the village who have done this ceremony. Later his father kills a bull and a pig and offered to every couple in the village along with the 'madhu'. After which a cock is killed and distributed to every guest in pieces and later on another ceremony follows. The man who performed this 'genna' is entitled to wear a cloth called 'sutum' or 'Ejumsu'.⁵⁴

The second social 'genna' is called 'Etha-Sho'. This 'genna' is done after marriage. Here a bull or pig is killed and this meat is not eaten by the couple's family. The couple is served with separate food offered by relatives and allowed to stay in the newly extended room behind the house till genna is over. The villagers are fed with enough meat and drinks. After their ceremony the performer is entitled to wear a cloth called 'Phanrupsu'.⁵⁵

The third social 'genna' in 'Longzusho' (stone dragging) or 'Tssiro etsosho' (mithun feast). It is so called because mithun is killed and stone dragging was done. This

54. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 16.

55. M.C. Murry, op.cit., pp. 30-31.

social 'genna' depended on the wealth of the family or performer concerned. This 'genna' killed a 'mithun' and half portion towards the head is shared among the same clans by the performer and leg portion is given to the wife's parents. This particular meat was not eaten by the couple. Besides killing mithun other rites follow suit. When a performer completed this 'genna' he was allowed to wear a cloth called 'Longpensu'.⁵⁶

The fourth social 'genna' is 'Eshumsho' in which two mithan are killed in a day. The traditional performance of this 'genna' was the same as that of 'mithan feast' or stone dragging. But this time, a pair of stones is dragged and erected in front of the house of the performer. In this manner when nine stones are reected then the tradition called it as 'Shumbensho'. With this individual 'social gennas' are completed. After this ceremony the performer was allowed to wear 'Longpensu' made of six blue stripes as a mark of high social status and respected by all in the society.⁵⁷

At the time when head-hunting was the order of the day, the Lothas were no exception to it. So when a man performed head-chopping ceremony as a mark of warrior in the

56. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 17.

57. Ibid.

society he was allowed to wear a distinctive cloth called 'Rikyusu'. This cloth was not to be used by any other except the warrior.⁵⁸

When all the social 'gennas' have been completed the last 'genna' or ceremony for the couples lifetime was 'Onsoni-Woa' (lit. Oson - granary, Woa - go) ceremony is performed. This ceremony was so called because it was performed at the granary. Here they killed two pigs and two fowls and other rites followed. When this ceremony is done, then wife was allowed to use a particular shawl known as 'Opvuram' and the husband could freely use any ornaments and feathers on his cap as a sign of completion of all social 'gennas' or ceremonies and was placed on a high social status and was respected by all.⁵⁹ Here it is important to remember the observation made by Julian Jacobs when he says,

The ornaments and particularly the cloths of the Nagas reflect a concern for minute identification of social organisation and social status. The designs and colour of cloths symbolize ascribed status such as village, clan and morung membership, and achieved or prestige status arising from head-taking and feasting exploits. 60

But these days, due to degenerating society and on account of Christianity in the district, almost all the above

58. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 31.

59. Ibid., p. 47. Also, District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 19.

60. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 65.

'gennas' and festivals are no longer observed and has become a thing of the past, except the 'Tokhu Emong'. The religious usage governed by divination system, animal sacrifices and other features are no longer important. There are few non-Christians in some villages in the district but observance of these old ceremonial activities are no more seen in the area.

Games and Sports

Even in ancient days before the spread of modern civilization and education there were various kinds of games and sports among the Lothas, like the rest of the Nagas. The common games and sports comprised of the following:

High jump and Long jump

These two are the most common sports for every Lotha. In olden times every young man had to prove himself a successful warrior since head hunting was rampant. And because of this one had to protect oneself from the enemy as well as to be able to defeat others. It was therefore necessary that each and every young man practised high jump and long jump regularly. The two posts and bar for the high jump are made of bamboo slits. The style of jumping is very simple but now adays it is at par with modern styles.

Spear Throwing

The people being constantly vigilant against enemy

attack, spear throwing is equally important. They practised spear throwing for markmanship - the person who hits the bull's eye was acclaimed for his accuracy. In recent times Javelin is introduced in modern games and sports but spear is still used for hunting animals. Even today elderly people in the villages are seen carrying spear while going to the paddy fields or jungle, for, the spear serves not only as a weapon but also as a supporting stick.

Wrestling

Nagas are very fond of wrestling and so are the Lothas. They have a free-style of wrestling but this sport is not so popular with the Lothas as much as with that of the Angamis and the Chakhesang Nagas.

Stone Throwing

It is similar with modern shot put and the shot is usually a lump of stone. The person who could throw the stone farther than other competitors is declared to be the best thrower.

Pole Climbing

Pole climbing is also a play for the Lothas and they do it with keen interest. Generally the pole is a smooth bamboo, made slippery by applying oil, and the competitors often slip downward. The person who reached the top of the

pole is acclaimed to be the best climber. This game is still practised in almost all the villages.

Wood-Chopping

In ancient times when head-hunting was prevalent, wood-chopping was a good game practised by every young man in order to make himself skillful warrior. A piece of slim tree, bamboo or cane is placed slanting or stuck into the ground and is chopped with one stroke by a sharp dao. The person who can successfully cut it off leaving a smooth cut mark at each stroke is still acclaimed to be an expert in chopping.

Bow and Arrow

It is obsolete nowadays but in ancient times bow and arrow was used not only as a weapon against the enemy but also for shooting animals and birds.

Slinging

Stone slinging was used for killing birds. Young children also used it for the sake of playing. But nowadays it is being substituted by catapult.

Tops

Peg tops and spin tops of various shapes and sizes are played by the children and grown ups alike. They are made of hard wood. A string is wound round the upper cone and the other end of the string is held by hand by setting a finger

through the noose made at the end. Then it is thrown to the ground where it spins, and is made to fight with other tops.

Sword Bean Seed Game

This game is more popular among the girls who were deprived of almost all the other games. Every competitor tries to pocket as much nuts as possible into the hole, dug for the purpose. The remaining ones left outside are to be hit from a distance, and if one hits it, then she is declared as the winner who thus earns a number of nuts to her credit.

Tug of War

It is the only game where both men and women participated, not necessarily as a contest for strength but for merry making and fun in each others company. The rope is generally a stout jungle creeper. When men only play, and if they meant business, they choose the strong and stout people only for the contest.⁶¹

In recent time modern games and sports of every kind have been introduced and are played not only in the towns but also in the interior villages. Almost every school and college has facilities for games and sports, and tournaments are held in college as well as in school level. Athletes and sports

61. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, pp. 53-55.

persons participate not only in the state but also interstate tournaments bringing in good name to the society.

Marriage System

Generally, Lothas follow monogamy but there was no bar in polygamy. As a result, some rich men occasionally used to have more than one wife, but that was more an exception than a rule. Polyandry was not practised among the tribe.

The Lotha system of marriage seems to have been governed by quite a number of formalities which are necessary to be followed rigidly. Yet, there were some differences in the conduct of these formalities from village to village, though negligible. Therefore, it is important to study the commonly practised system of the Lothas.

In the olden days the marriageable age for the boys were roughly fixed at 17 to 20 and that of a girl between 14 to 16.⁶² As Major Woods, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, wrote in 1890's, "the Lhota (Lotha) girls marry much earlier than the girls of other tribes...."⁶³

Marriage by negotiation was an accepted rule amongst the Lothas. As preliminaries to what we may call family

62. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 48.

63. B.C. Allen, Census of Assam, 1901, Vol. I, p. 23. (Printed in Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1902).

arranged marriages, a match-maker plays an important role to bring about a consent to the boys' proposal by the relatives. Amongst the Northern Lothas, during the first visit, a go-between, often the mother or any elderly female relation, goes to intimate the proposal to the girl's house. If they are agreeable, she goes for second time with rice-beer and if it is sipped, then the boy's proposal has been accepted, and after that the boy and girl keep contact. Souther Lothas appointed a man instead of woman to be a go-between. Here also the first sign of consent was drinking of beer by the girl's parents offered by the boy.⁶⁴

Another interesting formality which followed was the preparation of rice-beer out of the fermented rice contributed by both the bridegroom's and the bride's households during the groom's ceremonial visit to the girl's house. He was accompanied by one elderly man and a young friend. Every member would drink the beer except the couple. The elderly man sits with the couple and offers prayer on behalf of the couple. The man also takes a cock, which he has killed and cooked himself called 'Hantsen'. This toasting symbolises the real engagement between the boy and the girl. This ceremony is known as 'tsoyuta'. The toasting of beer which the groom has brought to the bride's place was also different with the

64. Interviewed with Yishumo Lotha on 23.12.93 at L. Longidang.

southern Lothas. In the party, including one old woman and one old man who accompanied the groom while handing over the beer, are obliged to take first the beer given by the girl's family, and later in turn drinks that which was brought by the boy. Then the boy gave the girl a rain-shield (Pvuchio), a small carrying basket (eyingkhungro) and a dao handle (nhyapung) as a sign of proper engagement,⁶⁵ besides several bundles of fire wood surrounding the girl's house.⁶⁶

The most important part of the engagement was that the groom (boy) was obliged to work in his father-in-law's house for one complete year. This was a kind of marriage price as well as to judge the boy's ability to work hard to maintain a wife. Marriage is taken place after the completion of the agricultural year, that is, after 'Tokhu Emong' festival (explained above).⁶⁷

Then construction of a new house 'Kithanro' follows for a would-be couple. The new house is opened by a pig-killing ceremony when appropriate portion of it was presented by the groom to his father-in-law. Meanwhile the bride receives gifts in cotton thread and 'modhu' (rice-beer) from

65. Interviewed Chiborao on 18.9.90 at Longsa.

66. Interviewed Mrs. Rodila on 23.12.93 at L. Longidang.

67. Ibid.

ladies belonging to her clan. Marriage taken place in the day time in the house of the bride's father and is followed by feast there, borne by the groom's family. Later at mid-night the groom's male attendants give a send-off to the couple from his father-in-law's house for their new house. They set off in a procession where the bride and groom were closeby attended by two women, one representing the married women of the groom's clan, and the other - a wife of the bride's paternal brother or cousin brother. Reaching the new house, other customs are observed. It conforms to pouring of water into the hands of the couple. The rest of the night is passed by them in company with two boy attendants from the side of the groom and that night sexual intercourse is forbidden. The second day is 'genna' and on the third day new couple visits the wife's parents house and feast there. Three or four days later the ceremonies are completed by the 'Poniratsen' (man-and-wife-magician). This ceremony was regarded as a sort of initiation into married life.⁶⁸

Origin of marriage price

Marriage price among the Lothas is said to have been originated at the time of the desertion of the first Lotha village of Tiyilongchum. In the process of desertion Mongtsulo

68. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., pp. 44-45.
M.C. Murry, op.cit., pp. 48-49.

became wedded wife of Ramphan. This development came to the knowledge of Mongtsulo's father. At the same time they did not have an issue for some years. Then her father demanded her marriage price from Ramphan, but Ramphan said, "first give me the marriage feast and then I will give you the marriage price."⁶⁹ So her father having no alternative, told him to give only a bamboo spoon and a bamboo rice-stirrer. So Ramphan made and gave him that he demanded. From then on, the practice of marriage price among the Lothas came into existence, and also had a son and a daughter born to the couple.⁷⁰

Marriage price was discussed and settled at the time of marriage negotiation. Some instalments of marriage price use to be cleared at the time of marriage itself by the relatives of the boy and the rest are kept to be paid later. The last instalment of the price was not to be paid in a hurry for that was regarded as the by-tie between the relatives of the couple. Marriage customs are seen to vary from village to village in the society especially in giving marriage price. The prices which is paid by the husband for his wife is known collectively as 'oman'. It is divided into a number of items.

Most commonly accepted prices among the Lothas were divided into following heads:

69. J.P. Mills, Folk stories in Lotha Naga, Revised Edition, 1987, p. 50.

70. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 120.

1. The first payment of all is known as Chüka. It is paid not to the girl's parents, but to her mother's brother. The amount is Rs. 1. This is paid as soon as 'tsoyuta' has taken place.
2. Secondly, Nzyu man Rs. 8 to Rs. 10, paid to the girl's **pa**rents, as the cost of bringing her up.
3. Kitsoman Rs. 2, for not building his father-in-law's house.
4. Tssungvoman, Rs. 2, paid in case groom does not collect firewood.
5. Sontsoman, Rs. 1, for not building granary for his father-in-law.
6. Tssoroman, Rs. 2, for being intimacy with the bride.
7. Opyae etsov (the price of feeding the bride's brothers). This was shared by the girl's father and brothers. It amount to about 250 baskets of rice or Rs. 30, if paid in cash, in instalments.
8. Hanlam (Pork), certain amount of kilograms set as per the customs and practice of the village, paid on or before the marriage day.
9. Should a woman die without children her husband makes a final payment varying from Rs. 2 to 5, called 'Echuman' (price of death). Once they have

received this, the girl's parents could claim no further instalments of Opyae etsovman. If the woman dies leaving children a payment of one or two rupees, called Myingshi, is made to her parents or their heirs, who could in this case claim any of the Opyae etsovman which may be outstanding.⁷¹

Now the brides' parents will give the following articles on her marriage day. (1) Lepok (dao), (2) Yingkhi (large basket made of bamboo splits or cane), (3) Vekhuro (sickle), (4) Chokchu (spade), (5) Weaving apparatus and some cloths, (6) Chicken, paddy (rice), and many other articles. All these could be also paid in cash if so desired.

Christian marriages are different, as more spiritual than economic and social emphasis used to be laid, as well as its form and rituals are different. It is also equally important to note that nowadays the younger generations prefer love marriage to arrange marriages.

According to Christian marriage system, the church pastor and the Deacons are invited to the engagement party as a witness in the name of God as and when the final settlement is arrived at between the two relatives. In this party, no

71. District Cultural Office, Wokha, op.cit., p. 15.
 M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 49.
 N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 47.

exchange of gifts is made. After this a date is fixed for solemnisation of the marriage. The church leaders keep a watch to check unnecessary marriage breakage with a view to maintain marriage sanctity. Marriage feasts are held with great enthusiasm on the marriage day in the house of the bride. To these days, at least some amount of the marriage price is paid to the parents of the girl on that day.

After the completion of the marriage feast the girl is taken to the new house of her husband with a procession. But these days, the system of giving and taking for marriage is much relaxed amongst the Christians. Such cases are different from the old customary sanction. Most of the marriages are done in the church though a few ceremonies are done in the bride's place.

It is to be noted here that, if there is premarital sexual relation which can be known only from pregnancy, the marriage does not take place in the church, but in either groom's or bride's house just by throwing a party and not by any religious solemnisation.

Divorce

Divorce is less common among the Lothas, though it is not unknown in the society. Divorce may be on any ground but the common ones are, infidelity, barrenness or simply

encompatibility. Whatever may be the cause of divorce, it is intimately connected with refund of the bride - Price depending on the merit of the case.

If the wife goes away out of her own volition she or her parents do not get back or claim anything. In case the wife goes away for no fault of the husband, not only she will not get anything, but also she will have to repay the cost of marriage to her erstwhile husband. If the wife goes back to her parents, they will have to make the payment. But if she goes away with her paramour, naturally he will bear it. She will also have to pay rupees ten to her erstwhile husband for leaving her for no reason. If the wife leaves her husband due to his infidelity, or incompatibility, or in any way, not for her fault, she will get back her personal properties.⁷² If the husband drives away his wife because of her infidelity, then she will get only rupees ten from her husband as divorce cost, but the husband will get back a part of his marriage expenses which is generally paid by her paramour.

Since marriage is a difficult and costly affair for a man, generally a husband does not desert his wife. But in a rare occasion if a husband deserts his wife for no fault of her, he will have to pay a heavy fine which is settled by

72. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 97.

discussion between the two families. And since remarriage of a wife is not very easy, the wife generally does not take initiative for separation.⁷³

However, whatever may be the cause of divorce, it is talked over and settled, wherever necessary with fine, between the two families. On the whole divorce is less common among the Lotha Nagas.

Most of the people being Christians now, they do not go in for divorce so easily. Remarriage on the part of the divorce, husband or wife, is more difficult, at the same time they are looked down upon by the society and also ex-communicated from the church.

Food and Drink

Like any other Nagas, the Lothas are rice eaters. They take rice generally thrice a day. It is taken with meat and other curries.

The people relish meat, for which reason domesticated animals are kept both for food and sacrifice. Pork is more relished and so pigs are more in number than other animals. Cows are also kept both for meat and milk. Mithun which is said to have been common in the olden days, have become very

73. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 43.

rare these days. As far as fish is concerned, both fresh and dried are taken, pork, beef, chicken, fish, mutton etc. are prepared into various curries - indigenous and modern ways. Games including wild animals, birds and fowls are all taken, snakes are also taken by few. Lothas are famous for eating bamboo shoots - both fresh, dried and watery form. Bamboo shoots in liquid form is used in all kinds of curries. Generally, the people prefer hot taste with chillies. Vegetables and herbs are the common items of curry.

Rice, millet and maize are the common cereal crops in the district. Sometime Taro is taken as substitute of rice in time of scarcity. Of the modern beverages adopted widely tea is more relished. Milk of cows is taken widely these days. Rice beer is widely used. Nowadays, those who can afford take Indian made foreign liquor and others.⁷⁴

Agriculture and the Ceremonies connected with it

The Lothas are above all an agriculturist. Rarely does his ambition extends beyond a bumper crop. Till few decades ago, service under government has few attractions for him. Even if he takes a post he often throws it up after a year or two and says he would rather go back and live in his village and cultivate his land. The method of cultivation is that of

74. Ibid. p. 52.

'jhumming'. A piece of jungle is cut and burnt, and the land cultivated for two years and then allowed to go back to jungle, under which it remains for a period varying from five to fifteen years (depending on the availability of land). The whole village, as far as possible, cultivate in one block, each man having his own piece of land. Isolated patches of cultivation would merely provide food for wild pig, monkeys and other pests. The jungle is cut about December and January. (The times of agricultural operations vary a good deal according to the height and climate of the village or range concerned) when the time comes to begin operations each man goes to his land and clears a little piece of jungle. If no evil omen occurs he cuts a stake and sets it up as a mark that he will be cultivating that plot of land. A bad dream would be enough to make him select another piece of land for that year. In clearing the jungle everyone take part - men, women and children. The jungle is left till March to dry, when it is all burnt on the same day. Next day is emong (rest day or 'genna' no one would go to the field). After that works begin in earnest. Stones and half-burnt logs were collected and little barriers (Oliejo) are built along the hill sides to prevent the earth being washed away. ⁷⁵

75. Interviewed - Tenpyomo on 23.12.94 at L. Longidang.

Ceremonies

As in the case of other Naga tribes, the festivals and ceremonies of Lothas aimed at fertility corresponding to the different agricultural seasons. The ceremonies rest upon a certain background of beliefs. Given below are some of the most important ceremonies connected with the agricultural year at different seasons.

After the field is cleared, before anyone could sow his land, certain ceremonies have to be performed by the priest. The first of these is Rhuvan ceremony. It was a sowing inauguration performed by the village priest at the village sacrificial site. On completion of this ceremony the priest start sowing which when finished, the sowing of others starts. But during the first stage it was confined to men of social position, who have performed 'genna' sexual intercourse is forbidden the night after this ceremony.⁷⁶ The southern Lotha further performed a ceremony called Mothan Ratsen, when the crop has germinated, to prevent it being damaged by insects.⁷⁷

When the grain comes into the ear, another ceremony was performed again by the priest with the help of his assistant. This ceremony was known as Amung nam. This ceremony was to ensure a good crop for the year.⁷⁸

76. Interviewed with Khungmomo Ngully on 13.9.90.

77. Ibid.

78. Interviewed Kinao on 25.9.90 at Wokha.

Next ceremony is known as 'Ronsi Ekhum' or 'Likhum'. At the Likhum, the master of the house having slept apart from his wife the night before and eaten apart from her in the morning, he proceeds straight to the field house (liki). There he makes fire and afterwards consults omen from the hen which has just been strangled there - calling out the names of all the different varieties of rice he knows whether he has sown there or not and asking Ronsi (a deity of harvest) to give him a good crop and blessings of them.⁷⁹

Just before the crop begins to ripen the ceremony of eating the first-fruits is performed known as Humshu etak by the Pvuti (priest). After this ceremony was performed by the priest one may cut his rice as soon as it is ready. On the day when he first goes down to cut his crop each man performed at his field-house (liki) a ceremony called Lirithung or Ronsi ekhum in honour of the Ronsi (deity) that there may be good crops, no accidents, no raids by enemies, and no prowling tigers.⁸⁰

Though many ceremonies were performed by the forefathers in agricultural year now these ceremonies are no more performed by the younger generation. It is due to

79. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 18.

80. Ibid., p. 19.

people's conversion to Christianity, where instead of rites and sacrificial ceremonies, they pray to God for protection and blessings. A unique feature and uniformity we find among the Lothas now is that every village organise a special programme (service) in the church. At this programme every household brought varieties of seeds (crops) and placed on the church altar to pray to God for more blessings. Pastor of the church leads in prayer. This is held sometime in March/April (depending on the climate of the village), when it is time for sowing seeds. This is known as Moju Khurüm.⁸¹ It is also important to mention here that when the first crop is repaed, (each variety of crop) they placed on the church altar as thanksgiving to God for the blessing.

Crops

Besides varieties of rice, there are a number of subsidiary crops, generally sown along the edges of the fields or in patches among the rice. They are: Maize (tsunghanro), Millet (teni), ginger (osung), job's tears (omum), several varieties of taro (mani), chillies (machi), gourds (shümo), several varieties of lentil (orho), cotton (khungko), watermelon (mhelithi), varieties of cucumber (lishakthi), black sesame (penchung), white oil seed (pentsu), and many others are grown.

81. N.T. Nguillie, op.cit., pp. 9 & 108.

Implements, etc.

For the successful agricultural operation different implements are used. They are: Dao, Axe, Hoe, Spade, Pick, Scraper, Sickle, Rake, Mat, Winnowing fan, Basket of different sizes, etc.

In connection with agricultural implements we may mention scarecrow though it does not directly come under implements. It is necessary to ward them off - the birds and the animals. For this purpose they employ various devices. One is human figure made of grass, etc. Another is any object hanged from a pole and in wind it moves and the birds get frightened and fly away. Split bamboo is also used to make loud report like guns and it scares the animals away. Of course its string has to be operated by human being.

Manufactures

Since time immemorial there were cottage industries and several manufactures among the Lothas. But no attempt was made for development of such industries in the past, and strictly confined to the individual at home. In describing the economic set up of the district the age-old village arts and crafts have to be given due weightage because it is important for both traditional and economic aspect. It may be noted that not only the Lothas but the Nagas as a whole are more or less self-sufficient in their daily needs.

Weaving, is most common and is found in every house. Weaving is done only by women, and every woman has got her weaving apparatus made of wood and bamboo. Formerly the people used to grow cotton and used to make yarn by themselves, but now adays they seldom make yarn and everybody prefers purchasing ready made yarn from the market for weaving their clothes. It is a prerogative of the women. It has come down from mother to daughter and so on. Every Lotha household makes its traditional clothes for both men and women. They make various designs on the mekhalas and shawls. As Julian Jacobs says, "while this is being woven, small patches of embroidery can be added in, sometimes using dog's hair; this is done with a porcupine quill needle".⁸² He also says, "dying is done with a number of natural plant dyes, though bazaar dyes became common by the 1920s."⁸³ In modern times, the people are weaving neckties, bags etc. of various designs, apart from the traditional clothes. As a result of acculturation, the people are more and more using mill-made clothes and so the weaving industry of late had suffered some set-back. Different apparatus employed for weaving is collectively called tshirochunglong.

Bamboo and cane work is another important industry which the Lothas inherited from their forefathers. Bamboo

82. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 44.

83. Ibid.

tubes (othi) are used not only as water containers but even rice is cooked on festive occasions in them. Bamboo crafts, with engraved figurines studded with black paintings, such as bowls and mugs have artistic value. Parts of their ornamental dress such as fillets, leggings, headgears - woven of cane have similar artistic significance. Basketry and mat making of different sizes and designs are very important. Cane is far more valuable and is reserved for articles which are meant to last a long time. It was produced mainly for domestic use in the past. But now adays some quantity is sold to the urban people or to those who cannot make it. 'No woman is allowed to do any basket work of any kind.'⁸⁴ Thus bamboo has an important place in village economy.

Wood-work is another important works of the Lothas. Timber has multifarious use. Rough planks are hacked out with dao and adaze. Tree trunks serve as poles, battons, beams and cross beams etc. for house construction. As Julian Jacobs writes,

Wood carving produces a variety of objects for functional and ritual purposes. The tools are simple: the dao, hand drill, adaze and chisel. Functional objects such as husking tables or dishes, and small ornament, might be carved by any man, on the other hand, grand-scale

84. Tssenchio Ovung - Presented a paper on "Lotha Culture" during Lotha Hoho sponsored seminar at Wokha on 11.1.94.

carving of house-pots, grave effigies, gates and log-gongs, are more likely to be done by specialist or at least on special occasions.⁸⁵

In the morung they carved animal forms such as mithun, tiger, elephant, hornbill etc. But such carving is no more done in the district, except for fun.

Blacksmithy

Forges where agricultural tools and ceremonial weapons are made still exist almost in every village in the district although their number is dwindling. At these forges, spear-heads, daos, scrapers, knives and other articles are still made, at least for consumption of the villagers. The equipment until late years was improvised. Production has, however, largely reduced owing to the availability of cheaper agricultural tools and implements from outside the district. The craft is restricted to the families, members of which have been blacksmiths in the past. Alemchiba writes, "it may be mentioned here that the Lothas, though practise the trade, regard it as a very unlucky one and believe that no blacksmith lives long after he stops work".⁸⁶ Smithy in the village is not a profession, but a part-time vocation of some people to augment their income.

85. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 46.

86. Alemchiba Ao, Arts and Crafts of Nagaland, Naga Institute of Culture, Government of Nagaland, 1968, p. 87.

Pottery

Though foreign articles are being used more and more Lothas still make their own pots. It is an important age-old industry which is still practised, specially in the upper range of Lotha area. The type of pots produced from their area is very thick and is useful for cooking purpose. Among the Lothas pottery is confined to womenfolk. As Mills says, "only women can make pots, but the industry is not restricted to old women."⁸⁷

It may be mentioned here that the Lotha women making pots must refrain from sexual intercourse and must not eat any strong smelling food while she is so engaged otherwise the pots would crack. It should be also noted that the craft has never been practised widely.⁸⁸ Potter's wheel was not known to them, as Julian Jacobs says, "the potter's wheel is unknown, and therefore all objects are made by the process of modelling or coiling pots tend to be of a basic design, without varnishing or handles and rarely with ornamentation."⁸⁹

Trade

The Lothas are living adjacent to the plains of Assam. It is, therefore, expected that they must have had contact with these people. But this was not very common, as far as

87. J.P. Mills, Lotha Nagas, p. 41.

88. Ibid.

89. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 48.

trade relation is concerned. So the Lothas remained outside the influence of modern civilization for long. Being uncivilized in modern sense, their needs were few and they could somehow manage to be self-sufficient of their basic requirements of food, shelter and clothing in their own way. "This was the condition even towards the end of nineteenth century", says Ghosh. ⁹⁰

Before the introduction of British administration into this area the Lothas carried their agricultural products such as ginger, cotton, chilli etc. to the plains. These things were exchanged with the plains people for their requirements which comprised of salt, dried fish, agricultural implements, yarn, ornaments, cattle etc. What is important to remember at this point is that while entering into an alliance with the Lothas, the Britishers had taken extreme precaution for they have not yet, been close relations with them. Secretary to the Government of Bengal (in his letter No. 1347), thus writes, "... I am directed to say that the particular position of the government, with regards to these Naga tribes should likewise be carefully explained to any parties desired to enter into communication with them for the purpose of trade or otherwise."⁹¹

90. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 89.

91. Volume 40: Letter Received from Government, 1855, p. 1456.

It shows that initially the relations between the Lothas and the British posed dangers from both sides, the two seemed to have made an alliance conducive through economic or trade ties. The trade relations between the Lothas and the Britishers is also found in the writings of Governor General's Agent to the Secretary, Government of Bengal thus,

On the last bank of the Doyang immediately bordering on the Sibsagar division are the powerful tribes of the Lotah Nagahs, who are in constant communication with Golagant, and our haunts to which they bring a very large traffic of cotton etc.... 92

For this purpose, money was not used but instead, they set a reasonable rate of quantity for a particular commodity according to its value and utility. As Mills says, "trade was apparently always carried on by barter in the days before the British coinage came into use."⁹³ Of course, there existed a kind of coin also known as 'Chabili', which is said to have been brought in the course of their migration but the use of this coin with the plains in their trade was not known. But it is certain that the Lothas used this coin (chabili) sometimes as marriage price, mithun are bought and also slaves from neighbouring tribes. It is said that one 'chabili' worth a day's work.⁹⁴

92. Volume 15, 1850-51, July-April.

Letter issued to Government, Letter No. 103.

93. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 44.

94. P.E. Ezung, op.cit., p. 24.

Governor General's Agent officiating Commissioner's annual report to the government on the Naga Hills trade writes in 1870 that,

Trade here, though quite in its infancy has increased considerably during the past years.... They also bring down with them quantities of rice, Bee-wax, honey and occasionally a tusk or two and a little cotton (which is grown in the Samoogoodting* and lower ranges) and they take back with them both, salt, beads, and other personal requirements, and above all guns, when they can get a chance, which is not very often.... 95

Therefore, now it can be said that after opening up of the area by the Britishers in second half of the 19th century the people needs increased and the volume of trade also increased.

As Pimomo⁹⁶ and Yishümo⁹⁷ said, the Lothas used to carry trades with Golaghat, Merapani (Marachu), Furkating, Borholla, and also Titabor etc. places of Assam bordering Nagaland. After money was introduced in the trade, gradually from the beginning of this century, the Lothas are selling their articles in different trading centres and purchasing their requirements from them through the medium of money. Thus Mackenzie writes:

* Present Chumukedima.

95. Volume 41, 1970 April-November. Letter issued to Government. Annual General Report for the year ending 31st March 1870, p. 112.

96. Interviewed on 14.2.92 at Wokha.

97. Interviewed on 23.12.93 at L. Longidang.

The local trade with the Nagas is largely developing, and even the remoter Lhota (Lotha) Nagas are now found visiting our markets and showing a wish to maintain commercial intercourse with the plains. 98

Hunting

Even before the introduction of modern firearms Lothas, like other Naga tribes were expert in hunting. They hunt and kill the wild animals individually and through corporate hunting. The spears and dao were the main weapons they used in hunting. Though not common they also used bows and arrows. Their hunting games consist of squirrel, bear, deer, tiger, leopard, wild cats, wild boar, elephant etc. and birds of every kind. They also used certain traps and snares to catch the small animals. But the big animals are either trapped in the pitfalls or are cornered in a particular place by picketing and which the animal tries to run out through escape-way already prepared, would be killed. Sometimes when the animal is in a cave or such hideout, dogs are used which bark at it. They also smoke the cave so that the animal rushes out to it and is easily killed.⁹⁹

Fishing

Like hunting, fishing is undertaken both individually and corporately. A village, a khel, a few people or group of

98. A. Mackenzie, The North East Frontier of India, New Delhi, Reprint, 1981, p. 100.

99. M.C. Murry, op.cit., pp. 43-44. Also interviewed Peter Odyuo expert hunter at L. Longidang on 24.12.93.

friends go to a river and take on the expedition ceremoniously. Fishing is taken in lean season, that is, from October to March, when the water is less. The most important method of catching fish is by poisoning the water. For this purpose the stems, roots, leaves and fruits of a poisonous plants or creepers are collected from the jungle a day ahead of operation. On the day of fishing, people gather with bundles of the roots, stems etc. and it is thrashed and then it is mixed with the water in the river. In the fishing by the method of poisoning the water following poisonous plants and creepers are used in Lotha, Notsu, Niru, Ajak, Opyak, Phitsü, Chethi, Mvuyimthi, Nothi etc.¹⁰⁰ Fishing nets were also used for the pupose, in the later stage.

Another popular method of catching the fish is by diverting the course of the river in a suitable place with felled trees, stones and mud etc. and thus the water is made to flow in a new course and thereby the water is emptied and the fishes were caught. They also catch the fish and crabs by hand by groping under the stones and holes. Ankling rods are also used. Baskets of different sizes which are placed in the normal course of the fish also serve the purpose for catching it. The baskets were made in such a way that once the fish get into it cannot come out.

100. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 77. Also find in M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 43.

Nowadays in a big river different types of explosives, lime and dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (an insecticide), in short known as DDT are used through which a good number of fish can be caught with less effort.

The social and economic life of the Lothas at present has undergone tremendous changes. It is well understood that a particular society or community cannot remain isolated and static and is therefore had to move in tune with the fast changing character of the modern age. It is due to this force that the Lotha society has undergone a drastic change in every aspect of their life. The influence of the so-called 'modernisation' and Christianity has taken a new turn in the life of the people. For example, no rituals and ceremonies are observed while founding a new village. Again the use of different shawls which was once used according to the social status of a man is no longer found. No importance is given in marriage price, gifts and labour rendered by the groom but the future relations of the couple.

In the economic life of the people too many changes have taken place. Ceremonies connected with the agriculture are almost forgotten and disappeared. The most important changes that have taken place is the improvement in the living standard and health of the people as a whole. In the field of manufacture indigenously - the technical knowledge of it are

not given importance any longer, due to the easy availability of machine made goods. Therefore, we can say that the 'technological invasion' from outside the state has considerably reduced the people's ability and potentiality of indigenous production of arts and crafts then making the people expending on others more and more.

CHAPTER V

TRADITIONAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS

TRADITIONAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS

Exogamy

The system of Lotha marriage is exogamous upon which the framework of Lotha society was built. The young men of one clan marry the young women of another clan and through the interclan marriage, relationship and understanding among the clans are promoted.

Among the Lothas there are three phratries divided into clan (Chibo) which are in some cases further split up into kindreds. Strictly speaking a man ought to take his wife from a phratry other than his own. On this Lotha opinion is quite clear. As the time passed-by the exogamous system is threatened by the so called "forces of modernisation". It is due to the disintegrating nature, the age-old strict social system could not be followed. Rather it is correct to say that 'a man ought to take his wife from a clan other than his own.' In some villages again, chiefly among the southern Lothas, marriage between members of different kindreds of the same clan is permitted. The reason for this, as Tsenchio ovung¹

1. A paper on 'The Lotha Culture', presented during Lotha Hoho sponsored Seminar at Wokha on 11 January 1994.

says, "a man's choice of a wife is limited, for he is almost forced by circumstances to take one from his own village, or at any rate from a neighbouring village." He also said that, "in the days of head-hunting, though head was not taken among the Lothas, there was no free movement from village to village for fear of being attacked." It is also because of this reason that there was no close association and therefore less inter-marriage between different villages and thus compelled a young man to marry from his village. Again in some villages, for unknown reason, it used to be inhabited by one or two clans making it less chance of selecting a bride from different clans. Therefore, in such cases marriage within the same clan was also accepted by the society, keeping in view that the blood relation between the two is not too close. For example, in Ralan area of Lower range we find many cases of ovung clan marrying ovung.

Apart from such instances, according to the Lotha custom marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited and considered 'taboo', for it is said, if such marriage alliance is taken it might bring disaster and the loss of generation. When such an incest taken place resulting into pregnancy in no way young couple is allowed to marry. It is feared that it might result in bad heredity and the child might also be born blind or crippled. If the two cannot be

separated in spite of strong objection by the elders and the custom, the two will be fined heavily consisting of pig and cow, as per the law and are ex-communicated from the family and society as a whole. Meat or fine realised from such cases are to be eaten only by the elders and aged people and never by the young ones.² Again during the course of field work informal discussion with the Doboshis in their office at Wokha, I learnt that if such cases of marriage taken place formerly 'mithun' was realised from the offenders but now 'Vuktsu' (large pig) as a fine is imposed on them.³

A man in search of a bride naturally thinks first of marriageable girls whom he knows of near home. The parents of a girl, too, usually prefer that she should marry a man in their own village, sometimes because they are fond of her, but more often because they want her to come in and give a helping hand in the house or look after them when they are in need of help. In the olden days marriage price system is another potent factor. The bridegroom naturally does not want to go and work for a father-in-law in a distant village where he will have to live among strangers with no chance of keeping an eye on his own fields and those of his parents. It is

2. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 4.

3. Discussion with group of Dobashi at Wokha on 24.9.90.

therefore convenient to marry from the village than going to a distant village. Nowadays this practice has disappeared and also the field of choice being wide open for the young men to select a bride, are discouraged from choosing a bride within the same clan.

The origin of phratries and clans among the Lothas is a point of confusion to many, but the most commonly accepted tradition and story runs as follows: in the beginning there was a man and woman and the union of the two gave birth to three sons, namely - Ezomontsu, Tonphyaktsu and Limhathung. The names of these brothers later came to be known as phratries among the Lothas. It is to be noted here that since these brothers found it difficult to give their children in marriage they had a discussion to solve this problem. The outcome of the meeting was that each of them would give their children in marriage, excepting that of the same parents. It was at this point that the three brothers got one step a part and thus phratry came into being in the society. Thus, marriage alliances between different phratries was made possible and later became an accepted customs in the society.⁴

Another interesting development in the social life of

4, Cassette recorded from Yisao Odyuo on 3.7.82 at Bhandari by K. Chumben Kyong. This is also shared by P. Kikon of Yimpang village.

the Lothas is the origin of clan system. As mentioned above each brother had sons and the names of the sons, what came to be known as the clans, or clan system among the Lothas. The Lothas, like any other Naga tribes, practised both patriarchal and patrilineal systems. Therefore, daughters are not taken into consideration specially in clan system.

For proper understanding, Phratries and principal clans are given below:

<u>Phratry</u>	<u>Clan</u>
Ezomontsu	Ngulio, Humtso, Tungo, Mozhuo, Shitio, Kithamo, Enio, Rangphango and Lapomo. ⁵
Tonphyaktsu	Kikomo, Miphongo, Tsophothung, Ovungo, Jungio, and Jamio. ⁶
Limhathung	Odyuo, Ezungo, Murry, Yanthan, Tsanglao.

J.P. Mills has correctly observed when he says, "the Lotha tribe may fairly be said to have an exogamous system which is in the process of breaking down."⁷ During the

5. R. Nguli and M. Kithan. Ezomontsu phratry meet at old Changsu, June 19 and 20th, 1979, p. 8.

6. P. Kikon. As per the Resolution No. 5 of the Limhachan-Tonphyaktsu phratry meet on 3.1.1951 at Lotsu-Pyangsa, Notification was served on 18.2.1988.

7. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 87.

Ezomontsu phratry meet at old Changsu in 1979 long arguments on the marriage were advanced by both advocates of remaining Exogamous phratry and converting it into Endogamous phratry. Those who advocated for remaining as exogamous argued that patriarch Ezomontsu instructed his children to remain as an exogamous group. Those who advocated for converting it into an endogamous group argued that since we have not been able to keep the purity of exogamous practice owing to some villages notable: old Changsu, Longying, N. Longidang, Humtso and Pangti and since there are a number of cases where endogamous practices are being forced into within Ezomontsu phratry in recent days and since they could not strictly enforce the practice of exogamous system only it would be better to remove the restriction. The advocates for remaining purely exogamous phratry maintained that some villages have found it impossible to keep the purity from the practice of marriages only outside the phratry due to circumstance and environment as existed in the particular village from the foundation of the village but it was not a renunciation of the ancient law. That moreover in modern days with exception of the one phratry Ezomontsu the whole of humanity is opened to the young people that it is not essential to remove the restriction on marriage within the same phratry.⁸ The argument in the general meeting remained

8. R. Nguli and M. Kithan, op.cit., pp. 32-33.

inconclusive. Therefore executive meeting of the Elders was held and was decided and reported as follows:

That the most ancient and sacred tradition of exogamous system shall continue. That Ezomontsu phratry shall remain exogamous with exception of within villages which were forced to practise endogamy by environmental circumstances from the very foundation of the village. That whosoever violates this shall be severely dealt with by Ezomontsu and in addition they shall be turned out beyond the limits of the village defence perimeter. 9

In spite of strong opposition from the elders, advocates of maintaining exogamous system and the custom on general, nowadays the sanctity of such resolution could hardly be kept. A glaring example is that incidentally a marriage was contracted between members of the same phratry, belonging to different clans, at Dimapur on 7th March 1996. In olden days this type of marriages was not sanctioned by the custom, but are now accepted by the society and the marriage price (hanlam) is also taken, with the exception of few, who still refused to accept marriage prices.

Though they may belong to a different phratry there are certain women whom a man may not marry. (i) his mother's sister's daughter, even if his mother's sister has married into another clan, for he calls his mother's sister Oyonong-

9. Ibid., p. 37.

hovo (little mother) or Oyoram (big mother); (ii) his own sister's daughter (orrüv); (iii) his father's sister's daughter (orrüv).¹⁰ It is believed that if matrimonial alliance between close relations takes place it results into genetic defects or physical deformity in the offspring. It is clearly said "marriage within the cricle of a man's relations is not permitted."¹¹ A man can marry his mother's brother's daughter. He is rather expected or advised to take his wife from his mother's clan and is still preferred. Of course, there is no fine for not doing so.¹² Lotha custom do not restrict a man from marrying his deceased brother's widow, but if he wishes without paying any marriage price. But this type of marriages are very rare. It is also not restricted a man from marrying his father's widow provided that she is not his own mother but such marriage are viewed with a certain amount of disfavour and so are non-existent nowadays, in the society.¹³

Polity and Village organisation

The Lothas lived in villages. These villages were mostly located on the hill-tops which provided a commanding

10. J.P. Mills, op.cit., p. 95.

11. Verrier Elwin (Ed.), The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 352.

12. Informed by Mrs. Rodila of L. Longidang on 23.12.93.

13. Told by Yananyimo Ngully on 13.2.92 at Tsungiki.

view over the surrounding areas. The first settlers of each village had carved out enough land which enabled them to become self-sufficient. As they were given to a simple life, all they required was the basic necessities of life only. Each village was a compact and well-knit society where rigid customs and discipline were observed.

Each Lotha village is a state. The territory is sufficient enough to maintain the population of the state. In the olden times, each village was a little republic having nearly everything, within the village and having independent foreign relations etc.¹⁴ There is a government in the village constituted by chosen representatives from each clan residing within the territory. Formerly, as a whole, the Lothas have no political organisation but their respective village organisations which are formed on similar patterns from one another represented the political organisation. In spite of many changes that has taken place in different fields in the whole country, the village communities are following the same pattern of government till now, with little or no modification. Each and every citizen contributes his share of duties and service for common welfare of the population.

There was no hereditary chief or ruler worth the name among the Lothas. There is only a spectacular administration

14. Ibid.

in the village government which in turn by a council formed by chosen clan-representatives. The council meets according to local conventions and regulations, discusses matters of common interest, works for keeping law and order and settles disputes in the village. It is even now the most important and effective means of settling the affairs of the community. The village council thus formed by clan representatives reflects several clan organisation. For their services in the village, in lieu of fees and salaries, they are entitled to meat-shares of animals bought out of collection from the villagers and also fines realised while settling numerous cases in the village. Usually the village as a whole is run by the same council or the administrators. But in all the Lotha areas, the villages are formed on the basis of 'khels' and if the 'khels' are big enough the tendency is for the leading men of each 'khel' to manage their affairs independently.

Every village, except the very small ones, is divided into two or more 'khel' (Yankho). Sometimes, it is nothing but, a little strip of open space marks the division, it is also divided by the clans and sometimes some feature of the site gives the 'khel' its name. In every khel there is a common bachelors' house known as 'Chumbo', a sort of club which plays an important part in Lotha life and also in matter of village administration as a whole. A member of Chumbo

starts when they are able to hold 'dao' till his marriage. It is the main institution where one learns the responsibilities in life. Here the eldest members called Chumboramo controls its affairs.

Another important factor in village life is that of the working companies known as 'Yengaden', composed of the children of neighbours or age-group in the village. Composition and membership of Yengaden is purely temporary. Sometimes it is composed of male members, or composed of female members only but it can also be formed from both the sexes and no membership fee was involved. It is formed for seasonally to work together in the field. In this connection, Mills writes, "Boys and girls work together and help in the fields of the parents of the various members of the company when there is a pressure of work. Anyone who is short of labour may hire a company for the day, giving them their mid-day meal and a small wage."¹⁵ These working companies are still found in every village for it brings good friendship among the members and also the tiredness is less felt when they work together. From the Naga context of the companies Julian Jacobs¹⁶ has lucidly thus put,

15. J.P. Mills, op.cit., p. 97.

16. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 56.

Even in the more autocratic communities, the gangs are organised democratically, and even a chief's son would expect to do his share of work. They are a key feature of agricultural production: few families could complete their yearly farming tasks without hiring the work gangs. Before marriage, work gangs are usually mixed; after marriage men and women make up separate gangs.

The village priest called Pvuti takes the leading part in all ceremonies concerned with the welfare of the whole community. He is responsible for various ceremonies in the village, the most important of which, the Oyantsoa (reconstruction of village), and on certain crucial occasions. His post is not a hereditary one. In the performance of his duties, he is assisted by his aids called Yingae and also a group of people called Sotsoe (meat eater). With the coming of Christianity the post of Pvuti has disappeared and now replaced by the post of a Pastor.

Property and Inheritance

Land - the most important form of property, can be held by the individual, family, clan, a 'morung' or by the village community as a whole. When a new village is established a plot of land is set aside for the community for common use and remains to be so for generations to come. Every 'morung' owns land which is the property of the 'morung' as a whole and not of any individuals in it. It is worked by the

boys of the 'morung' and the produce used to buy meat for ceremonies. Clans and families possessed land with the establishment of a new village by earmarking a plot of land for the cultivation and other purposes.¹⁷ Thus Mills writes, "a very large proportion of the land in the Lotha country is clan land, which is held in common by all members of that particular clan in the village. A man who leaves a village loses all right to clan land in the village."¹⁸ Cattle, houses, ornaments and so on are the property of the individuals.

The laws of inheritance among the Lothas follow male line, and women are not entitled to inherit immovable property like land, etc. Sometimes a man who is well off will settle land on his daughter for her life. This is particularly common in the case of man who have no sons. In these cases the woman cannot sell the land, which goes to the nearest male heirs of her father on her death. As "property is inherited exclusively by the male heirs ... the need of the heirs is the primary consideration, a system which in theory is almost ideal and in practice works excellently," observed Mills.¹⁹

Among the Aos²⁰ and the Konyaks the largest share goes

17. Told by Chiborao Ezong of Longsa on 29.1.92.

18. J.P. Mills, op.cit.

19. Ibid., p. 98.

20. Tajen Ao, Ao Naga Customary Laws, Mokokchung, 1980, p. 67.

to the eldest son of the house after the death of the father. The Lotha custom presents a contrast to it, because among the Lothas the youngest son is entitled to a lion's share of property reckoned in terms of granaries, cash and other movable properties. But immovable property like a plot of land is equally shared by all the brothers, except the division is made among the brothers at the time of their father's life time. The youngest son gets the house of his parents which is similar to the Rengmas²¹ and Angamis²² where the youngest son is considered to be the custodian of his parental house and care-taker of his parents in their old age. The youngest son would have to support his mother and unmarried sisters for which reason he is assigned a lion's share of his parents' wealth. Women are generally presented gifts in the form of cash, ornaments, clothings etc. on their marriage. They are not entitled to immovable properties of their parents.²³

Changes caused by the present transformation especially in urban settlements may have produced but slight changes in a few individual cases which, however, cannot be counted to be of general application.

21. J.P. Mills, The Rengma Nagas, p. 143.

22. J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, p. 136.

23. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 45.

Almost all the areas of the district have been Christianised. But Christianity has not changed the law of inheritance and the local economy substantially although there has been a total departure off the old religious, customs, beliefs and practices.

Adoption

Adoption is practically unknown among the Lothas. One reason is that there are very few people poor enough or willing to be adopted, and the chances of material gain for the adopter, are few. Adoption of a girl seems to be unknown. There are generally relations of some kind ready to bring her up and get her marriage price of boys and adopted, the adopter had to find him a wife and pay his marriage price and also look for his cultivable land.²⁴ Unlike the Lothas, among the Semas and the Aos adoption is common. While among the Semas an adopted man and his descendants become practically the self of their adopter.²⁵ While among the Aos' orphan male boy is eligible for adoption for the purpose of (a) heirship, and (b) for service.²⁶

Settlement of disputes

When there was no law the Lothas governed themselves with the help of customs, traditions and their common sense.

24. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, pp. 99-100.

25. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, p. 162.

26. Tajen Ao, op.cit., p. 80.

They maintain peace by their own methods of polishing and tried to deliver justice to the wronged person as per the best of their understanding of the situational complexities and judgement. The character and influence of the village authorities might vary from village to village, but there are hardly any variations in their basic approach. The members of the village authorities are accepted leaders of the population and hence are effective in the implementation of their decisions. The decisions are taken in most democratic manner, with unanimity reached after great deal of discussions and hearing wherein everybody can take part in the open proceedings. The penalty is pronounced in the presence of everybody and its implementation is visible to all, at a time when corruption was not known.

When the Britishers came to our area they were surprised to see such an organised form of judgement in solving several disputes of various types, said Yisao Odyuo.²⁷ Therefore as far as the customary law is concerned the Britishers respected and various disputes were settled accordingly.

Before the British occupation of the Lotha area in the late 19th century, head-hunting and other related quarrels

27. Interviewed recorded on 3.7.82 at Bhandari.

were common with other neighbouring tribes. When such problems arose a truce between them were arranged through messengers from both sides who acted as negotiators, who are not to be killed. If both sides agree a day was fixed at a particular place (usually a border area of the two villages). The elders of the two villages assembled and a solution to the problems were discussed. If the responsibility for the quarrel can be fixed on any individual or a group a fine was imposed on him/ them, and the fine either divided among the elders of both village, or given to the village against which the wrong was done. When the solution is found the two parties exchange drinks and food and the peace is restored.²⁸ In case of dispute or misunderstanding within the village both the warring groups are summoned before the elders and as far as possible compromise was discussed, if not the case is settled with fine, this was regarded as binding.²⁹

When a murder is committed in and around the village and the identity of a murderer is not known, the Lotha forefathers adopted a noble idea in bringing the culprit to book. In such cases the elders killed a pig or a cow and cooked to be tasted by everyone in the area. If anyone refused to eat or taste, he was accused as the murderer, because if he is the

28. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., pp. 94-95.

29. Ibid., p. 86.

murderer and tasted the meat, he would die of 'mmyok' (dreaded disease, explain earlier), if not some unnatural thing is sure to happen to him. Therefore, the man who refused to eat will be questioned and if admitted that he committed the crime will be sent out of the village for life or with limited years. Sometimes revenge was taken with the same act.³⁰ Similar method was applied in the case of animal killed, but the degree of punishment meted out to them was different depending on the gravity of the crime.³¹ In this connection, Ekyimsao Ngully³² adds that, if the culprit could not compensate the act with the fine imposed on him in pig or cow etc. then it was also compensated by properties like land etc. out of his share. He also said that the habitual liars were fined according to the degree of the crime.

Since time immemorial, says Lenthio and Chibarao of Longsa,³³ there were cases of elopement. If a boy elopes a girl the case was not a problem for they were fined for not respecting their in-laws and allowed to marry. But in this case N.T. Ngullie adds that the Lothas have a belief that marriage by elopement does not last long their marriage life,

30. Ibid., pp. 78-79.

31. Ibid.

32. Interviewed on 20.9.90 at Niroyo village.

33. Both interviewed on 18.9.90.

therefore it was discouraged by the elders.³⁴ In the case of eloping with other wife, who has a family, the matter is treated with much concern and the suitor has to pay a heavy fine, according to the customary law of the land. In this case the new couple had to pay extra of Rs. 50/- fine for bringing bad name to the village, after which the husband was fined Rs. 10 for breaking the erstwhile two family relation.³⁵ In this connection, Thungmomo³⁶ said that it has two categories if one elopes with a wife of unemployed man he was fined Rs.100/- and secondly, with a wife whose husband is a government employed than the suitor will be fined Rs. 200/-. It is true that this categorisation is of very recent development but it did give us the idea of reflection that even in the past such cases were treated with a difference between the socially high status group and that of common people in the society. It is also true that the fine realised from these cases differs from village to village and area to area though the nature of judgement remains the same. As Yananyimo³⁷ says, in the olden days since salt was highly priced the cases like, elopement, adultery and other related cases were settled with

34. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 98.

35. Interviewed Lenthio, Chiborao, and Chumbemo on 18.9.90 at Longsa.

36. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 98.

37. Interviewed on 14.9.90 at Tsungiki village.

salt, the quantity of which were fixed depending on the nature of the cases.

Minor quarrels and misunderstanding between husband and wife or within the family were, as far as possible settled among themselves. But where there is such quarrel up to the extent of physical injury, resulting into bloodshed the couple is fined with pig or cow by the elders of the two families and sometimes involving the village elders. While in the midst of quarrel, if the enraged husband pulls down hair from his wife's head he was fined Rs. 25/- by his wife's brothers and sisters.³⁸

In every village there is a village tree known as 'Menkitong'. It is the sacred tree which everyone has the responsibility to keep it safe and take utmost care to preserve it. Therefore if anyone cuts or injures the tree knowing or unknowingly was fined as per the custom in the village.³⁹ Along with the tree luck-stone known as 'Halong' (or some call it Menkilong) are kept. It is believed that this 'Halong' brings blessings in many ways - therefore to destroy it would bring disaster to the village. It is considered to be

38. M.C. Murry, op.cit., p. 67.

39. Ibid., p. 62.

tabooed. It is due to this belief and reason that whoever destroys it had to pay heavy fine. It is said that some people even went mad due to destruction of village Halong.⁴⁰

Unlike the Angami Nagas and the Khasi, the Lothas strictly prohibits the burning of forest. If anyone set on fire intentionally was fined according to the area destroyed by the fire. If it is unintentional than he/she has to take an oath that it happened unintentionally and the matter is solved.⁴¹ The burning of forest is prohibited because it destroys animal lives and other vegetations.

Besides solving these problems, the forefathers also kept in view the other sensitive issues threatening the welfare and lives of the people and are considered as breach of laws and custom. Therefore, the elders failed not to prevent them by imposing fines and other related measures from occurring such incidents.

One of the most important ways of finding the truth and to bring the culprit to book is the oath. That the offender is charged if there is sufficient evidence against him and there is no difficulty in exact determination of the

40. Yisao Odyuo - Interview recorded on 3.7.82.

41. M.C. Murry, op.cit., pp. 58-59.

guilt. However, where it is not possible to ascertain the guilt exactly, magico-religious method viz., oath and ordeals are resorted to.

Oath

Oath is generally taken in the name of deity along with articles that are in dispute. For example, soil, if the land is in dispute. The common articles that are accompanied in taking oath are the soil, swearer hair, tigers tooth (or in the name of tiger) egg and others.

The ordeal is a subsidiary method of administering justice. It is resorted to only when other primary agencies of law and justice fail to produce results. Ordeals are generally not preferred as these are considered dangerous. If a person is guilty, he invariably prefers to give the fine rather than go through the ordeal and suffer the loss of property, moral degradation and death. The tribal people are generally simple and honest and tell the truth even if the statement is against them. It is also impossible to keep secrets in a small community.

The system of judgement and disposal of various cases were democratic in nature, open to all - speak, give opinion, decisions pronounced are unanimous, justice given is speedy, elders were simple and straight forward and not under the

influence of any outside factors. The important factor under the system is that 'no pleader can appear on behalf of anybody.' 'It is because of this' as Yanamyimo Ngully⁴² says, "the British local authority was in favour of continuing this system."

Friendships

Formal friendships are of great importance. Once Nagas are aquarrelsome lot, and a man likes to have plenty of people who can be trusted to take his side. A man may always be sure of the support of his own family or clan, but naturally tries to form other alliance outside it for his greater protection. This was more necessary in the days before the advancement of modern administration and the restoration of peace was made. It is said that even in the days of head-hunting friends were not killed. This formal friendships is known as 'Okhümo'. As Mills writes, "a man may not kill his 'Okam' (Okhümo) even if he belongs to a hostile village, should he happen to kill him in battle with a spear thrown at a venture he will not take his head."⁴³ Even now formal friendships cemented by gifts, are common in all tribes, or within tribes. When travelling a man will stay in his Okhümo's house in each village. He in turn will entertain his Okhümo who come to his village. It is also

42. Interviewed on 14.9.90 at Tsungiki village.

43. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 104.

usual for the sons of 'friends' to become friends in turn.

War and Head-huntings

In the past the Nagas are known to the outside world for their head-hunting. As Jenkins, Governor General's agent, wrote in 1852 of his first experience in the Naga Hills, thus:

No one can will say who were the original offenders in Naga feuds. I remember well that when I came across these Hills in 1831/32, these Nagas were in the utmost distress, from the attacks of affrays of their stranger neighbour's and their villages were then almost all deserted. 44

Although it is now a thing of the past, yet it is important to study the subject for better understanding of the social and political life of the people. By putting a stop to head-hunting the British government has profoundly changed the mode of life of the Nagas.

In the old days, war was the normal and peace the exceptional state of affairs. There are certain factors that encouraged a man to undertake head-hunting expeditions as a game may be studied. The most important factor, however, the Naga tradition and so also the Lothas that a man could not climb the ladder of social recognition till he brought enemy heads.⁴⁵ In this connection, the observation made by Captain

44. Volume 18 of 1852-53. Letters issued to the Government, p. 218.

45. Interviewed Renashio of Tsungiki on 15.9.90.

Reid on Naga head-hunters may be appropriate when he says, "these murders are constantly made not for revenge but to gain a name and the decorative ornaments allowed a man only after he has killed a man,"⁴⁶ Another compelling cause was justice. When the village boundary or truce was broken that led to the attack of that particular village and considered as hostile village. Another reason why head-taking was important especially women-head is to enrich the soil. To quote Julian Jacobs for better understanding why heads were taken,

Nowadays we cannot offer heads and the sickness goes on and on. Man after man falls ill and dies, and there is nothing we can do. The fields too have gone off and we do not get the crops we did In short when the village had heads, the people were healthier and the crops were better. ⁴⁷

This point may be further illustrated for better understanding from the available records made by the Britishers, before the area is brought under control. Governor General's agent, thus reported that,

Lieutenant Vincent officiating junior assistant in the Naga Hills had recovered from the Lotah Nagas a little Meekir girl, one of the children who had been carried off by them after the massacre of 23 women and children at 'Deolow' (at Loongerjan) ... the child it would appear and destined by them for a sacrifice, in the cutting of their crops....⁴⁸

46. Volume 15 of 1850-51 July-April. Letter issued to the Government. Letter No. 14.

47. Julian Jacobs, The Nagas, p. 121.

48. Volume 15, op.cit., Letter No. 111.

Not only for the fertility of the soil and other agricultural production but in the past, the Lothas made human sacrifices in several occasions. The reason was that they made several raids in the plains, for more heads, for it is reported that,

Distressing occurrences the killing of people for their heads by the Hill Tribes, which we find it so extremely difficult to prevent by any persuasion or intimidation or by any precautionary measures.... In this instance two girls and a boy have fallen victims to the irresistible desire and these tribes evince to offer human sacrifices to their deities on certain occasion... that the perpetrators were found to be Lotah Nagas, of clans unconnected with us and under present circumstances inaccessible to us.... 49

Before the Naga Hills were fully brought under their control the British Indian government, laid down two principles and they preferred to adhere to it, that is, (a) that infraction of border and ill-treatment of British subjects beyond it should be punished, but (b) inter-tribal feuds and murders committed outside the frontier should be disregarded.⁵⁰ In 1850, Rengma Naga village of Ressang, who were by then British subjects were attacked by the Lotha Nagas as we find A.R. Young's letter to the government of Bengal, dated

49. Volume No. 18, op.cit. Letter No. 51, dated 19th April, 1852.

50. Sir Robert Reid, History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, 1883-1941, Eastern Publishing House, Delhi, 1983, p. 103.

6th June 1851 thus, it is surmised however, that the assailants were "Lotah Nagas". It is not stated whether the Lotah Nagas are or are not subjects of our government, but it may be gathered that the village attacked is within the British jurisdiction.⁵¹

Another important factor for head-hunting was the fact that the warrior who scored a number of heads over his rival had the better chance to win favour and love of the best girl of the village for marriage. It is said that those who could not capture any head at all had great difficulty in getting a suitable wife. At the time where there was general fears of war and head-hunting, girls wished and wanted that her husband should be good warrior.⁵²

This point can be further strengthened by giving the following illustrations. It goes that Yampongo of Phiro village, a man of great note in his time, desired to marry a beautiful girl from the same village. But minx said she would only accept him if he would take the head of a Rengma girl and show it to her as a proof of his valour. This put the ardent over in a quandary, for with the British administration established in Kohima and Wokha, it appeared that he must either

51. Volume 32(A) 1851. Letter Received from Government. Letter No. 516.

52. Interviewed Renashio of Tsungiki on 15.9.90.

lose his well-beloved or take a head and get into serious trouble. But a brilliant idea struck him. He caught an unfortunate Rengma girl, cut off her ears without killing her, and after giving this proof of his valour and devotion, triumphantly married the Phiro girl.⁵³

During the trouble days, since the head-hunting was double edged game, the Lothas were also frequently attacked by the neighbouring tribes. In 1881-82, the village of Tsungiki and nearby villages were attacked by the neighbouring Sema village of Philimi killing two persons from Tsungiki. This was followed by successful British expedition led by Captain Abbott of the 42nd Regiment and some Frontier Police and reparation exacted from the culprit village.⁵⁴

The Lothas hunted heads for various purpose not only in the neighbouring Naga tribes but also frequented in the Assam plains. In March 1852, the Lothas attacked Borpathar who were under British jurisdiction, killed some few persons, but were beaten off by the villagers.⁵⁵ Jenkin's, Agent Governor General, informed this incident to Secretary (J.P. Grant) to the Government of Bengal, in the Judicial Department, thus, "... it is beyond doubt the murders were committed by a party

53. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 106.

54. A. Mackenzie, North East Frontier of India, p. 143.

55. Ibid., p. 96.

of Lotah Nagas...."⁵⁶ He further informed in the same incident,

... It appears that the villagers of Borpathar beat off the Nagas, and in following them up, killed two of their party, though only very badly armed with bows and arrows, and four old muskets. The guard at Borpathar only consisted of a Naick and 4 sepoy, too small a party of any being detached to pursue the Nagas with the villagers. 57

He also reported to the Secretary in the same letter, another incident of raid and murder by the Lothas. He said, "In addition to the present murders ... the Lotah Nagas have committed too similar outrages, within the last 18 months in the Rengma Naga Hills and speared four buffaloes belonging to the people of Borpathar."⁵⁸ It is due to the frequent outrages committed by the Lothas in the area the Agent suggested that more arms and ammunition should be supplied to the village of Borpathar, and he said, "The arms will give them confidence in their ability to protect themselves."⁵⁹

On 4th January 1854, Agent Governor General (F. Jenkin) reported a similar outrages and murder in the plains to Secretary (William Grey) to the Government of Bengal. To

56. Volume 18, 1852-53. Letter Issued to the Government, Letter No. 56.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

quote him,

There has been frequent attack on the plains by the Lotah Nagas in a Cachar villages ... the attackers took off 20 persons and killed and 3 wounded The particular clan of Nagas who committed this aggression appears not to be distinctly known but I presume the offenders are the same who were beat off by the Borpathar village in 1852 ... and that this attack has been made in revenge for that defeated in persecution of their former feuds. 60

The continuous murder and raid committed by the Lotha Nagas in the valley took place for a long time. This led to the establishment of more police outpost in the border areas for the defence and protection of their subjects and other establishments. In this connection, F. Jenkin's, Agent Governor General made the following arrangement and the same information was sent to C. Allen, officiating Secretary, to the Government of India, foreign department on 18th May 1852,

Along the Naga frontier of the Sibsagar district, we have only two police stations, Saipore and Golaghat, about 80 or 90 miles apart but at the intermediate - Hauts frequented by the Nagas, if necessary to maintain small posts for the security of the Ryots and to prevent the Nagas quarrelling amongst themselves, when tribes at feuds meet at the Hauts. To occupy these posts and to keep up a line of observation along the frontier, to supply guards for the jails at Sibsagar and Golaghat, and on emergencies for

the treasury at the former station, and to assist the police whenever required would be the principal duties of this militia, and if active operations should be required of the local infantry, this corps and that of Dibrooghur the greater part of the Regiment from where police duties, and leave it disposable for service. 61

In spite of frequent head-hunting expeditions made by the Lothas in their neighbouring areas, it is to be remembered that war between Lotha villages was rare and it was absolutely forbidden for one Lotha to take another Lotha's head. As Julian Jacobs writes, "the Lotha observed a prohibition on taking other Lotha's heads"⁶² for if ceremony was taken with Lotha's head it brought disaster in the village or community. In this connection, Mills writes thus, "one 'Khel' of Rephyim is supposed to have died out because the head-taking ceremony was once performed there with a Lotha head."⁶³ But unless peace had been definitely arranged, any village of another tribe was regarded as hostile and fair game. This never ending state of war affected everyone, women and children in their daily lives.

Head-hunting practice have not been given up by the Lothas till the last decades of the 19th Century. In December

61. Volume No. 18, op.cit., Letter No. 65.

62. Julian Jacobs, op.cit., p. 139.

63. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 104.

1875, Captain Butler, the Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, who was personally surveying the area with small personal, was killed in an ambush at the village of Pangti. Action was promptly taken, the next day by burning the village by the survey incharge, Lieutenant Woodthorpe.⁶⁴ This action had a great impact on the nearby areas and the villages of Are, Are Yanthamo, Okotso and others acknowledged the British administration and remained friendly. This peaceful environment could be achieved only by the late 1880's.⁶⁵

In the morning, before the old men, women and children were left behind within the village fence, a band of young men fully armed scouted round the village and had to report that no enemy was lying in wait nearby. All went down to the field for the day's work in a compact body and men fully armed, leaving behind the rest in the village with a guard. Careful watch, too, had to be kept while work was going on in the fields on their favourite method of attack against the isolated family parties when they were weeding or cutting jungles.⁶⁶

When a raid has been decided upon, those who were to take part in it having slept a part from their wives the night

64. A. Mackenzie, op.cit., p. 129.

65. Sir Robert Reid, op.cit., p.112.

66. Interviewed Khungmomo Ngully of N. Longidang on 13.9.90.

before, assembled in the morning at the Ekhung's (chief) house. There a cock and a pig were killed and a meal eaten. If the cock squawked when its throat was being cut it was regarded as a bad omen and the expedition was usually put off. Similarly, anyone who hiccoughed when he was eating the pork stayed behind, for if he went misfortune would befall him.⁶⁷

Like all Nagas, the Lothas were very keen to take heads but preferred to do so with the minimum of risk to himself. A strong forewarned enemy was rarely attacked, usually a party of raiders would either lie in ambush by the village spring, and kill a woman as she came down to take water, or rush an unsuspecting party working in their fields, or cut off a straggler on some path. If a whole village turned out to destroy another village a surprise attack at dawn was generally attempted. As Elwin writes,

On approaching the enemy's territories, they collect their troops and advance with great caution. Even in their hottest and most active wars, they proceed wholly by strategem and ambuscade. They place not their glory in attacking their enemies with open force. To surprise and destroy is the greatest merit of a commander, and the highest pride of his followers. 68

67. Yisao Odyuo - Interview recorded on 3.7.82.

68. Verrier Elwin, op.cit., p. 538.

Once the defenders had a few casualties or found the enemy were through their fence they gradually turned tail and fled in a wild rout out at the other end of the village, having the wounded and aged to the tender mercies of the raiders. Similarly, an attack was rarely pressed home against a stout defence, and once the attackers began to make for home the defenders followed them, cutting off stragglers.

The Lothas took the heads of men, women and children indiscriminately, except those of infants who had not yet got their teeth. These were merely killed for a head cut without teeth did not count in a warrior's tool of heads and so was not worth cutting off. A woman's head, however, was regarded as a finer trophy than a man's for women were likely to be carefully guarded. Ordinarily, from each of the slain, the head, toes and fingers were taken. But if the enemies were pressing close and there was no time to take the head, an ear only would do as well. The credit for every head taken was shared equally by the men who got it first, second and third spear. It did not matter who actually cut off the head. The head, fingers and toes etc. were brought home wrapped in a cloth. When the party got within earshot of their own village they began to chant "O Shamoshari" (O, we have killed an enemy"). The hearing of this in the distance was the signal for wild excitement and uproar in the village. All streamed

out to meet the returning heroes and see the trophies replying to each chant of "O Shamoshari" with "O Emhayile" (O, we are glad). From each head a few hairs were taken and put it a cleft stick which was set up outside the village gate. The meaning of this is obscure. Lotha call it Oriluma deriving the word from Ori (enemy) and luma (warm) and say that it means "warming the earth with an enemy's head", so that the crops will grow and the village increase and multiply. ⁶⁹

According to Khungmomo Ngully,⁷⁰ in his village (N.Longidang), the victor's chant was shouted as "O Apojeli" and replied with "O Emhayile" and the chanting was made in response to the number of head they had been taken. That is, if one enemy was killed, they would shout once and two heads, twice and so on. The procession of warriors went round the village, and halting in front of the house of each man who had taken part in the expedition sung for a few minutes. Then all the men went to the "Chumbo" where the old men brought them food and "madhu" (rice beer) and sat and listened to the account at their exploits.

According to Mills, in the Lotha area the last head was taken by Akok, sometime in the 1870's exact year being

69. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, pp. 106-107.

70. Interviewed on 13.9.1990 at Wokha Town.

unknown, in a case in point. The incident goes that, no heads having been taken for a long time, they arranged to buy a slave from Longkhum (in Ao country). On the agreed date, a party of Longkhum men set out towards Akok, taking with them the unsuspecting slave, who was carrying a load. Half-way between the two villages they were met by some men from Akok. All sit down and drank and talked. The slave was given a drink of 'madhu' and at a pre-arranged signal, an Akok man killed him with a blow with his dao (lepok) from behind. The head was cut off, and pieces of the body sent as presents to various villages. Many man touched the head and these blossomed out as "warriors".⁷¹

At the time of general fear there was also raid or head-hunting expedition led by a group of friends desire at acquiring a trophy and to acclaim themselves as a good warrior or sometime with the intention of taking revenge for being inflicted casualties on their family members or among friends in the past. According to Renashio Kikon,⁷² as far as possible, they tried to avoid launching of head-taking expedition consisting of a single family members. The reason was that, if they were unlucky enough all of them might become

71. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, pp. 109-110.

72. Interviewed on 15.9.90 at Tsungiki village.

victim of the expedition. In my further inquiry in this regard, Lenthio and Chiborao⁷³ of Longsa told me that even family members consisting of father and sons launched an expedition and they further said that enemy's head would not be shared even between the family for it is personal achievement and name in the society. The enemy's heads were first brought to the 'Chumbo' (dormitory). Among the Lothas, heads were not taken but suspicious person habitual troublesome were captured as captives or worantsan and the ransom demanded from his friends or villagers.

One important point to be mentioned here is that, a woman had to remain chaste while her husband was away on a raid. Any breach of this rule, it was believed, would cause her husband to be killed by the enemy. She was also forbidden to weave, lest her husband's foot should become entangled in jungle creepers and he should be caught and killed, besides sleeping apart for few days from his wife and avoiding the eating of meat from tiger's kill. Therefore, these were strictly observed and followed by the womenfolk and the husband at that period. The sign of heroism was shown by putting 'hornbill' tail feather on his 'warrior's cap'. For

73. Interviewed on 29.1.92 at Longsa.

example, one hornbill tail feather could be worn for each head-taking ceremony, but a man rarely wore more than six or eight at the outside, however, many times he had performed the ceremony.⁷⁴

Peace and prosperity of any village depended on the ability of the village to keep enemies and attackers at bay. As such, the village fence and the village gate were efficiently maintained and made impenetrable. The village braves had to be exhorted to remain vigilant. The Lothas maintained a strong defence just near the village gate. A ditch was made around the village. Beyond the ditch there lay rows of Panjis or sharp and pointed bamboos stick on the ground, intensively covering the ground and beyond that a stone wall was kept, outside the stone wall there used to be bushes of itch-weeds to prevent any enemy negotiating the area. Small bridge was kept over the ditch to allow the villagers pass to and from their fields at the appointed hour. At night during the war time this was removed.⁷⁵ The village fence was not provided where the hill slope was steep enough to render the fence superfluous. But this practices have already vanished in the modern society, because of peaceful condition.

74. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, pp. 108-109.

75. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 49.

Head-hunting has now completely stopped in Nagaland. The practice had virtually stopped by the time when the British administration appeared on the scene. Hatred and enmity arising from head huntings melted away when the hearts of the head hunters were completely changed by the white missionaries, mostly Americans.

The Position of Women

The study of the position and status of women in any society has rightly been recognised as a true criterion to evaluate the state of its modernisation and civilization. The period of seclusion, however, it may be fascinating to note at least from the angle of change in the age old social order, began to mark an end only with the spread of Christianity in the later part of the 19th century accompanied by formal schooling system unknown before, to the traditional Naga society. And this is the landmark that witnessed the seed of transformation from the primitive stage to modernisation of the society as a whole.

"A Lotha's wife is by no means a slave or chattel, but a very real 'companion'", says Mills.⁷⁶ All her life a woman enjoys a considerable freedom. Besides the usual burdens like house-keeping looking after children, and so on, she works

76. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 111.

shoulder to shoulder with the husband in fields. Her duties are nevertheless sharply defined. In the patriarchal Lotha society the man is for all practical purposes the defacto head of the family while the wife is the de-jure mistress in the household.

Women are not economically independent in the real sense. They also do not inherit any landed property and so they depend on parents before marriage, on husband after marriage, and on sons at the old age. But all her life she works in the agricultural operations. From that point of view she earns her own livelihood. She also raises other domestic animals. When guests are present it is the wife who sees that all are comfortable, but as a rule she takes little part in the conversation.

Women have got almost equal status with man in the society. At first sight, it might seem that Lotha society is extremely male-dominated. Males tend to monopolise ritual and political offices but in this connection Julian Jacobs⁷⁷ who has done extensive research in the Naga society says, "In material terms ... Woman do the bulk of agricultural work, and therefore feasting cannot happen at all without their labour." He goes on to say that,

77. The Nagas, p. 132.

Without her cooperation in production, the man is unable to gain status. He is unable to amass the necessary rice, or indeed the cotton, which the wife tends and then fashions into the cloths which prostrates his (and her) high status as feast-givers. 78

Therefore we can say that woman is the one who acts from behind, in the high social status attainment of men.

Lotha women also dance, but they dance separately, not with the men together. The most important dance of the women is a dance for bringing down rain, at night. It is a kind of sacred dance to induce rain. The dance by the women to avert drought and to bring rain probably indicates that the women are more worried about the crop failure than the menfolk. And it is a fact that women work harder in the field than the men.⁷⁹ Lotha girls often married when young, and almost invariably without being consulted in the matter. The result is that, although divorce is rare in the society, sometimes did occur due to the same reason. Divorced woman can remarry. However, "divorce is generally less common with those tribes where bride price, is high as it broadly involves repayment of it while the wife is responsible and it cannot be claimed back when the man is at fault."⁸⁰

78. Ibid.

79. B.B. Ghosh, op.cit., pp. 44-45.

80. M. Alemchiba Ao (Ed.), Highlander, Vol. III, No. I, March 1975, Bi-Annual Research Bulletin, Department of Art and Culture, Kohima, p. 15.

But now adays things are changing and women are taking part in all social activities and also government services. Today, numbers of women hold posts in the central and state services. The participation of women in multifarious private undertakings and activities is on the increase gradually. The government have recognised the value of women's education and equal participation everywhere and had since long been launched upon special schemes to attract women at large. Thus, with the coming of the modern education and Christianity in the area the status and position of women in the society has considerably improved. Now, almost in all the fields women are treated equally with that of men.

CHAPTER VI

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Religion is the outcome of feelings; the feeling of insecurity and ideas as to its causes induce an individual to act for its remedy and derive satisfaction out of helplessness. The traditional religion of the Lotha is of that type which is vaguely termed Animism. As in the case of other Naga tribes, the Lothas also have a vague conception of a Supreme Being.

Religion permeates all aspects of life. In the traditional tribal society, there were no irreligious people. The tribal religion does not have written creeds to be recited: instead, the creeds are contained in the hearts and minds of the people and therefore, each one, family, clan and village is a living creed. In short, for the tribals, religion exists within the whole system of their being. It is basically a community religion, and to do so involves the active participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. Therefore, in the tribal religion, an individual life and the community life are inseparable.¹

1. A. Wati Longchar. The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity. Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, 1995, p. 6.

The word 'animism' is derived from the Latin 'anima' meaning 'breath', hence carries with it the idea of soul and spirit. According to Edward Taylor, soul is a fundamental concept of tribal religion. In Taylor's view, it is a belief that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by souls or spiritual beings. Accordingly, hills, trees, rocks, streams, oceans, certain animals, each have a radiant soul.² In the olden days, the conception of Supreme Being among the Lothas, is however, not clear. But the deities that existed cannot be altogether forgotten. They called it Oyak Potso or God of sky and Liko Potso or God of Earth. It is believed that these Potsos are omni present and therefore watchful, punished the wrong doers and blesses who pleased them. Therefore, no one dares to do wrong against the will of the deity.³ According to Yisao Odyuo,⁴ the Supreme Being of the ancient Lotha religion is known as Niroshan. He had a son called Tongtikikho, who performed every duty as entrusted by his father. It is said that on certain special occasion he visited the villages and participated in the ceremonies and rituals.

2. Ibid., p. 9.

3. N.T. Ngullie, Kyong Tathi Juli, (The Lotha Naga Customs and Culture), Wokha, 1994, p. 17.

4. Cassette recorded on 3.7.82 at Bhandari.

Deities and Spirits

The nearest equivalent to gods is an order of beings called Potso, and thus it is the common name for god. The only Potsos who affect us are those in the world immediately above our sky. It is believed that just as the Lothas have their Potsos, so the other tribes of the Nagas. The language of Potsos is different from that of men. Potsos are believed to visit the earth from time to time and hold conversation with the village seer or ratsen. It is said that they send a servant ahead who appears to the ratsen in a dream and tells him that his master's will come on such and such a day. Till he comes nothing must be killed in the ratsen's house. Secondly, ratsen must not go outside the village land. Thirdly, must not indulge in sexual intercourse. Fourthly, must not eat the flesh of anything killed after he received the warning, though he may eat meat dried before.⁵

When potsos are expected best 'madhu' and some other eatable things are kept ready. On the night when the potsos are expected all in the village must go to bed early and shut their doors. The ratsen himself sleeps in a separate room from the rest of his family. The potsos then come and speak to him in a voice which no one else can hear, and show him symbolical articles from which the future can be foretold. In the morning

5. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 114.

the marks of the spear butts of the potsos and their servants can be seen outside the ratsen's door. This belief seems to show that the potsos are regarded as coming in material form.

According to Mills, Nchumo, the ratsen of Elumyo village was visited by potsos in April 1919, with many symbolical articles. Nchumo reported that two potsos came with fourteen attendants and brought with them reeds, meaning sunny weather, part of a railway carriage, meaning elephants would give trouble, two loads of dark blue thread, meaning that some one would die, and a broom, meaning that wind would damage the crops.⁶ The day after a village is visited by Potsos is kept as an emung (genna) both by the village to which they came and by its neighbours. It is said that, formerly if any village was visited in this way all Lotha villages, however, distant, kept one day's emung when they heard the news. Apart from special ceremonies performed to appease or gain the favour of the Ronsis, Sukhyingo and such - like godlings, it is to the potsos that prayers are offered in sacrifices. It is interesting to note here that, the polished stone celts which are sometimes found in the fields are regarded as thunderbolts and are called 'Potso Pvü' (God's axes). The long flat seed-case, too, of a certain tree is called 'Potsotsitüm' (God's weaving sword).

6. Ibid.

The spirit and spirits

Belief in the existence of the spirit and spirits occupies the core of the tribal religion. Because of belief in many spirits, the tribal religion has been categorised by many anthropologists, sociologist and Christian missionaries as animism. Unfortunately, it has created a negative impression that all the spirits believed by the tribals are malevolent, mischievous and dangerous.⁷ That is not true. The tribals and so also the Lothas believe in the existence of both a benevolent spirit and other malevolent spirits.

(a) The benevolent spirit is generally thought to be the spirit responsible for the welfare and prosperity of humans. The spirit not only creates but also sustains and controls the earth. Thus the spirit is worshipped and sacrifices are offered not because of fear, but is worshipped out of reverence and love. Thus the spirit must be worshipped through proper sacrifices.

(b) The malevolent spirits are always thought to be dangerous and destructive to human affairs. It is believed that all forms of human sufferings such as damage of properties, disease, accidents of various kinds and madness are

7. A. Wati Longchar, The Tribal Religious Traditions (In North East India), Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, 1991, p. 13.

attributed to these spirits. Because of these negative elements associated with the spirits, people had to offer sacrifices of domestic animals, food etc.⁸ To quote Alice B. Child,

Such offering seems at once an acknowledgement of indebtedness, an expression of gratitude, and a petition for future help. The net effect is to bring the supernatural firmly into the real social world of everyday life. 9

If this is not done, it is believed that the spirits are likely to harm them. Thus worship of spirits and sacrifices to the malevolent spirits played an integral part in the tribal religious system.

Besides, the tribal people give respect to the ancestor spirits. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors never depart from the family members, and are often invoked for help and welfare of the living members of the family and clan. It is believed that the ancestor spirits come and help and also share in all difficult moments. As Child says, "The ancestral spirits acting on their own are the source of help and protection."¹⁰ In all their major festivals, a portion of food is offered to them.

8. Ibid., p. 40.

9. Alice B. Child of Irvin L. Child. Religion and Magic in the Life of Traditional Peoples, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1993, p. 41.

10. Ibid., p. 44.

The following are the most important spirits:

Sikyingo

Sikyingo is regarded as the lord of wild animals, which he keeps just as men keep pigs and cattles. Sometimes he can be heard calling the wild pig and other animals, but to hear him is very unlucky. He lives in the jungle and it is said that, is like a small man, with his head twisted to one side. By his favour men have luck in hunting.

Ngazo

Ngazo is another jungle spirit, identical with Sikyingo but the function is different.

At this juncture it is worthwhile to mention the Lotha folk story, how Sikyingo's neck got twisted and men have luck in hunting while Ngazo is not. The story goes like this, one day Sikyingo and Ngazo went to dig for bamboo rats. Sikyingo caught many, but Ngazo, though he dug all day, only got one. Then Ngazo said to Sikyingo, "I have only caught this and you have caught so many", and showed him the rat. Then Sikyingo replied: "Even that you only got because I gave it to you." To which Ngazo replied, "What, I have dug out this rat after digging all day and you say you gave it to me!" "Then let it go", said Sikyingo, "and see whether I gave it to you or not." So Ngazo let it go as Sikyingo said, but the rat burrowed into

the ground, and Ngazo, though he dug and dug after it, could not catch it again. Then said Sikyingo, "you say I did not give it to you and yet you cannot dig it out!" At these words Ngazo became angry and they resorted to wrestling, and Ngazo twisted Sikyingo's neck. That is why, Sikyingo can only look one way. Men say to this day that a hunter towards whom Sikyingo looks is sure to get something, but that he from whom Sikyingo's face is turned away will get nothing at all.¹¹

It is believed that there is another Sikyingo called Okisikyingo or "house Sikyingo". It is the good genius of the house. He is like a man, but has enormously long fingers and is spotted all over. It is said that he is only seen by men in delirium. So long as he is in a good temper his influence is good, but he can be harmful if due respect is not shown him.¹²

Ronsi

A deity of harvest. To every village and every man is attached a Ronsi, by whose favour the crops are good and have a wealthy harvest. It is said that making fire with enough smoke which indicates the inviting of Ronsi the spirit who blesses for more harvests.¹³ No one has ever seen one or knows what one is like to look at.

11. J.P. Mills, Folk Stories in Lotha Naga, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, Ed. and Revised Ed. 1987, p. 96.

12. Yisao Odyuo - Interview recorded on 3.7.82 at Bhandari.

13. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 33.

Just as wild game and crops have their genii, so have the rivers and streams in Tchüpvüo (lit. Otchu - water, and Opvüo - owner or master) or 'water-master', who lives at the bottom of deep pools. It is said that small offerings are made to him by some village after the Oyantsoa ceremony.

Tsungramvü

In other words it is known as evil spirit. The spirit who causes sickness in the human body. Chicken eggs, ginger and many others are offered to this spirit to cure the sickness. As Epao says, "sacrifices are being made to appease the harmful spirits."¹⁴ The springs (water spring) and other empty and hallow places and also lakes are suspected to be abode of this spirit.

Monkumvü or Nungkumvü

Monkumvü or Nungkumvü is the spirit which can be seen with the human eyes in some occasions, and its speeches are very often heard by human being. It is said that this spirit speaks all kinds of languages and dialects. This spirit used to carry human beings away from their homes to unknown destinations in the jungle, especially towards rivers. They never allow the human being fall while carrying them through

14. Veprari Epao, From Naga Animism to Christianity, Sanyivan Press, New Delhi, p. 61.

steep places. The human being never gets injured even if he is thrown from the top of the trees to the ground by these spirits. They travel from one place to another carrying their victim for many days without any food and drink but never allow their victim to die in their hands. The victim is sometimes fed with snails, it is said. It is believed that this spirit stays in the jungle especially in the foggy jungles. It is also said that this Monkumvu, the jungle spirit, carries a bag with him in which lies his supernatural power. If any one seizes the bag the spirit would very often go and ask for that bag unless and until it is given back to him.¹⁵

It is clear the spirits are, in general, of two types one benevolent and the other malevolent. In order to appease these spirits sacrifices are offered by the forefathers. It is believed that as long as these spirits are in good temper and happy they are blessed in every activity and health. But when the spirits are not kept in happy and proper sacrifices are not offered it is likely to harm them. Nowadays, with the spread of Christianity sacrifices are not offered to these spirits though people still have the belief that the spirits exist and sometimes do harm to human beings. Instead of rituals and sacrifices Christians offer prayer to God for His help.

15. District Gazetteer, p. 33.

The Soul and Life After Death

Tribal people conceive of soul as resemble to human, having personality, although by its nature, it is invisible and etherial. In each person a soul is endwelt and it is the soul that enable a person complete being. The Lotha usually regards himself as having two distinct souls called respectively Omon and Nongyi. The Omon, which is visible in the form of the man's shadow and shows its good sense by disappearing into him when the sky is cloudy and rain threatens, leaves the man sometime before death in cases of serious illness. It may just wander about, in which case it can often be induced by the proper ceremonies to return, or it may go straight along the Road of the Death to the next world, in which case the man dies.

This belief can be further illustrated by giving an example, narrated to Mills by a Riphyim man. The man said,

The Road of the Dead in our village runs past the Chumbo (Morung) in which I used to sleep. One night when I was lying awake I heard someone go stumbling past towards Wokha Hill, groaning as he went. Then I heard him say, "Oh, oh, I cannot walk," and recognised the voice of my brother-in-law, who was very ill. I was frightened and shouted and woke all in the Chumbo. My brother-in-law died next day, for his soul (Omon) had already gone ahead. 16

16. J. P. Mills, The Lotha Naga, p. 118.

Wati writes, like the living beings, the soul is also subjected to pain and suffering caused by external influences. It is said that when a person gets sick or comes under the influence of an evil spirit, his/her soul also suffers. The soul and physical body are inseparably related to each other. Though both have distinct personality.¹⁷

The mongyi leaves a man at the moment of death and goes straight to the world of the dead, where it joins the Omon which had already gone on ahead. "At death, it is believed to leave the body like a thin gush of wind through the mouth or the nostril."¹⁸

The Nagas and so also the Lothas believe in life after death and the abode of the dead. However, the idea of the abode of souls varies from tribe to tribe. The soul of the dead goes to the abode of the dead on the very day of his burial. It is believed that the journey towards the land of the dead begins after burial. It seems that the soul remains at home until burial (Mongyi, in the case of the Lothas). Because of this belief the dead body is usually disposed off before the sunset to enable the soul of the dead to reach the abode.¹⁹ Almost all Nagas agree that the souls of the deceased

17, A. Wati Longchar, The Tribal Religious Traditions, p. 92.

18. Ibid.

19. V. Epao, op.cit., p. 84.

go to the 'Land of the Dead': Some think that the stars are the souls of the dead who for unknown reasons went to the sky instead of going to the Land of the Dead. Another view is that the souls of the dead go under the Wokha Hill in Lotha territory.²⁰ Hutton in his writings mentions that good souls go to a village of the Dead 'towards sunrise and the bad to a less pleasant place towards the sunset.' There is also belief that the soul becomes butterflies or other insects.²¹

A curious belief, apparently at variance with all their beliefs as to dead men walking to the Land of the Dead, is held by Lothas in common with Semas and Aos. It is that if a man kills a flying squirrel during his life, at his death his soul will fly to that land under the shelter of the wings of the soul of the squirrel. Therefore, no member of a household in which death has occurred may take the life of any creature, whether animal, bird, or insect, till the days of 'genna' are accomplished and the soul has finally left, in case the creature killed should be the dead man in another form.* It is said that the Land of the Dead lies under our world and has the bottom of our world for a sky, just as our world lies under the world of the Potsos (Gods). There the

20. P.T. Philip, The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland, p. 44.

21. J.H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas, p. 211.

* The Aos have a similar belief, vide J.P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, p. 228.

dead lives exactly as men live here, those who have done good deeds here being rich and happy, and those who have done evil deeds being poor and miserable. In this connection, Wati writes thus,

The status of soul after death, is determined by the actions in this world. Those who disregarded the social, ethical and religious norms are punished after death. They are put to a place where they suffer by many miseries.... But these people who live a selfless life towards fellow humans are rewarded after death. 22

Life in the Land of the Dead is certainly not regarded as everlasting but the Lotha is very vague as to what the next stage is - the truth being that he does not worry himself about the matter. One theory is that men die again and become flies. Another is that every man passes through nine successive lives and then ceases to exist. Still other thinks that he goes to the land of the dead and be merry with friends around who are already there. But nowadays, with the coming of Christianity and conversion to it, it is believed that the Christians have to choose only one road of the two, one leading to Heaven and the other to Hell.

22. A. Wati Longchar, The Tribal Religious Traditions, p. 93.

Magic and Religion

The term 'magic' has been defined in various ways by scholars. Magic according to H. Presler, is "a system of imaginary laws of cause and effect, supposed to operate regularly through spell and ritual, which are handed down by tradition, and which presume to manipulate the impersonal power of Mana.*"²³ For Stephen Fuchs, magic is "the art of manipulating the force of nature by certain techniques and formulae that are outside of nature and if the art is correctly applied the results are supposed to be infallible."²⁴ Hence, we may say that magic is an ability to produce miraculous work with the help of certain spirits who are controlled for such purpose.

Here it may be shown with an example, the magical sacrifices practised by the Lotha forefathers. It is said that when a person remains sick for a long time, his spirit is called back by offering sacrifices. For it is believed that the spirit has wandered. The process is like this, a village seer is called and a white chicken is cut, where water is already poured in a clean plate. Then, while observing the water minutely, the sacrificial rite is being performed and in

* In short, it is defined as supernatural power.

23. H. Presler, Primitive Religion in India, (Madras: CLS, 1971), p. 13.

24. Stephen Fuchs, Origin of Religion, (Alwaye: Pontifical Institute of Theology & Philosophy, 1975), p. 68.

the process the sick man's spirit is invoked. At this moment, it is said that, if the water in the plate shakes by itself it is believed that the spirit has come back and drank the water, and sick man improves slowly.²⁵ Another instance is that of the Lotha women's dance invoking the spirit of rain to avert drought. It is said that this dance by women at night is a kind of sacred dance to induce rain. This 'magical dance' is performed by women only, to save the agricultural crops from drought.

Religious Officials

In the olden days in every Lotha village there was priest (Pvuti), his assistants and other minor religious officials for various social and religious ceremonies. The priest of the village who takes the leading part in all ceremonies concerned with the welfare of the whole community is called by the northern Lothas Pvuti and by the southern Puki. The Pvuti, which is commonly called, has his assistant known as Yingae or Yinga. Few men are eager to accept the post of Pvuti, which is a risky one, for verbal mistakes in the ceremonies may call down divine displeasure on the officiant and the whole community, on the sudden death of the Pvuti, the assistant takes up the post, thus awkward interregnum is avoided, for in the

25. Told by Rev. N.T. Murry on 14.4.95.

absence of a Pvuti public ceremonies cannot be performed. Later the village elders meet and discuss the question of his successor. Ordinarily, the man in the village who has done most social 'gennas' is chosen, provided he is otherwise qualified for the post.

The Pvuti assistant or Yinga accompanies him at all ceremonies and carries his load and "is appointed for life".²⁶ He receives a share of meat at all 'gennas' and one small basket of rice from every house in the village once a year.

Apart from the priest and his assistant certain individuals are selected from among the people bound for the new village. It includes limoro etssephoe (a person to nip off a branch), Woko-ejong (piercer of pig), Hono-ehoe (chicken strangler), müngpen (carries of corpse), Phyali-efung (lot-caster), müngtso-müngyi (dream interpreter) and so on.²⁷ This minor religious officials were given the right to perform and exercise their task in the society with relation to the field for which they were selected and assigned. The religious officials of the ancient Lotha religion are no more found in the society due to the influence of Christianity. They are now replaced by the pastors, deacons and other church leaders.

26.. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Naga, p. 126.

27. Y.M. Humtsoe. Presented a paper on "Chumbo (Morung) - Its Importance in Lotha Society". Organized by the History Department, NEHU, 11 September 1982, p. 4.

Ceremonies

Besides the ceremonies intimately connected with agriculture which have already been described, there are certain other public ceremonies of a more general character. In all the ceremonies Pvuti is the central figure as he used to performed the ceremonies under his initiative. The agricultural year begins with the Pikhuchak 'genna', but before it is performed the omens for the whole village are taken at a ceremony called Siroesi.

The word Siroesi can neither be translated literally nor defined in a single sentence. At this ceremony the elderly men from Khels and clans lead by the Pvuti go down to a place outside the village fence with meat and soko (rice beer). They sit down and pray that their enemies may make peace and come and eat with them, that tigers may not kill their cattle nor hawks their chickens, and that the village may flourish and grow big. They also pray for more blessing in the year to come. After which the Pvuti sees the omen for coming year through the two eggs they have taken along with them. The process is like this, in a particular place they would place the eggs and observe carefully what type of insects come near the eggs. The future is really believed to be revealed by the kinds of insects which are caught near the egg. Caterpillar and spider mean tiger will frequent in the village,

grasshopper mean more blessing in hunting and fishing. Small white insects show that the crops will be poor, and so on.²⁸ When a few insects have been caught, and their significance has been expounded by the Pvuti and old men, all go home.

Then comes the Pikhuchak 'genna'. It marks the beginning of the agricultural year or in any case it must be done before the rice is sown. This ceremony is to induce the deity for better agricultural seasons.²⁹ After the crops are sown different ceremonies follow and the agricultural year closes with Tokhu ceremony. This is a kind of thanksgiving ceremony to God for His blessings. After this the engaged males in the village are allowed to marry. It is because of this reason the Tokhu ceremony is also known as Loroe Tokhu or 'lady festival'. At this festival friendships are strengthened, misunderstandings are cemented and the dead ones are also remembered.

Individual Ceremonies

There are many ceremonies when individuals can perform but the three main classes may, however, be considered here, namely those performed regularly for the general welfare of the household, those which are connected with illness, and

28. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 58.

29. Ibid., p. 90.

those social 'genna' on which the status of the individual Lotha depends.

A 'genna' called Potsoekhüm or 'present to the God' is performed every year, or oftener in case of sickness by every household. The regular time for it is just before the new harvest are done. The ceremony starts with the killing of a small pig of either sex inside the house by the master of the house. After which, many formalities are followed but the central focus of this 'genna' is to ensure (a) good health among the family members, and (b) good harvest during the ensuing agricultural year. The ceremony of Epo-Etha is connected with the traditional migration history of the Lothas. The story goes that during the period when the Lothas were living inside the cave or underground world Khohamo or Rankhandan ate several human beings. Therefore one day, the villagers decided to migrate from that world and at last reached the overground world passing through a small hole. Unfortunately, Rankhandan or Khohamo had branch-like horn due to which he could not pass through the hole and was left behind. Having no alternative, Rankhandan told the migrating villagers, to begin agricultural year by offering sacrifices in his name for better crops and harvest. Therefore, it is said that, in the olden days, the forefathers offered sacrifices comprising of several things in his name. This sacri-

ficial ceremony was performed before the ensuing agricultural year by every Lotha household or at least before the seeds are sown.³⁰

Another important ceremony is performed at the time of illness. A Lotha when sick usually attributes his illness to the malice of an evil spirit (tsungrhamvü). In any case a ratsen and montsae or soul caller is involved. After the completion of necessary formalities the ceremony began by calling out the name of sick man and the sick man's soul comes back or any foreign matter that are present in the body are removed. The montsae's fee for the ceremony is said to be one small basket of rice.

A person sufferings from intermittent fever of some similar slight ailment gets rid of it as follows. He gets up from his seat in his house and puts any bits of rubbish, into an old carrying basket. Taking up this load he says aloud, "I am going out to get some things." Having reached the outskirts of the village he hangs his load on a bush and says, "watch this; I am coming back very soon." He then leaves the load with the illness watching it, as he thinks, and returns to his house by another path.³¹ All these practices seemed supersti-

30. Pimomo Kikoh, Kyong Motsu Eram Tsukona Ndangshon Yi Tara. (Precaution about the writings of Lotha History), Wokha Town, 1994, pp. 3-4.

31. J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, p. 136.

tions and meaningless to many but the strong and sincere belief of the animists in their religion made them infallible.

The Nagas though they differ widely in their culture, have like most peoples a medical practice of their own. There are four distinguishable common methods of treatment - (1) propitiation by ceremonies of unknown spirits which are responsible for disease, (2) the exercise of disease by the magical arts of the professional healer, (3) the cure or avoidance of ailments by the consumption of certain foods or use of certain specifics which can work on principles which only be termed magical, and (4) the use of surgical methods or specifics which have empirically been found useful.³²

A part from employing various methods and sacrifices to cure different ailments the forefathers also applied various traditional methods to relieve from physical sufferings. They also applied various herbal medicines etc. to cure and to prevent different types of ailment and sickness. Few examples can be given in this context. Naga surgery appears to be primitive in the extreme. The Lhotas (Lothas) rely for many forms of pain such as sprains and inflammation, on the practice of cupping. The poison known to the Lothas

32. S.C. Roy (Ed.), Man in India, Vol. VII, April-September, Nos. 2 & 3, 1927, Ranchi, p. 63.

appears to be pounded root of the Rhisa creeper, which has a very strong smell and so it cannot be secretly administered. For burns, the leaves of Woropendong or Mirimozu burnt to ashes and plastered on the affected skin. For diarrhoea, the berries of the Yenkhoti chewed. For emetic, a diet of roast goat's hoof or the gall of a cow or pig. For sore eyes, chicken and rats' dung whipped up in water and drunk. For Leech bites, a decoction of the leaves of sangsevo (*drymaria cordata*). An infusion of the bark of Nungatsung as protection for pox or skin complaints. For stomachache, the dried upper stomach of a porcupine drunk in water. An infusion of the bark of Nashitung (*Herepernum Cheloncides*) or Yenkhodong drunk and so on.³³ The medicinal knowledge of the Naga, however, is of great interest, at least as showing the extent to which such knowledge may be naturally acquired by a people lacking contact with western or any other science. It may be mentioned here that no matter how the methods used and knowledge be backward or primitive, most of the traditional methods applied and medicine administered are still found among the people.

Social 'Gennas'

Naga 'religion is not a moral code. It is a system of ceremonies', says P.T. Philip.³⁴ Avoidance of forbidden acts

33. Ibid., pp. 64-67.

34. Op.cit., p. 39.

on days of prohibition is most important. The day of prohibition is called 'genna'. It also means practically holiday - for some unnatural things happened in the village etc. 'Gennas' are observed for the benefit of the individual, household, clan, village, members of a certain age group or sex group as the occasion may arise. Strict observance of 'genna' is absolutely necessary for, health, wealth and progress of the individual and the community. Breaking 'genna' brings a curse. When the 'genna' is declared people are to abstain from normal work and avoid contact with the outside world. People from other villages are not allowed to come and visit the village observing 'genna', certain genna's prohibit sexual acts. 'Gennas' are periodically recurred as in the case of agricultural operation such as jhumming, sowing and harvesting or they arise out of special occasions, natural calamities like storm, earthquake etc. unnatural death such as death by wild animals, lightning, falling from a tree or cliff, drowning, child birth, and suicide. 'Gennas' are also observed on occasions such as fishing, hunting etc. Those who met with unnatural death are believed to be the victims of some spirits or divine displeasure. People will not speak to members of their family for a given period. Their properties are taboo and are never used. Consciously or unconsciously the observance of 'genna' asserts publicly the solidarity and identity of the members of the village etc. and restore their unity.

The social 'gennas' play an enormously important part in Lotha life. Beginning from the first small 'genna' they increase in costliness and importance till the ceremony at which two stones are dragged is reached. Almost every one of them entitles the doer to wear a distinctive cloth. The wealth and consequently the importance of a man is gauged by the number of these social 'gennas' he has done, for the Lotha, like all Nagas, is a great respecter of wealth. It is, therefore, the ambition of every man to perform the full series if he possibly can. The first, second, third, and fourth social 'gennas' respectively are known as Ozhutana, Shishang or as the southern Lothas call it Ozhuyua, Etha and Tsirotsoala.

Then comes the stone-dragging ceremony. At the first ceremony one stone is dragged, and at the second, third, and so on, two stones are dragged. There is a limit to the number of times the stone-dragging ceremony may be done, which varies in different villages, but it is so rarely reached that it practically exists only in theory. It is said that there lived a famous man in Lotha area who has reached the limit of stone dragging is Mhunchumo of Pangti who has dragged twenty five stones.³⁵ The only course open to him now if he wishes to do any more social 'gennas' is to 'become a boy again' and sleep in the Chumbo (Morung) and begin the whole series again.

35. Told by Thungmomo Ngullie of Pangti on 9.1.94.

Feasting and drinking are permitted during 'genna'. At other festivals and ceremonies, eating, drinking, dancing and merry making are in plenty. Visitors and guests are entertained on all occasions except 'genna'.

Birth and Death

In addition to certain social and other taboos which women are forbidden to do at all times, there are certain other things which are prohibited during pregnancy. For instance, neither the woman nor her husband may eat tortoise or she must not even touch. The wife may not eat bear's meat. It is most important that neither the husband nor the wife should kill a snake during this time. Were they to do so the expected child would have a tremulous tongue. Some pregnant women even object to a snake being killed in their presence. It is also forbidden to an expectant mother to cut her hair. At the time of delivery the woman lies on her side and is attended to by an old midwife.³⁶ Nowadays she is also attended by doctors and trained nurses. The husband and elderly female relations may be also present.

The moment the child is born, it is given a name other than the real name. This is to deceive the evil spirits who may be listening at the door. The real name is given on the

36. Told by Chiborao and Chumbemo of Longsa on 29.1.92.

fifth day, if a girl, and on the sixth day if a boy. It is also to mention here that, if he is a boy a cock is killed and if a girl, a hen is killed, right after the child is born. The meat is also known as Ethihan or Epokhan. It is to be eaten only by the new-born baby mother, her husband and the midwife who helped in the delivery. 'Genna' is also observed for some days and at this time mother remained inside the house and strangers and guests are not allowed to come inside the house.³⁷ After some days, the child is taken to the village well, the family field and to relatives to invoke prosperity. It is also said that during the observance of 'genna' freshly killed meat too must not be brought into the house. For these days the child is regarded as in a sense still in the process of being born. There are simple family rites for the first hair cut and piercing of the ear and other ceremonies and rites are followed. At the time of naming ceremony some elderly people were invited and an old lady holding the new born baby and prays for the prosperity of the child.³⁸ Christians do not observe all the 'gennas' or rules and do as they like or as the most modern people do. However, they observe the naming ceremony where they invite pastors and deacons and they pray for the welfare of the child and name her/him according to the choice of the parents.

37. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 49.

38. Ibid., p. 50.

As and when death occurs the nearest relation present closes the eyes and washes the face of the corpse. A sacrifice immediately follows of a chicken which is then hung above the corpse on the position of its face, and it is necessary that its wings are kept on the wall of the house until after burial. The meat is either thrown away or given to the buriers (mungpen) to eat. If the deceased was influential, a dog is tied to the hand of the corpse for sometime and the dog is killed after the burial in order that it may go barking down the Road of the Dead and frighten away the ghosts of enemies and tigers slain by the dead man during his life time. Some coffin of rich men have certain typical representation of wood carving like hornbills head and tail etc. In some cases, the deceased is armed with weapons to be capable of fighting against evil spirits which seeks to obstruct the soul in its journey to the land of the dead.³⁹ The Lothas bury their dead. The funeral takes place as soon after death as possible, the grave being dug within a pace or two of the front door of the house. A fire is often kept burning for several days over a man's grave after his burial, and flowers are very often put up over it.⁴⁰ But it so happens that those who died of accidents or unnatural death are buried outside the village.⁴¹

39. Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 38.

40. Verrier Elwin (Ed.), The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century, (Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 352.

41. Interviewed Ekyimsao Ngully of Niroyo on 13.2.92.

It is said that when a baby died they are mostly buried inside the house out of love by the parents.⁴² If a woman dies in childbirth, her body is taken out of a doorway out through the back side of the house, and never through the main door. Only the priest and the husband attend the funeral.⁴³ Unlike many other Naga tribes like Angami, Ao, etc. feasting in the funeral time is not practised by the Lothas. Funeral ceremonies of the Lothas also depends or varies from person to person, according to position and social status of the deceased during his life time. Christian burials are different and governed by Christian ceremonies.

Encounter of Christianity with the Animist

The Nagas were untouched by modern civilization until the late 19th century. The only connection with the outside world was with the plains of Assam where little trade was carried on with them.

It was during these times that Christians encountered the Naga animists. With Clark's encouragement the first encounter was made in 1871, when an Assamese evangelist, by the name Godhula, arrived at a village called Dekahaimong (now called Molongkimong) and preached the gospel. Godhula was followed

42. N.T. Ngullie, op.cit., p. 24.

43. P.T. Philip, op.cit., p. 41.

during the next year by Dr. and Mrs. E.W. Clark of the American Baptist Missionary Union. Mrs. Clark declared, about Godhula's encountering the Naga animists with the Gospel:

In the failure of their own gods to give them help, they were all the more ready to listen concerning Him who Godhula told them, was the bread of life. The great straits to which this village was reduced was thus under God the occasion by which a man was found in the plains as guide, and a door was opened to the hearts of the people. 44

Certainly, some important factors facilitated the spread of Christianity. Notable ones may be mentioned here:

- (a) Though British officials sometimes came in conflict with the missionary policy, they directly or indirectly supported missionary work by establishing roads and communication, issuing laws to stop head-hunting and establishing schools.
- (b) The Naga community life made it easier to apply Christian principles. In no few cases group decisions were made for the acceptance of Christian faith.
- (c) More importantly, beside animism, there were no strong religions, such as Hinduism or Islam, to oppose the spread of Christianity. 45

44. M.M. Clark, A Corner in India, Gauhati, Rpt., 1978, p. 12.

45. Akumla Longkumer, Revival in Nagaland: Facts or Fallacy? Aolijon, Mokokchung, 1986, p. 11.

In the Lotha area the first mission headquarter was opened at Wokha, which was the third Naga mission centre after Impur (Mokokchung) and Kohima. Their development came in the year 1885 and the first missionary was W.E. Witter.⁴⁶ Later, necessity of having separate mission compound was felt and therefore a plot of land for the purpose was acquired from the Wokha villagers, known as Vankhosung, located just close to Wokha town. Dr. Bailey, a missionary in Ao area came to Wokha in 1928 and bought an area of 32 acres from the villagers, which came to be known as Vankhosung Mission compound,⁴⁷ a mission centre of the Lothas.

In those days the missionary work was not an easy one. They had to face stiff resistance from the people. In spite of problems and difficulties they began to see good result. The first converts from Lotha were two young men, Nkhao from Yikhum village and Shanrio from Tsungiki village, who were baptized by Haggard at Impur on 2nd October, 1898. Both were orphans and were students at the Impur Mission school. Within few years more converts and baptized followed one of these Shanchamo of Yikhum played an active part in the early history of the Lotha church. Later he became the first Naga to visit

46. F.S. Downs, The Mighty Works of God, Gauhati, 1971, pp. 60-70.

47. L.M. Murry, Nagaland Adventure 1947-53, Howard and Harriet Houston, Kohima, p. 5.

Palestine and America,⁴⁸ in the first decade of the 20th century.

From time to time, converts suffered different forms of persecution at the hands of the non-converts. Evangelists were not welcomed in the villages and anyone who was discovered discussing the Christian way with them was under suspicion.⁴⁹ It was between the years 1907 and 1909, R.B. Longwell made a trip to the Lotha village⁵⁰ and while he was at Wokotso village, it was learned that there was a plot to kill both the missionary and the Christians. Longwell escaped during the night and the government took action against the plotters but this did not protect the Christians from other forms of persecution.⁵¹ For instance, Rikhyo the first Christian from his village (Longsa), had to face opposition from his father, the headman. The furious father said,

No longer will I give you rice and clothes for school, and not one rupee for school books if you remain a Christian! The son replied, 'I am a Christian and nothing you do can change my mind'.⁵²

The leading men of the village felt disgraced that one

48. F.S. Downs, op.cit., p. 126.

49. Katherine L. Read (Ed.), The Church of Stone Foundations, New York, 1955, p. 4.

50. M.S. Sangma, History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India, Vol. I, Delhi, 1987, p. 251.

51. F.S. Downs, op.cit., pp. 126-27.

52. Katherine L. Read, op.cit., p. 6.

of their members had forsaken the worship of their forefathers. They ridiculed Rikhyo who was the only one to remain in the village on Sundays when all others went to their fields to work: "Ho! ho! ho! Rikhyo is a 'water-drinker' now! Because he does not drink our rice-beer, he has no strength to work in the fields."⁵³ Again there developed problems and misunderstanding between the Christians and the non-Christians in the construction of church. Few cases can be mentioned here. The Christians of Longsa assembled the necessary materials for the construction of the church. One day, when the rest of the villagers were away working in the fields, small primitive building was erected inside the village. At sundown, when the non-Christians returned from their fields, they were furious, and shouted:

We will not have a Christian church in our village! and angrily slashed at the new church with their long-bladed knives. One of the headmen yelled, 'you Christians cannot stay in our village! Get out! Go live in the jungle!' ⁵⁴

At this time the spread of Christianity was resented by the non-Christians, hence building of church inside the village fence was opposed. Therefore, if the Christians wanted a church headman gave permission to construct outside the

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 9.

village fence. Defiance of such order led to misunderstanding and quarrel in the village. An example of such case may be mentioned here. The court case of Shambemo G.B. Vs. Yizamo of Tsungiki is of such nature.

Mokokchung Case No. 34 of 1923 Dated 10th May 1923

The illustration of the case shows, Yizamo who claimed to be the leader of the Christians in Tsungiki village, constructed a church inside the village. As this was not in accordance with the permission given to the Christians by the Gaon Bura, tension arose in the village. This came to the knowledge of the administrative officer at Mokokchung, the case was tried and settled in favour of the complainant, (the Gaon Bura). The church has to be dismantled in ten days and to be rebuilt on the site originally given to them. The verdict is also forwarded to the Rev. Dr. J.R. Bailey, Impur, for information. (The detailed text order is shown in Appendix 1).

By the second decade of the 20th century, the Christian population steadily increased in Tsungiki village and the two section the animists and the Christians were at loggerheads as usual. The situation could not be improved for a long time therefore the converts had to establish a Christian village nearby the old village. Propagation of Christian tenets, gospel, singing hymns or religious songs etc. were

resented by the non-Christians. The difference in observance of 'Gennas' and Emung and other ceremonies widen the gap between the two. (Extract copy from J.P. Mills Tour Diary for the month of June 1923, Appendix 2).

It is necessary to mention here one of the reasons behind the establishment of L. Longidang village in 1927. The Christians and non-Christians could no longer adjust with each other in their religious practices etc. As in the case of community life, the Christians who were in minority, suffered the most. Therefore, the new converts decided that they build a Christian village away from the old village, Akok. The first song to be sung in the new village was Jesu Thungi Roa (come to Jesus).⁵⁵ In this connection, Downs has lucidly put it thus: "When people did become Christians they were driven from their villages and forced to establish new ones."⁵⁶

Similar problems found to be common in Lotha area and in the year 1930 at Pangti village a new Christian 'Khel' was established, arranged by the government. The Gaon Buras of the village were forbidden to offer resistance to any Christians who want to go to the new Khel hereafter.⁵⁷ Further

55. Told by Tenpyomo Murry, Ex-Pastor of L. Longidang, on 23.12.94.

56. F.S. Downs, The Mighty Works of God, p. 127.

57. Interviewed Ryutishan (85) of Pangti at Wokha on 6.2.93.

enquiry, it came to be known that, it was not a khel but a village known as Osa Yan. But due to unknown reason many people died and had to come back to the old village after some years. He also said that during these years, the Christians of Okotso village were fined Rs. 20/- of which Rs. 10/- went to Pangti, for the defiance of government order. The reason was that the Christians of Okotso went twice to Pangti and sung in certain houses. For, this was in contravention of order issued by the government, that they were not to sing without first obtaining the permission of the village Goan Buras.⁵⁸

With the spread of Christianity in almost all the Lotha village, there developed constant clash and misunderstanding between the converts and non-converts, took place. To restore peaceful and conducive environment in the villages between the two sections of the people government passed in 1922, an order regulating relation, between the Christians and the non-Christians. This regulation dealt with the observance of festivals, 'gennas', Emung or holidays etc., which are likely to hurt the sentiments of others. (The government regulation on the matter is shown in Appendix 3).

It is also important to mention here that, for the non-converts Lothas having two or more wives was accepted by

58. Ibid.

the society. But for the converts or Christians it is not sanctioned by the new religion and therefore unacceptable. In the light of this, a man or woman wanting to accept new religion or lead a Christian life is forbidden to have more than one wife or husband. The court case of Yizmo Vs Ndrano of Tsungiki, Mokokchung Case No. 47 of 1923 dated 16.6.1923, is of this case. Yizamo (the complainant), had two wives and as it is not sanctioned by the new religion, hence filed a case in the court to divorce one of them (Ndrano). The verdict was in favour of the complainant. But before he does so and baptised he had to clear off and settle all the dues, if he had not yet been done (Appendix 4).

With the advent of the British into the Lotha area, and the Christian missionaries, especially the American Baptist Missionaries, helped in removing the animistic beliefs. Head-hunting slowly disappeared from the scene. Superstitious and other ancient beliefs were replaced by reason, and rationality in thinking. It cannot be denied that the early missionaries faced innumerable problems and difficulties in their exploratory and pioneering works. Converts were in various forms persecuted at the hands of the animists. With their persistent efforts the missionaries succeeded in their mission. But the role and contribution of the political agents and officers in this regard, cannot be overlooked. As

Clark says, "English political control has just been extended over this tribe, and a sub-divisional officer with a native military force was in command, making this a comparatively safe place for mission work."⁵⁹ In due course many Lothas embraced Christianity and at present in all the 95 villages of the Lothas have churches and the percentage of Christians in Lotha area is estimated to be 98 per cent.⁶⁰

59. M.M. Clark, op.cit., p. 150.

60. General Report File 1994-95, Lotha Baptist Mission Centre, Vankhosung.

CHAPTER VII

IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Towards the Hill tribes, the basic and lone British aim was to bring them under their control. To achieve this aim, they were willing to follow all kinds of policies. The Supreme Government of course desired to achieve this aim through peaceful relations with the tribes. But the tribes were not willing to oblige. Their attitude as reflected in their relations was uniformly antagonistic to the British. The initial response of the tribes was that of unorganized and unsuccessful attempts to ward off the British forces signifying their love of freedom and culture. But once overpowered by the alien force, they gradually though involuntarily acceded to the control of the invaders.

In their efforts to maintain peace and security of their settled districts, however, the British could not follow any consistent policy until 1881 when Naga Hills were brought under a regular system of administration.¹ The government changed its policies from time to time depending on the

1. B.C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteer, Vol. IX, Naga Hills and Manipur, Shillong, 1905, p. 9.

response of the Nagas vis-a-vis the tenability of their tactics. As a matter of fact, the early British policy towards the Nagas may be broadly divided into two periods: the first period covers 1832-1877 during which the British tried to ward off the Nagas from raids into the administered districts of Assam and in the second period, which covers 1877-1880, the government followed a 'forward policy' leading to the final merging of the Hills into the British Indian system of Administration.² The British policy to occupy the Naga Hills was slow but continuous one. Alemchiba is of the view that in 1852, Sir Cecil Beadon, the new Lt. Governor of Bengal, reviewed the whole situation in Naga Hills and found that the policy of non-interference was unsound. Accordingly, he suggested that an Officer should be appointed who should contact the Naga Chiefs and make them responsible for the good behaviour of the tribes. This suggestion while going through official consultations, was delayed, so far as translation into actual practice was concerned. However, Colonel Hopkinson, the Chief Commissioner of Assam also expressed a similar opinion, he suggested the appointment of a British Officer who should be posted at Samaguting and make peaceful contacts with the Nagas without taking direct control of their

2. Ibid.

country.³ Meanwhile, after ten years the policy to be followed towards the Nagas again came under review, for the prestige and credibility of the British Administration to advance into the hills. To this Hopkinson and Beadon, Colonel and Lt. Governor respectively declared, "to reassert our authority over the Nagas, and bring them under a system of administration suited to their circumstances and gradually to reclaim them from habits of lawlessness to those of order and civilization."⁴

In the beginning, it was not an easy task for the government to establish an ordered administration. As was reported in Assam Census of 1901.

the Nagas showed extraordinary persistence in their resistance to our arms and no less than three political officers came to a violent end, two being killed by the hillmen and one being accidentally shot by his own sentry, and it was not till 1881 that the district was finally pacified. 5

With the recommendation of transfer of administrative headquarters from Samaguting to Wokha in 1875 by the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Keatinge and subsequent establishment of

3. M. Alemchiba, A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland, pp. 64-65.

4. Piketo Sema, British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, p. 9.

5. B.C. Allen, Census of Assam 1901, Vol. I, Rpt., New Delhi, 1984, p. 2.

the same, made easier, to control the Lothas and the neighbouring tribes who frequently raided the plains. It was in the same year in December, Captain Butler, the Deputy Commissioner, while leading the survey party, was killed in an ambushade at the village of Pangti, a Lotha Naga village. The very next day, Lieutenant Woodtrope, who was incharge of the survey, promptly burnt Pangti, and the neighbouring villages remaining friendly, the work of the survey was carried on to completion, without much resistance.⁶ As Mackenzie says,

The attitude of the tribes during the year 1880-81 was one partly of exhaustion and partly of expectancy. The indirect results of the war were far more grievous to them than the actual hostilities; and those on whom the blow had fallen hoped, by quiet and peaceable demeanour, to earn some relaxation in the stringency of the conditions to which they were bound. Accordingly, throughout the year there was little or no crime, no outbreak, and no necessity to employ force.⁷

From the assumption of active administration in 1881 to the transfer of power in 1947, the British administered Naga Hills as a frontier district of Assam. During this intervening period, British administration concentrated on the maintenance of law and order in this border district. The establishment of peaceful conditions in Naga Hills was a

6. A. Mackenzie, The North-East Frontier of India, Delhi, Reprint, 1981, p. 129.

7. Ibid., p. 141.

gradual process which went on steadily throughout the period along with the extension of colonial rule and administration. The British directed their policies primarily towards practical and pressing problems such as the establishment of law and order, the foundation of administrative system and the dispensing of justice, and not the least, the raising of the revenue necessary for the discharge of the function of the government.⁸ At the same time British policy was not that of imposing a European model of administration, but of establishing the rule of law for the security of colonial interests. Accordingly, the existing native institutions which had no contradiction with their policy or interests were left undisturbed.⁹ Nevertheless, certain natural by-products of British rule - the development of road communications, introductions of education and Christianity, etc. had significant transforming impact on the Nagas and so on the Lothas as well.

Colonial administration and its impact on Village Polity

British occupation of the Lotha area introduced no significant basic changes in the administration of the "village-states".* They were mostly left to continue to rule

8. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 22.

9. V. Elwin, Nagaland, Shillong, 1961, p. 8.

* 'Village-States' means each village living independent of the others.

and administer their villages according to their customs and traditions. Conversely, while the techniques of control and administration remained informal, native system of administration functioned under British paramountcy. This popular technique of administration served the dual purpose of keeping the village authority free to govern themselves in their traditional ways and at the same time immensely reduced the responsibility of the government from the detailed and costly affairs of administration. Thus, the British adopted the system of native administration which would suit local tastes and at the same time be conducive to the maintenance of law and order among the Lothas. It cannot be denied that the same policy was applied by the British in different parts of tribal areas in the region. As Piketo writes, "this system ensured social continuity and at the same time facilitated the acceptance of British rule."¹⁰

In pursuance of the same policy objective, the government readily used the existing institutions based on local customs and traditions. It made no attempt to introduce any measures based on the alien concepts leading to an elaborate administrative system which might estrange the local population. Thus, the native leadership consisting of village Headman and his assistants was empowered to supervise and

10. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 29.

maintain law and order in consonance with their established tribal customs and traditions. The village headman or chief became the agent of the colonial administration. This system of administration was uniform all over the district. It may be recalled that, with the occupation of Naga Hills by the British the whole of the administered hill area was placed under the charge of a Deputy Commissioner. The occupation of the Naga Hills was done so as to protect the interest of the colonial power in the plains. As Reid says, "the necessity of protecting the borders of Nowgong and Sibsagar against raiding Nagas which in the earlier days compelled us to penetrate into the hills little by little, ceased with the formation of the Naga Hills District,"¹¹ to which the final decision to make the Naga Hills a British district was taken in 1881.¹²

Thus with the gradual extension of their administration, the British also appointed, beginning in 1882, village Chiefs according to local practice and customs.¹³ The government's interest was served best if they could be recognized and appointed to assist the colonial administration in the carrying out of their respective village administration.¹⁴

11. Robert Reid, History of the Frontier Areas Bordering On Assam, From 1883 to 1941, Delhi, Reprint, 1983, p. 100.

12. Ibid., p. 99.

13. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 31.

14. M. Horam, Naga Polity, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 80-81.

Although the chiefs and the headmen were given due recognition as undisputed leaders of their traditional societies, their recognition as village chiefs was made mainly with the intention to make them loyal agents of the colonial administration at the lower reaches. Thus, while continuing as leaders of their people, they at the same time became an important link between the British government and the community.

The introduction of British administration into the village had several impacts. Though the British largely left the village administration to the native leaders, it also brought about certain important changes in the system. The close study of it reveals that the native leadership, which existed loosely in the pre-colonial period, was recognized and legitimised in the form of Headmen, and their appointment was made by the government while the selection or election to the post was made by the villagers.¹⁵ The new administration reinforced this feudal structure of leadership and integrated it into the colonial administrative apparatus. Consequent upon the recognition of the native leadership, it was institutionalised and infused with a certain dynamism.¹⁶ At the same time, the status of village administrative functionaries was changed

15. Informed by Yishumo, Ex. G.B., L. Longidang on 26.12.1994.

16. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 53.

significantly as they were given a quasi-official position and were no longer answerable to the village community of which they had been the representatives or servants, which is one of the negative impacts of British administration in tribal areas.

In the interest of British administration, village administration was delegated with the powers to deal with petty local disputes, and yet, practically in almost every aspect of public affairs, the district administration invariably intervened in the name of maintaining law and order and its developmental activities. The village communities were thus no longer left to manage their affairs without direct or indirect supervision. Because its administrative machinery, it made in-roads in the social structure of the village. "Thus although government's policy was to interfere as little as possible in the internal affairs of the Nagas, this non-interference was superficial rather than real."¹⁷ Although different influences operated to undermine the social structure of the village community to a certain extent the native system retained vitality at the village level. As for instance, the village council still acts as a tribunal for the adjudication of petty cases, and the district officers

17. N. Rustomji, Imperilled Frontiers (Indian North-Eastern Borderlands), Delhi, 1983, p. 26.

intervened only in cases which the village authorities could not settle at their level of administration. But it is to be remembered here that during the pre-colonial period "there was no cases" says Yananyimo,¹⁸ "which could not be settled by the village authority" is now being done in the Deputy Commissioner's court or subordinate courts, thus, slowly disappeared the power of age-old native Panchayat courts existed in the village.

At this juncture, it may be mentioned here that, with the gradual extension of administration into the hills, the first thing the British government did was introduction of house tax. It was a kind of revenue imposed on every household, but much less important from fiscal point of view, and was on the other hand of far greater importance from the political point of view. It was a form of acceptance of the administration and the authority of the government. As Barpujari writes, "the Nagas were made to pay as a token of loyalty to the British a house tax of rupees two per house or eight days labour a year."¹⁹ According to Ghosh, Angamis were the first to give house tax to the British in 1867 of Rs. 2 per house. But when the Lothas, Aos and Semas came under

18. Informed by Yananyimo Ngully of Tsungiki vilage on 15.9.90.

19. H.B. Barpujari, Problems of the Hill Tribes, North-East Frontier (1843-72), Vol. II, Gauhati, 1976, p. 111.

administration, they were originally assessed at only one rupee per house as token of submission to administration.²⁰ Therefore, imposition of house tax and collection thereof was very important from the standpoint of administration. The village headman or the Gaonburah was made responsible not only for the law and order within his limits but also for collection of revenue, while receiving a remuneration in return.²¹ The introduction of house tax was a new thing for the Lothas, as there was no such tax known to them. As Ghosh writes, "every village had its own government... but there was no tax anywhere in any from."²² According to Ryutishan in those days since money was scarce many found it difficult to pay in cash and therefore, had to pay in kind or compensated by labour. It created a lot of hardship for the people.²³ Till today, house tax had been continuing and it has increased the annual contribution, to Rs. 5.

The next institution of local administration which was created by the British and had a lasting impact on the tribal administration was that of the Dobashis, the personnel of which were recruited from the native population. Initially, though appointed to interpret the tribal dialects, the Dobashis were also commissioned with the power to decide cases

20. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 24, and Sir Robert Reid, op.cit., p. 123.

21. H.K. Barpujari, op.cit., p. 111.

22. B.B. Ghosh, History of Nagaland, Delhi, 1982, p. 154.

23. Told by Ryutishan of Pangti on 6.2.93 at Wokha.

according to the customary laws of the tribes.²⁴ They acted as liaison between the community and their rulers. As accredited agents of the government, they had considerable influence over the affairs of the native people. They held a high status in the community because of the influence they wielded as the agents of the authority. This institution manned with prominent local leaders signified the inroad or intrusion of 'feudal system' into a more or less "classless society".²⁵ According to P.E. Ezung, in Lotha area, with the opening of administrative centre at Wokha, in 1876 the British government recruited eleven Dobashis for maintenance of law and order and also to assist officials whenever necessary. Following are the names of the Dobashis: 1. Ezanthung Ezung of Longsa, 2. Sophamo of Yonchuchu, 3. Aphamo of Shaki, 4. Khyodemo of Pongitong, 5. Chumbenthung of Chudi, 6. Vantanshan of Lotsu, 7. Surhon of Pongitong, 8. Anio of Phiro, 9. Sulumo of Tsungiki, 10. Limonthung of Yikhum, 11. Nyamo of Wokha village.²⁶ The first Gaon Bura in Lotha area to be appointed by the British was Padafu Kachari of Wokha Town.²⁷ It is to be noted here that when the Wokha town was chosen as administrative centre, there was not many Lothas established in the

24. B.B. Ghosh, Gazetteers of Nagaland, Mokokchung District, pp. 159-60.

25. M. Horam, Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas, Delhi, 1977, p. 67.

26. P.E. Ezung, Nkolo Nchung Kyong Liphong Phisa Yansa, Kohima, 1993, p. 26.

27. Ibid., p. 31.

area. Therefore, the government appointed non-Lotha as Gaon Bura to assist them in maintaining law and order of their choice.²⁸

Impact on Culture

The coming of the British in Naga Hills in the second quarter of the nineteenth century made an unprecedented socio-cultural interaction between the two socially most distinct and contrasting races - the British and the Nagas. The differences were not so much the geographical factor, but the socio-political and economic aspects of their lives. It cannot be denied that with the occupation of the Lotha area by the British, the age-old institutions have been shattered, the rhythm of life has been disturbed, the alien culture, has shaken the indigenous one. This is, however, not to suggest that the west has had a destructive impact only. There is another side to it also: life has now acquired a new meaning and a new purpose. In other words, both blessings and the curses of British rule even on the culture, should attract our attention in the treatment of the subject particularly in the context of all notable changes which took place in the modern age in various spheres of their lives.

The cultural policy of the British towards the Nagas

28. Told by P.E. Ezung on 13.1.1994 at Wokha.

and so also the Lothas can be studied under the following heads - the direct measures and indirect measures for the convenience of our study.

Direct measures

Even after the assumption of colonial administration in Lotha area, the British did not directly interfere in the traditional religious beliefs of the people. But at the same time, it took various necessary measures to remove certain social evils and practices associated with the customs and traditions of the people.²⁹ It should, however, be noted that in the interest of smooth functioning of administration, government took coercive measures for the suppression of certain evil social customs. While dealing with the repression of certain cultural practices and where native cultural practices were found to be detrimental and where native cultural practices were found to be detrimental to social peace, the government took repressive measures against such practices regardless of any cultural values which might have been attached to them. As for example, in 1881-82, Lothas from Lakhuti village committed a murder of two persons on Mangmetong village of Ao area. An expedition was carried out and the

29. W. Kithan, Presented a paper on the topic "The Present Life of the Lotha Society", during Youth Crusade held at Wokha, February 3-6, 1994, p. 2.

guilty person was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment.³⁰ It may be also recalled that when Captain Butler was killed at Pangti near Wokha, Pangti village was burnt down.³¹ The colonial administration had thus no hesitation in using force for the suppression of barbarous practice such as head-huntings, slavery system and human sacrifice etc.

Head-hunting, slave trade and human sacrifice were practically interlinked. The captured people from raids were treated as slaves and slaves sold for economic gains. The practice was that the captured people were afterwards ransomed by their friends or relations.³² Although government did not take immediate measures for the emancipations of slaves, it was determined to gradually check the practice. In his letter to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, A. Porteous, while denouncing the practice of slavery argued that "such a state of things cannot be allowed to continue in British territory."³³ Although Government did not regulate rules for its immediate eradication, it also directly checked the practice of slavery

30. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 24.

31. B.C. Chakravorty, British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam Since 1858, Calcutta, Reprint, 1981, p. 95. Also see A. Mackenzie, op.cit., p. 129.

32. Interviewed Renashio Kikon on 15th September, 1990 at Tsungiki. See also N.T. Ngullie, Kyong Tathi Juli (The Lotha Naga Customs and Culture), Wokha, 1994, p. 74.

33. Vide, Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 62.

in the district. Thus, with the establishment of administrative centre at Mokokchung in 1889* the practice of slavery along with other social evils such as head-huntings were checked successfully.³⁴ With the gradual extension of British control over the Nagas, the propagation of the gospel by the American Christian Missionaries and the introduction of Inner Line Regulation together effectively checked Hindu influence on the Nagas. It is due to this reason that the colonial administration was given the credit of protecting the Nagas from the influence of Hinduism.³⁵

Indirect Measures

The real agencies which brought about considerable socio-political changes were indirect agencies which functioned under the explicit protection of the Government. Of these, the most powerful ones were Christianity and education. These two agencies had far reaching impacts on the Naga society in general and Lothas in particular. Christianity and education functioned as two sides of the same coin. "For the purpose of disseminating Christianity and at the behest of authorities, the American missionaries opened schools."³⁶ As

* By then Wokha was under the administrative jurisdiction of Mokokchung.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 65.

36. Ezamo Murry, Thus Saith the Missionaries, Wokha, 1972, pp. 27-29. Also see Asoso Yonuo, The Rising Nagas, pp. 110-111.

Piketo writes, "the Christian missionaries generally enjoyed an unusual degree of protection and moral support within the British empire from the imperial authorities".³⁷

After Mokokchung and Kohima, Wokha was the third mission centre established by the American Baptist Mission in 1885. The American Baptist Mission obtained permission from the Deputy Commissioner at Kohima, after which W.E. Witter and his wife reached Wokha on 9th April 1885, where they started their work. In 1888, Mr. and Mrs. Witter left for home due to ill health. Thus Wokha Mission Station was left without a resident missionary for several years till F.P. Haggard and his family came and stayed there from 27th October, 1896, to resume the mission work among the Lothas.³⁸

For the first time on Sunday morning, August 2, 1885, Mrs. Witter gathered several boys and began the first formal teaching of Christianity to the Lotha Nagas.³⁹ On August 25, 1885, she opened a school for the children with three boys. In the coming years, students increased and appointed Daniel Boruah an Assamese, as a teacher in that school. At this time Deputy Commissioner Naga Hills (Mr. R. McCabe) visited the

37. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 69.

38. P.T. Philip, The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland, Gauhati, Second Edition, 1983, pp. 93-96.

39. M.S. Sangma, History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India (1836-1950), Vol. I, Delhi, 1987, p. 249.

area and seeing the interested boys in the school he recommended Rs. 300/- to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, for the improvement and development of the school.⁴⁰ Thus, "the schools run by the missionaries received grants-in-aid from the government and they were inspected by the district authorities from time to time."⁴¹

The Christian missionaries interfered in the social and cultural practices of the local people to a far greater extent than the government did. The deepest impact on the society was made by the missionaries, because they were active and most closely in contact with the population. As mentioned, it was the American Baptist Mission which flourished under the patronage of colonial administration and made abiding impact on the cultural life of the Nagas as a whole. The coming of Christianity had and continued to generate a great impact on the lives of the Lothas. It struck deep roots among the remote, self-contained and isolated Lothas and affected them in many ways. It came as a dynamic force in the midst of static society. In the early years, it met with strong opposition against the new religion and refused to accommodate the Christian missionaries.

40. W. Wopemo Tsopoe and K. Chumben Kyong (Ed.), A History of the Baptist Church Wokha Town (Platinum Jubilee) 1919-1994, Wokha, 1994, p. 7.

41. Piketo Sema, op.cit., p. 69.

With the gradual and progressive acceptance of Christianity, the shift of cultural loyalty from their tribal religion to Christianity began changing the outlook and living culture of the people. A convert could no longer observe the rituals associated with the so-called 'heathen worship'. They also had to stop tribal folk dance, songs, sacrifices and celebrations of various kinds (those connected with cultivation, construction of houses, founding of new villages, feast of merit, use of Morung or Bachelor's house etc.). These were slowly removed from among the Christians.⁴² The Feast of Merit, the Morung (Chumbo) were the most important features of Lotha society, have decayed and are fast becoming relics of the past. The observance of the Feast enabled a man to get social distinction and henceforth he could wear special dresses and decorate his house in a particular manner. Now all these ended, said Yananyimo.⁴³ Nkhanyimo⁴⁴ also shared his view on decay of dormitory. He says, Chumbo or dormitory also fell into disuse due to new religion. These dormitories were the very basis of a village's corporate life. The young boys maturing to manhood under a common roof. Sang together, danced in a group and fought unitedly.

42. C.V.F. Haimendorf, Return of the Naked Nagas, Delhi, 1976, p. 268.

43. Interviewed on 15.9.1990 at Tsungiki.

44. Ibid.

In his article, "The effects on the tribes of the Naga Hill District of contacts with civilization", J.P. Mills writes,

Feast of merit are forbidden among them (Christians), and no attempt is made to induce rich Christians to decorate their houses in the old way. No Christian boy is allowed to go through his time in the 'Morung' and they are not built any more in Christian villages. 45

On the disappearance of Bachelor's Dormitory, Alemchiba writes,

The necessity of the Morung or Bachelor's Dormitory which was a guard house in principle was no longer there. In the past the state of the Morung house in a village indicated the state of the village itself. A decaying Morung meant a decaying village and a well kept and well used Morung a vigorous community.... The institution of Morung had made, through ages, immense impact on the life of Nagas. It was here that lives had been moulded to fall in line with Naga way of life....With the decline of this institution and in the absence of any other institution in its place the discipline and orderliness particularly among the young people became deteriorated and a vacuum was thus created in the village social organization. 46

Rice beer, the most popular drink of the Nagas, was replaced with tea, Christmas feasts replaced the feasts of

45. J.H. Hutton (Ed.), Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, Delhi, Reprint, 1986, p. 147.

46. M. Alemchiba Ao, Highlander, (Bi-Annual Research Bulletin), Department of Art and Culture, Vol. IV, No. 1 and 2, March/September, 1976, p. 5.

merit: and total abstinence from rice beer became a 'basis' of church membership.⁴⁷ Restrictions imposed on the use of rice beer, on the other hand, had far reaching effects on the Nagas in general. To quote J.P. Mills,

The national drink of the hill tribes of Assam is rice beer. Foreigners brought in distilled liquor and its effects are evil. The casual labourers working away from his village, himself the product of contact with civilization, has no wife with him to brew his rice beer and buys spirits instead. Later he comes to regard distilled liquor as a necessity. 48

The liquor effect among the Nagas including the Lothas is so strong that with the exception of few, liquor consumption is common in the society. Prakash lucidly put it thus:

The Nagas' contacts with the 'civilized' people also introduced them to distilled liquor. Today a bottle of rum delights them much more than any other earthly presents of even double that value. 49

Christian's refusal to observe the animists observances and vice-versa created social problem in many villages. The consequence of conversion was social and cultural conflicts between the new converts and the animists.

47. F.S. Downs, Christianity in North-East India, Gauhati, 1983, p. 216.

48. J.H. Hutton, op.cit., p. 147.

49. Prakash Singh, Nagaland, Delhi, Fourth Edition, 1995, pp. 70-71.

Their co-existence in the same village with parallel religion affiliation and practices could not go along smoothly. The result was the establishment of new villages as in the case of L. Longidang in 1927⁵⁰ and also Osayan near Pangti which is now abandoned.

Another cultural life has been seriously affected. The superficial westernisation in matter of dress, food habits, music and other activities became popular. No doubt, these developments have seriously challenged the traditional way of life. For instance, taking the matter of a wedding. In earlier times, a Lotha wedding was a simple affair. Festivities could be completed with the killing of a pig or a cow, involving no material or physical arrangements.⁵¹ But the scene is much changed now. There is a great pre-occupation with physical arrangements which tend towards the extravagant, creating problems for the groom to meet the same. In most of the cases now involving lakhs of rupees with the killing of a great number of animals and other arrangements.

In the intercourse with the Nagas, the British pursuing the policy of control over them more by conciliatory measure, than by coercion, encouraged the trading activities of the

50. Told by T. Murry, Ex-Pastor, L. Longidang on 23.12.1994.

51. Told by Renashio of Tsungiki on 15.9.90.

Nagas by establishing hats or markets in the neighbouring areas.⁵² Wokha district lies bordering the plains of Assam, hence even when the whole of the then Naga Hills, remained isolated, some people of this area carried on trade on barter system with the plains exchanging their products for other essential commodity. But this kind of trading was never on a large scale affecting the economic trend of the area. It was only after coming in contact with the outside world through the British administration that this area came under outside influence and was indirectly affected by the economic trend of Assam towards the end of the 19th century. However, it was not felt much as the people were more or less self-sufficient and their dependence on plains market was only for certain articles.⁵³ The introduction of monetary medium of exchange changed the economic life of the people, in the process, modified the accepted values. Hitherto wealth was assessed in terms of land area, number of animals, granaries a person owned and also number of community feast a person has thrown. Now it came to be measured by the quantum of money he possessed and hence respect in the society. In the process, an individualistic approach started substituting the group outlook, breaking down the traditional bond of unity among the

52. B.B. Kumar (Ed.), Modernization in Naga Society, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p. 64.

53. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 121.

Lothas. Prakash Sing has correctly pointed out when he says, "a new faith or economic prosperity would lose all meaning if the cultural and spiritual foundations of the society are completely forgotten."⁵⁴

The indigenous industry, arts and crafts were also adversely affected. No attempt was made for the development of cottage industries. When the Lothas came in contact with the outside world cottage industries lost its charm due to stiff competition from machine made products. As B. B. Kumar puts it, "the European goods stood in perfect competition with the fine manufactures products of the small scale cottage industry. The people started developing fascination for the European goods, as a result of which the industry suffered a great setback."⁵⁵ Weaving continues to be practised by most of the Lotha girls. But it is mostly confined in the villages. For those who are in the towns or in the urban areas are easily accessible to machine products. This has greatly reduced the art of weaving among the Lothas. It cannot be denied that markets are flooded with imitations of Naga shawls including the Lothas, and these have a good sale because they are cheap. At this juncture it is important to point out that in the olden days the shawls were never meant for commercia-

54. Prakash Singh, op.cit., p. 77.

55. B.B. Kumar, op.cit., p. 65.

lization. There are varieties of Lotha shawls for boys and girls, men and women and each of which has symbolic representation and colourful designs. These shawls are not only for wearing but unwritten books because the Lothas have woven their history and culture in these shawls.

In the matters of ornamentation, traditional dress, music and dance in the old Lotha style are now to be seen and heard only on the occasion of Independence Day, Republic Day, or when a VIP visits the area. These are now more object of curiosity than part of everyday existence.

The art of crafts and sculpture based on their beliefs have become a thing of the past. The finest carving were done in front of rich men's house, on the post in morung or chumbo in the village elaborately carved and ornamented with the figures of different kinds of animals and life size figures of men and women have gradually disappeared from the scene. The disappearance of these arts is because it has lost its functional value due to the coming of Christianity in the area.⁵⁶

Education and its impact

Missionaries were the harbingers of education to this district. One main objective of the Christian missionaries was

56. Told by Ekyimsao Ngully on 13.2.92 at Niroyo. Same view was also shared by Tssenchio Ovung, op.cit., Seminar.

no doubt, to spread the gospel of Christian religion among the Nagas including the Lothas but along with it they had the strong idea of bringing the same people to the enlightenment of knowledge through education. As such, right from the beginning they imparted education to the Lotha boys and girls along with the gospel.⁵⁷

The first missionaries who brought education to the Lotha area were Dr. W.E. Witter and Mrs. Witter. After experiencing in travelling through various and exciting hills, they reached Wokha on April 9th, 1885.⁵⁸ After setting down, on August 25th a day school was opened with three boys. Subsequently, numbers increased to nine in 1887.⁵⁹ Thus, though an informal one, a school was started in Wokha town. It is Dr. Witter who first reduced the Lotha language into writing in Roman script. However, Witter encountered difficulties and the Mission dropped the scheme of educating the people for the time being.⁶⁰ Initially, things could not be done in a systematic manner. During these unsettled situation the missionaries had to leave Wokha in May 1887 due to ill health which is

57. Nchumbeni Kikon, "History of Lotha Tribe in Nagaland: A Study in Tradition and Change". (M. Phil Dissertation submitted to NEHU, Unpublished), 1990, pp. 91-92.

58. M.S. Sangma, op.cit., p. 249.

59. Ezamo Murry, op.cit., p. 54.

60. B.B. Ghosh, Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 184.

a great setback for the Lothas.⁶¹ During the short stay at Wokha he published, An Outline Grammar of the Lhota Naga Language; with a Vocabulary and Illustrative Sentences, in 1888.⁶² Later in 1905, while he was at Impur Rev. Perrene an American Missionary, also published a book entitled, Kion Ziphen Kako (Arithmetic), in Lotha.⁶³ These were the very first books published by the missionaries for the Lothas. While the missionaries were carrying out their educational programme at its full swing in other Naga areas, the British rulers took a little initiative to educate the Lothas by opening some single teacher schools in the area. The first Government Lower Primary School was started at Okotso in 1915 and Yamolo Lotha of L. Longidang was appointed there.⁶⁴ Later after a gap of five years a school was opened for the Lothas at Furkating in 1920 by the missionaries, as they showed more interest in learning and in listening to preaching.⁶⁵ But as the place was far away, it was not easily accessible for many. Thus it kept away from common people. Therefore, it may be mentioned here that till the end of the third decade of the 20th century there was no educational institution worth

61. E. Murry, op.cit., p. 11.

62. G.A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II, p. 284.

63. P.E. Ezung, Nkolo Nchung Kyong Liphong Phisa Yansa, Kohima, 1993, p. 31.

64. Interviewd - E. Patton at Wokha on 29.1.92.

65. M.S. Sangma, op.cit., p. 251.

mentioning in the Lotha area. It was only in 1928 that a mission school was opened at Vankhosung. In spite of many difficulties in running and maintaining the school due to lack of funds, the standard was raised to Class VI. Then Lotha students studying in other schools such as Kohima, Jorhat, Golaghat and Impur were allowed to come and study at Vankhosung.⁶⁶

It may be a surprising that, it was only in 1941, during the time of Mr. P.F. Adam, the Sub-Divisional Officer, Mokokchung, that the first Lower Primary School was opened at Wokha station. Then it was upgraded to a Upper Primary. Later in 1944, with a request it was made M.E. School, and also granted a sum of Rs. 8,428/- for the construction of the school building.⁶⁷ It is to be mentioned here that when government upgraded to M.E. School, Vankhosung Mission School was amalgamated and its teachers were appointed and transferred to Wokha Government M.E. School in the same year.⁶⁸ Later under the initiative and chairmanship of N.L. Kinghen, a retired Additional Deputy Commissioner, it came to the agreement that all the Dobhasis in Lotha area would contribute Rs. 50/- each, Chairman Rs. 150/- in addition to

66. Khochi - Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Wokha Government High School, October, 1969, pp. 22-23.

67. Ibid., p. 12.

68. Ibid., p. 23.

other sources and a high school for the Lothas would be managed. As per the agreement a Private High School was opened in 1948. To meet the expenses in 1948, the Lotha Tribal Bench Court imposed cattle tax on cattle traders at the rate of Re. 1/- per cattle and Rs. 2/- per buffalo. These rates were later on raised to Rs. 2/- and Rs. 4/- respectively from 1949. Villagers also donated some amount towards the high school fund. Thus the high school section was maintained with the cattle tax from 1948 to 1958. The first teacher brought for the High School was Lanu Toy of Changki in 1948, now a retired Chief Engineer (Electrical), Government of Nagaland.⁶⁹

To feed the Wokha High School following Private M.E. School were opened in Lotha area: 1. Aitepyong, 2. Sungro, 3. Lotsu, 4. Yanmhon, 5. Bhandari, 6. Englan, 7. Wozhuro, 8. Chukitong, 9. Sanis. All the developmental works and educational institutions in the Naga Hills were closed down due to political disturbances in 1956-57, but it is most remarkable that the Wokha High School was never closed down even for a day. All these schools showed satisfactory progress through the cooperation and assistance from the people. At this time, the government took over the burden of the management of the schools from the public. The government took over the lone

69. Ibid., pp. 12-13.

high school at Wokha and all the nine middle schools in Lotha area, in the year 1958.⁷⁰

Now, it is clear that during British time not much government attention was paid towards the educational development, and so the progress of education in the Lotha area was very slow. But after the Independence of India and more so after creation of Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) in 1957, many schools were opened and wherever possible the Primary Schools were converted into Middle Schools and Middle Schools to High Schools.⁷¹

As per the record available at Deputy Inspector of Schools' Office, Wokha, at present, there are as many as 105 Government Lower Primary Schools in the district, 20 Middle English Schools (upto Class VI), 18 Proceeding High Schools (upto Class VIII), and 7 High Schools (upto Class X). Besides there are a number of churches and missions run schools at lower levels and as many as 10 Private High Schools in the district.⁷² The district has one government college known as Mount Tiyi College, located at Wokha Town. It was named after the highest mountain of the district which is called Mount

70. Ibid., p. 13.

71. Vide - Wokha District Gazetteer, p. 185.

72. Information collected at D.I.S. Office at Wokha on 15.6.96.

Tiyi. It started functioning since 1975. At present it imparts education up to degree level with honours in certain subjects. It was taken over by the government in 1987. Recently, one Private College has come up managed by Lotha Baptist Church, Wokha Town, called Bailey Baptist College, named after one of the early American Baptist Missionaries to the Lothas. The college started imparting knowledge to students from 1996 academic session onwards. At present it has Pre-University level only.

We have seen that according to 1991 Census there are 95 villages in the district. Whereas the number of Government Primary Schools is 105. It may be noted here that every village in the district has got Primary School and where the villages are big enough has more than one Primary Schools. For example, Wokha village and Pangti, each has got two Government Primary Schools. Thus, it is a fact that the total number of government institutions alone has more than the number of villages. Even, so far Primary Schools are concerned, it is more than one per village. As a result of opening of different schools (both government and private) and colleges and thereby providing facilities to every citizens, the percentage of person literacy in the district has increased considerably.

Education as one of the most powerful agents of

British Colonialism began with the Christian missionaries. It may be noted that from the very beginning of their contact with the Nagas, the British Officers perceived the necessity of introducing Christianity and education among the Nagas, for they considered education as the best agency for bringing the Nagas to order and civilization. But as Alemchiba observed, "the primary objective of education given by the British was to train some of the local people who could be employed as clerks in the office."⁷³ Keeping this point in view, the Colonial Educational Policy was mainly directed to the extension of pecuniary grants to the Christian missions in the Naga Hills. The Government followed a very cautious policy in the promotion of education for the hill tribes. Thus, while welcoming the increase of Primary education, it expressed doubts regarding the expansion of Secondary School education. The quinquennial review of the progress of education in Assam 1932-37 stated: "There is very little chance of employment for Naga... matriculates in their own hill, and practically none for them outside."⁷⁴ Thus, though government had made considerably progress in imparting rudiments of education in the district, it still had to make efforts for higher education oriented planning of education. However, with the exception of

73. M. Alemchiba (Ed.), Highlander, Bi-Annual Research Bulletin, Vol. III, No. 1, March 1975, p. 9.

74. Vide P. Sema, Op.cit., p. 85.

they learnt social customs of their own. No doubt learning process was simple and yet practice oriented.

The introduction of colonial education, however, disrupted the indigenous system of learning and redirected them to the new pattern of modern education. Undoubtedly with the increasing acceptance of colonial education, indigenous system was gradually relegated. Thus, modern education has substantial influence on the socio-cultural life of the Naga,⁷⁹ which the Lothas also could not escape from the same impact. The Naga education which the British rulers largely entrusted to the American Baptist Mission had a revolutionizing impact on their society. It effected their religion, demeanor, customs and habits.⁸⁰

The most unfortunate thing that happened to the Nagas in general, with the introduction of modern education is that, very rarely one regards education as something which is going to make him more fitted for his ordinary life. He regards it (education) as something which will fit him for a very different life, and he expected that life to be offered to him in the form of a government post - as a "sitting and eating job."⁸¹ Unfortunately, the same motion and mentality that has

79. V. Elwin, Nagaland, p. 78.

80. M.M. Clark, A Corner in India, Gauhati, Reprint, 1978, p. 135.

81. J.H. Hutton, op.cit., p. 148.

been implanted several decades ago, continues even today. The result is surplus of half-educated youths, unwilling to go back to the village life and looking in vain for employment which they consider suitable to their talents. Therefore, it may be correct to mention here that the present social disharmony and extortion in Nagaland (which is the order of the day), is the result of the point just mentioned above.

Before the British appeared in Naga Hills, the communications were almost non-existent. It is true that the expansion of communication and development of transport largely undertaken to serve British imperial interest, but it proved harbinger of prosperity to the Nagas as a whole.⁸²

In conclusion, we can say that the British colonial education, through the early missionaries, not only revolutionised the cultural ethos of the Nagas including the Lothas, but also led them to a new dimension of modern education, the outlook of the people which formerly remained narrow significantly developed and appreciated the modern education. The development of broader and healthier outlook of the people enabled them to accept the new trend of change in their society. As a consequence of the growth of modern education,

82. Asoso Yonuo, op.cit., p. 156.

the Lotha society witnessed gradual tendency for social cohesion the characteristic of which was conspicuously lacking among them in pre-colonial period. As early as 1923 educated and intellectual Lothas of that time spearheaded in forming Lotha Tribal Council with a view to protect the interest of the tribe as a whole.⁸³ Living standard of the people changed notably as a result of the effect of modern education. It played the role of renaissance in the Naga society for it came to them with Christianity as bread and butter.

On the other hand, the dawn of modernization in Naga society was associated with British imperialism and as such it has its own destructive nature too. Therefore, while commenting on the British occupation of tribal areas in India which the Lothas are also one among them, Jawaharlal Nehru remarked that:

The so called European civilization had the disastrous and paralysing effect on the tribal people. The march of modern civilization destroyed the traditional way of their lives and put an end to their arts, culture and simple way of living. 84

However, in all fairness it must be admitted that the Christian Missionaries proved to be a harbinger of change and

83. P.E. Ezung, op.cit., p. 83.

84. Vide, B.B. Kumar, op.cit., p. 67.

development to a considerable extent particularly in the tribal areas. They deserve the credit of stamping out certain savage practices, putting down sanguinary and reprehensible customs and abolishing some evil practices and beliefs based on superstitions such as head hunting which was a symbol of honour, valour and manhood, tribal warfare, inter-tribal feuds, murder, human sacrifices, slavery, polygamy, etc. and many other social abuses. All these could be successfully checked due to the combination of two civilizing and reformatory agencies such as - Christianity and education under the patronage of the British Government which changed the basic attitude of the Nagas towards other people.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The present Wokha District, the home district of the Lothas, is situated on the mid-west of the State of Nagaland. The place Wokha after which, the present Wokha district was named was occupied by the British and was made Hill District Headquarters in 1876. However, two years later in 1878, it shifted to Kohima, and Wokha remained a Sub-Division. Again in 1889, the Sub-Divisional Headquarters was shifted from Wokha to Mokokchung. Since then, Wokha remained below the status of a Sub-Division and only in 1957, when Naga Hill Tuensang Area or NHTA was formed and Mokokchung district was created, Wokha became Sub-Division again. This position continued for sixteen years, and in December 1973, Wokha became one of the seven districts* of the State of Nagaland. Wokha district is mainly populated by the the Lothas except few Semas and non-Lothas who are working as government servants and businessmen.

Like many parts of Nagaland the hills are steep and water currents strong, there is no navigable river within the

* They are 1. Kohima, 2. Tuensang, 3. Mokokchung, 4. Wokha, 5. Zunheboto, 6. Phek, and 7. Mon.

district. Moderate climatic condition prevails throughout the year. The district is rich in different kinds of vegetations flora and fauna.

From ethnological point of view, the Lothas are of Mongoloid stock of the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. They are believed to have come from Mongolia halting at different places on the way and reached the present settlement. In the beginning they settled around the present Wokha area but in course of time, due to the growth of population, they spread over and occupied larger area. Geographically, the district is divided into - Upper range, Middle range, and Lower range, having no differences in dialect, customs and practices.

The origin of the word 'Lotha' is still a controversial issue among the Lothas themselves. No one could give the exact origin and meaning of the word. The Lothas also called themselves as Kyong. At what point of time they were called as Lotha or Kyong could not be found. But it is believed that of the two identical names, the latter was brought by the forefathers from the place called Kyöng-Söng in the South-East of Manchuria.

During the migratory period, the Lothas came in different batches and had their own leader or chief. Therefore, a sort of leadership emerged even during the migratory period of

the people. But it is not possible to state clearly when and how in the past the institution of chieftainship and social organisations took concrete shape. But it can be reasonably asserted that it happened at quite an early stage of evolution in their group life.

Tradition says that on this way to present place, they were many in number and the chief or leader could not enumerate them, therefore they called the present Kohima (from where they counted) as Khayima, which simply means 'uncountable'. From there they proceeded northward and reached Tiyilongchum, the first Lotha village, where they settled for many years and spread to other parts of the area, ultimately led to the setting up of villages and each village had their own independent functions. But migrational tradition and stories also differ due to the absence of written materials.

The Lothas have got only one language or dialect called Kyongyi. The communication between the Lothas and the non-Lothas in the district and elsewhere, nowadays is made possible through Nagamese and broken Hindi. English is generally used among the educated people. Tradition tells us that once the Lothas had their own script but during the migratory period, since it was 'written on the animal's skin it was eaten by dog'. Another tradition goes that by mistake it was 'cooked and eaten'. It was only towards the end of the

nineteenth century that the Lotha language was reduced to writing in Roman script by the Missionaries.

Before the advent of the British the people were living under virtually 'village state'. They were independent and free from any external forces or there was no law enforcing authority for the entire population. It was also the time where people were engaged in inter-tribal feud and head-hunting. It was these ever increasing responsibility and functions to perform and founding of new villages that led to the origin or evolution of the chief among the Lotha society.

At the time when there was feeling of insecurity, fear and lawlessness prevailed all over - it was for self protection and security that the circumstances forced a man to go for head-hunting expedition. Later, this heroic act of an individual became a tradition and a person who has taken more enemy heads was acclaimed as hero and respected by all. Even in the head-hunting days no Lotha head was taken for if the ceremony taken place with the Lothas' head it is believed that it brought disaster in the village or community. The village chief led the village warriors in war against enemy village or tribe but at the same time, he also took extra care that no casualty takes place among his subjects. He trained the young boys who slept in the Chumbo to become good warriors and to

become good and responsible citizens in the village. Well defence and guarded village depended much on his ability as a leader. The chief in consultation with his council decided upon for a raid. The last head was taken by Akok in 1870s. Though among the Lothas head was not taken but captured as captives and demanded a ransom. All the war captives were kept in the dormitory. It was due to his role in war and head-hunting that the chief was sometimes known as 'Warlords'. All matters of inter-village affairs were to be decided upon in consultation with the council of elders.

During the time of head hunting or war, leagues of villages were formed and in this, the advice of the most powerful village would naturally carry more weight. But except for war, no village ever acknowledged the authority of any other villages. Keeping in view of the dangers of every attack the Lothas selected their village site on the top of the hills to enable them for the easy defence of the village. It is also found that even in the days of head hunting formal friends (Okhümo) were not killed even if he belongs to hostile village. Should he happen to kill him in a battle he will not take his head. For, the Lothas considered to perform ceremony with his friends' head as 'taboo'.

Unlike that of the Semas, the Konyaks and the Mizos

who had their hereditary and autocratic chiefs, the Lothas had a form of democratic chief, nominating the most capable person from the village. Therefore, the Lotha chief was not hereditary nor primogeniture in succession but placed him on the post as per his personal ability.

As a guardian and benevolent ruler of the village he supervised and looked after the administration of the village. He supplied to those who were in shortage of essential commodities, weapons and other implements. The idea and consciousness of the people, the importance of centralization of the functions in the hands of one person, group of persons or authority, gave them the feeling of necessities of the institution such as village chief, village council and other village officials. Otherwise, the administration and functions of the village would have been in confusion.

The Lotha chieftainship in the past was acquired by dint of their wisdom, ability, courage and diplomacy. For smooth functioning and administrations he was assisted by some village officials such as Tongti, Chochang etc. The religious ceremonies and sacrifices were performed by the priest or Pvuti assisted by his Yingae.

The chief's function was vast in the judicial matter but his power and influence was limited by the will of the

people, social norms and customs of the people. In the past, although there was no police force as such, the chief was to look after all law and order problems in the village and punishment was to be meted out by him to the guilty and offenders according to the established customs. While enforcing the customary laws, he used the villagers as his constables. Hence, when the British came to the Lotha area, they followed the procedures and norms of the Lotha village administration. All matters relating to issue of ordinances were made by the chief with the assistance of his council of elders.

Although the power of the chief seems to have no limitation, in practice, his power was somehow limited and curtailed by the collective power of the villagers. Besides, a strong council of elders could make the chief a titular head and in fact, he administered according to the directions of the subjects.

At the same time he enjoyed a number of prerogative from time immemorial. He was highly respected by all and though not compulsory he enjoyed presents such as meat and fish, grains, vegetables etc. from grateful subjects. He also enjoyed free labour seasonally. His house was constructed freely by the villagers. Another privilege was that, special treatment was also given to the funeral ceremony of a chief.

In the governance of a village, the Lotha chief was always assisted by informal council of elders. The main reasons for forming the elders was to inform the chief of all that is happening in and around the village and to help him while performing the various administrative duties and functions of the village. The elders were represented from each clan residing in the village and sometimes from the Khel. This practice is to be found even today.

The council of elders had a lot of duties to perform in the village affairs. All the disputes, quarrels, murder or misunderstanding were settled by them along with the chief who acted as a chairman in the meeting. They formed the highest court in the village. Dispensation of justice to all was the primary duty and concern of the elders. Boundary and other disputes with the neighbouring villages and tribes were also settled by them.

The members of this councillor were neither selected nor appointed for life nor hereditary. There was no fixed number of members. On the ground of inefficiency or incompetence and violation of established laws and customs they could be set aside from the post.

No remuneration was attached to the office of the elders but they too enjoyed in the feasting exacted as fines,

while settling various disputes. Sometimes they also enjoyed meat and other presents given to them by some grateful subjects. They were also highly respected in the village.

Many historians and scholars refer to the Morung (Chumbo) merely as 'Bachelors' Dormitory' without being able to establish its centrality in the total life of the Lothas. But a thorough investigation into the activities of Chumbo leads one to conclude that, it is a centre of all social, political, cultural and economic activities around which the society revolved.

It has been established that formerly the Lothas had only one clan but for the convenience of marriage and alliances the children of the three brothers were given in marriage to one another. Hence the name of three brothers became the phratries in Lotha society and the names of each son - the names of the clans. It is for this reason that marriage within the phratry was considered 'taboo' and looked down upon by the society. But now the exogamous system is threatened making marriage possible within the phratry, but not with that of the clan.

Further inquiry revealed that the marriage price among the Lothas is said to have been originated at the time of desertion of the first Lotha village of Tiyilongchum. In the

process of desertions Mongtsulo became wedded wife of Ramphan. This development came to the knowledge of her father then he demanded a marriage price from his son-in-law. But before doing so Ramphan demanded marriage feast from his father-in-law. Having no alternative, father-in-law gave what his son-in-law asked for. From then on, the practice of marriage price among the Lotha came into existence.

The British made their first appearance and contact in the Naga Hills in 1832. Later in 1866, Samaguting (Chumukedima) was made the headquarters of the then Naga Hills district. With a view to have closer contact with the Sibsagar plains, the Lothas, the Aos and other neighbouring tribes, Naga Hills headquarters was shifted to Wokha in 1876. Thus by the last decade of the nineteenth century the whole of the then Naga Hills district was brought under modern system of administration.

It is found that certain factors facilitated the spread of Christianity in the Naga Hills and so the Lotha area:

- (1) Directly or indirectly helped by the colonial rule by constructing roads for easy movement and suppression of head-hunting etc.

- (2) The Naga community life made it easier to apply Christian principles, and
- (3) More importantly, besides animism or tribal religion there was no strong religions to oppose the spread of Christianity.

At the same time, the tribal religion did not have any leader to propagate the religion, like other religions. At this point of time the coming of Christianity and its Gospel inflicted a final blow in the disappearance of the traditional religion. With the coming of Christianity the priest and his assistants were replaced by the church pastors, deacons and other church leaders respectively. It may be mentioned here that the festivals and various ceremonies (public and individual) performed by the animists were not just 'pagan worship' and traditions but with certain purposes. The importance lies in the blessings and prosperity of the village or the community, family and individuals as well.

It has been established that there existed 'land of the dead' or 'cave of the dead' in the deep jungle beyond Mount Tiyi. It is believed that when one dies the spirit goes to that place. Again there is a stream nearby the cave said to be water source for the spirits of the dead. This belief is still held strong among the Lothas.

The abolition and disappearance of the Chief in the Lotha area was made possible due to the prevalence of the democratic system of village government. In the process of abolition of the institutions, the British officials made friendship with the people and studied their culture, customs and manners and then mixed up with them by participating in all their ceremonies and festivals. Therefore, the policy of the British officials was that after winning the confidence of the people they started the modern system of administration. It is also a fact that in certain cases, force was applied in order to bring the respective areas under their control. It was at this time of struggle to bring the Nagas and also the Lothas under the control and civilization, many British officers were murdered in the Naga Hills, including that of John Butler at Pangti village in December 1875.

The abolition of chieftainship in the villages was followed by the appointment of the Gaon buras as government agents. Besides the Gaon Buras, the British also introduced Dobashis in the administrative centres who were used as interpreters in the courts and helped in settling certain cases and disputes according to the customary laws of the land. In recognition of their services they were given red clothes and red jackets respectively. Since then, this practice was found in every village and administrative centre in Nagaland.

Though it was village-centred administration even much before the advent of the British into the Lotha area, they were well-organized community and ruled themselves by the 'nominated chief' as the head of the village.

The introduction of colonial administration produced both negative and positive impacts on the Nagas and so on the Lothas as well.

Although the chiefs and the headmen were given due recognition as undisputed leaders of their traditional society their recognition was made mainly with the intention of making them loyal agents of the colonial administration. When the village chief or headman was appointed by the government, the status of village administrative functionaries were changed significantly. They were no longer answerable to the village community. Thus the village communities were no longer left to manage their affairs independently.

In the pre-colonial period, there were no cases which could not be settled by the village court. But with the introduction of modern system of administration, the independent and the highest court of justice was shifted from village to the district authority. Thus it shattered the traditional autonomy of the village court. One of the most significant part of traditional and pre-colonial, Lotha village adminis-

tration lies in the transparency and immediate settlement in the disposal of cases. This has been threated now due to money and political powers.

With the occupation of the area by the British and the introduction of Christianity, the morung, the centre of activities around which the society revolved fell into disuse and hence the disappearance of the institution from the scene. Again under the influence of western culture and modernization an individualistic approach substituted the group life and outlook, breaking down the traditional bond of unity among the Lothas.

In the field of manufacture, art and craft, though some useful productions are still made indigenously the technological knowledge of it are fast disappearing. This may be attributed to the easy availability of machine made goods. Therefore, technological invasion from outside has considerably reduced the people's ability and potentiality of indigenous production.

However, in all fairness, it must be admitted that the introductions of modern administration and the activities of the Christian missionaries proved to be the harbingers of change and development. They deserve the credit of stamping out certain savage practices, beliefs based on superstitions.

It is important to mention here that the passing of an Act, known as 'Nagaland Village and Area Council Act, 1978' by the Government of Nagaland was the replica of the then traditional village council prevailing in the Naga villages, in both composition and functions. Therefore, the traditional village council in Lotha area served as forerunner to the modern village councils.

One of the most important and significant impacts of the colonial administration on the people was the introduction of modern education through the missionaries. In the pre-colonial period there was no script and it was only with the efforts of the missionaries that Roman script was introduced in the area. Thus the introduction of secular education and spread of Christianity in the area not only revolutionised the cultural ethos, but also led them to a new dimension of valued system of life.

Thus, when the British officials came to the Lotha areas, they found the system of village administration and practices healthy and effective. Therefore, though they made some changes in the system, the norms and practices and also the application and enforcement of customary laws remained the same and the same has continued with the help of the village elders till today.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

MOKOKCHUNG CASE NO. 34 OF 1923

Shambemo G.B. of Tsingaki

Vs

Yizamo of Tsingaki

Subject: Samanungla asked for a site to build a church. I gave her a site just outside the village. All materials were collected there. Then the defendant, who has set himself up as leader of the Christians in the village said he did not like the site. He has now built a church inside the village on clan land against my orders.

ORDER

The defendant is a curious person to be leader of the Christians. He has been refused Baptism by the Mission on the ground that he has two wives. He said the present site was agreed on by the village instead of the one first offered. I doubt it. It was certainly built against the wishes of Shambemo, head of the Kikung clan to which the land belongs. The defendant was also undoubtedly prime mover in the matter. He has no status quo whatever and must obey orders and not seize land which does not belong to him. The church is to be dismantled in ten days. They can rebuild on the site originally given them.

Memo No. 161 G
Dated Mokokchung,
the 10th May, 1923.

Sd/- J. P. Mills
Subdivisional Officer, Mokokchung

Copy forwarded to Rev. Dr. J.R. Bailey, Impur for information.

Subdivisional Officer, Mokokchung

Source: Deputy Commissioner's Office, Mokokchung.

APPENDIX 2EXTRACT COPY FROM TOUR DIARY OF J.P. MILLS ESQR., I.C.S.,
SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICER, MOKOKCHUNG, FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 1923

The Ancients and Christians in Tsingaki are at logger-heads as usual. Oil and water will never mix and both sides are quite ready to separate. The village will provide a site for the Christians near the old village to which they are to move in the cold weather. All baptised Christians living in the new village will be free of all ancient religious dues and observances such as emungs. Any unbaptised persons joining them in the hope of escaping dues will pay all the dues they would have paid had they remained in the old village. The Christians will not hold any services in the old village or the ancient in the new village. Any one who likes may attend services in the church, but the Christians are not to enter persons houses for the purposes of propaganda without the consent of the owners. I insert this provision because a preacher who was recently preaching out of reason had to be thrown out by the householder. Neither side will sing hymns or religious songs in the other's village. The Ancients complain of the perpetual hymn singing which goes on in Tsingaki. The Christians may use Sandriyo's house only for services till their new church is built. I hope they will have some regard for the feelings of the people next door. The new church must be built as soon as possible in the cold weather. Inhabitants of the new village will pay their revenue through the gaonburas of the old village till they become large enough to have a gaonbura of their own. Any Christian living in the old village will pay all Ancient religious dues and observe all emungs and customary prohibitions.

Sd/- J. P. Mills
Sub-Divisional Officer, Mokokchung

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Memo No. 276

Dated Mokokchung, the 18th June 1923

Copy forwarded to Rev. Dr. J.R. Bailey, Impur for information.

Sub-Divisional Officer, Mokokchung

Source: Deputy Commissioner's Office, Mokokchung.

APPENDIX 3ORDERS REGULATING RELATION BETWEEN
CHRISTIANS AND ANCIENT LOTHAS

- I. Christians shall be excused from all contributions to religious objects of the Ancients.
- II. Christians shall observe four regular emungs each year, viz.,
- | | |
|--|-------|
| (1) <u>Pikuchak</u> (Sowing Festival) | 1 day |
| (2) <u>Tuku</u> (Harvest Festival) | 1 day |
| (3) <u>Motharatsen</u> (Prevention of pests) | 1 day |
| (4) <u>Lanvung</u> (Path clearing and blessing of crops) | 1 day |
- III. They shall observe following occasional emungs once only in any year in which they occur.
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| (1) Visit of the <u>Potsos</u> | 1 day in all villages observing it. |
| (2) <u>Emung</u> for wind | 1 day |
| (3) <u>Emung</u> for "Apotia" death | 2 days in village in which occurs, and 1 day in other villages observing it. |
- IV. In any year in which the rare ceremony of Oyantsoa is performed they shall observe the following prohibition:
- | |
|---|
| (1) Eight days <u>emung</u> during the ceremonies. |
| (2) Prohibition of the entry of strangers for 10 days. |
| (3) Embargo on the removal of rice in any form of livestock (other than plains cattle) from the village or village lands till the end of the following harvest festival. |
| (4) Observation of the customary 9 days embargo on killing anything in the village during the ceremonies. |
| (5) Any Christian who considers these prohibitions with regard to <u>Oyantsoa</u> may remove himself from the village before the ceremonies begin and remain outside the village fence till the completion of the Harvest festival. |

V. No Christian shall kill anything in a place in which forbidden by custom to do so at the following times.

(1) From mid-day of the day preceding a village fishing expedition till fishing is completed.

(2) During the 9 days of the Tuku ceremonies.

N.B. The onus of ascertaining in what place it is forbidden to kill lies upon the Christian.

VI. In villages where such a custom exists no Christian shall remove rice (in any form) or livestock (other than plains cattle) from the village or village lands during the final three days of the Tuku ceremonies.

VII. Any Christian who has conscientious objection to observing these regulations shall become automatically exempt from them if he build his house outside the village fence and refrain from entering the village during such times as the entry of strangers is forbidden by custom.

VIII. Unless quarrels occur these rules shall not apply to Okotso, where the two communities have lived side by side on amicable terms for number of years.

IX. Where local conditions and custom make it desirable these regulations are liable to alteration and modification.

Sd/- J.H. Hutton
Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills

Memo No. 155/G

Dated Mokokchung, the 19th May 1922

Copy forwarded to the Secretary, American Baptist Mission, Impur, for favour of communication to all whom it may concern.

Subdivisional Officer, Mokokchung

Source: Deputy Commissioner's Office, Mokokchung.

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APPENDIX 4MOKOKCHUNG CASE NO. 47 OF 1923

Yizamo of Tsingaki

Vs

Ndrano of Tsingaki

16.6.23

Subject: I want to divorce the defendant who is my wife and become a Christian. I have another older wife.

ORDER

Settled by the parties and recorded. Complainant does not get back the portion of the marriage price he has paid and pays Rs. 10/- Losama to her clan. As the wife is an only a little girl and her relations have received a good whack of marriage price and will get another marriage price from some one else there is no need for the complainant to pay her maintenance till remarriage. The divorce is decidedly sudden. It was only this morning that the complainant paid an instalment of the marriage price. The girl has been living with him for a year and a half. The complainant must pay all ancient religious dues till he is baptised.

Sd/- J. P. Mills

Sub-Divisional Officer, Mokokchung

Memo No. 268 G

Dated Mokokchung, the 16th June, 1923

Copy forwarded to Rev. Dr. J.R. Bailey, Impur, for information.

Sub-Divisional Officer, Mokokchung

Source: Deputy Commissioner's Office, Mokokchung.

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Chiporao Ezung	95	Longsa	18-9-1990
Chijamo	98	L. Longidang	23-12-1990 & 26-12-1993
Chumbemo	75	Longsa	19-9-1990
Ekyimsao Ngully	91	Niroyo	21-9-1990 & 13-2-1992
E. Patton	71	Wokha	29-1-1992
Hakao Kithan	77	L. Longidang	27-12-1993
Kinao Tsopoe	67	at Wokha	25-9-1990 & 10-1-1994
Khungmomo Ngully	90	N. Longidang	13-9-1990
Lenthio Murry	88	Longsa	18-9-1990
M.C. Murry	68	Sanis	30-12-1990
Mhonchumo	61	Yanthamo	4-2-1993
Mhonyimo	67	Yanthamo	4-2-1993
Mmhonsao	70	Yimpang	1-10-1990
Nkhanyimo	71	Tsungiki	14-9-1990 & 27-1-1991

<u>Person Interviewed</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Village</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Pimomo Kikon	78	Yimpang	28-9-1990, 14-2-1994, 13-10-1994
P.E. Ezung	88	at Wokha	13-1-1994
Renashio Kikon	76	Tsungiki	15-9-1990
Rev. Z. Yanthan	77	Lakhuti	2-10-1990
Rev. N.T. Murry	62	Wokha	14-2-1996
Renjamo	65	Yanthamo	4-2-1993
Rodila	71	L. Longidang	23-12-1993
Tenpyomo	69	L. Longidang	23-12-1994
Thayio	96	at Wokha	28-1-1992
Thungbemo	52	L. Longidang	27-12-1994
Thungmomo Ngullie	65	Pangti	26-9-1990 & 9-1-1994
Tsenyimo	70	Longsa	19-9-1990
wopansao	72	Akok	5-1-1994
Yananyimo Ngully	92	Tsungiki	14-9-1990
Yisao Odyuo	97	Bhandari	6-1-1991
Yishumo	79	L. Longidang	23-12-1990, 24-12-1993 & 26-12-1994

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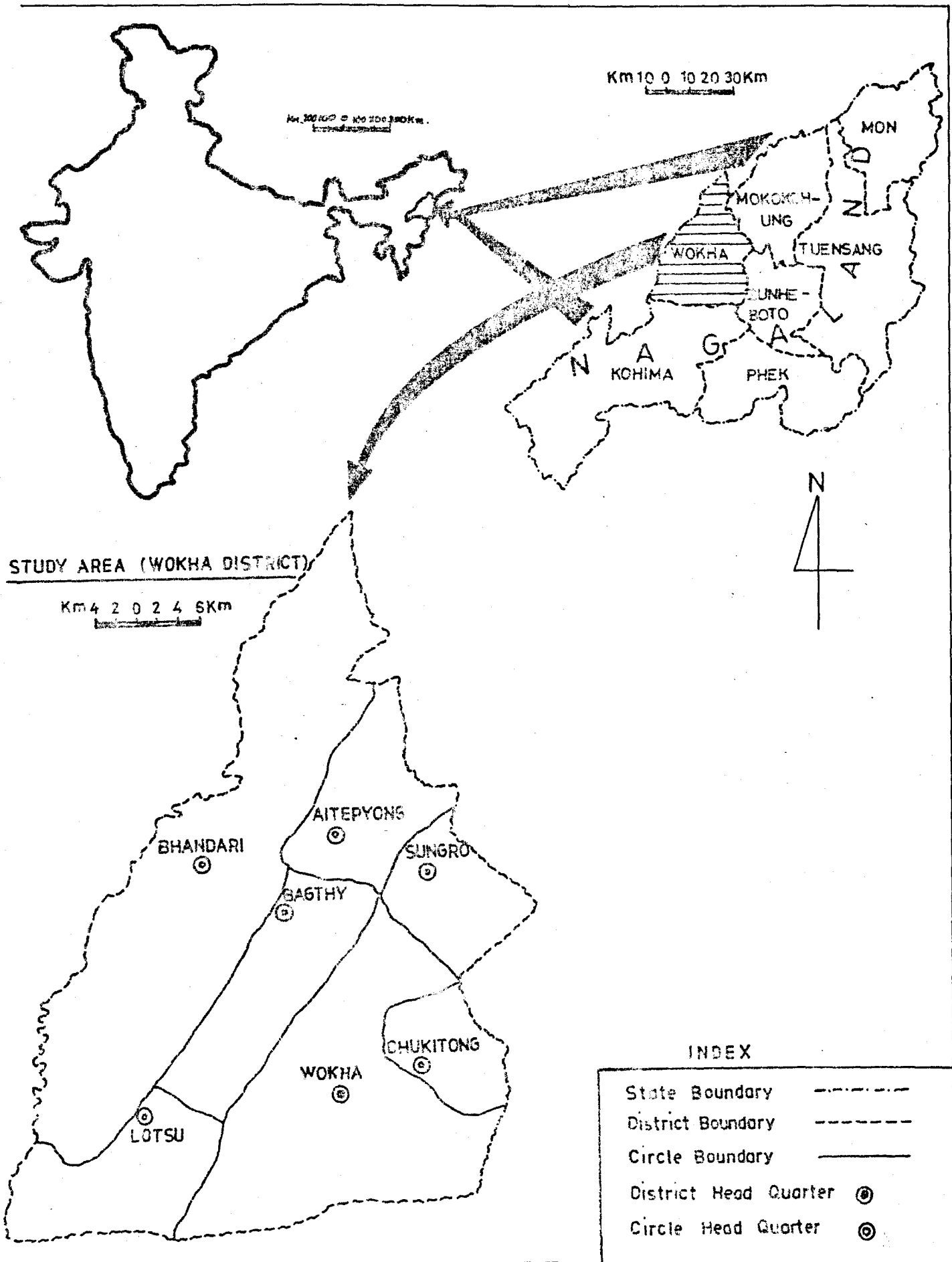
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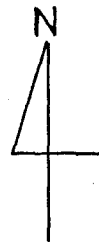
LOCATION MAP



Km 10 0 10 20 30 Km

Km 4 2 0 2 4 6 Km

STUDY AREA (WOKHA DISTRICT)



INDEX

State Boundary	-----
District Boundary	-----
Circle Boundary	—————
District Head Quarter	●
Circle Head Quarter	⊙

BIO DATA

Mr Ben Lotha is graduated from Patkai Christian College and Honours degree from Kohima Arts College. He obtained the Degree of Master of Arts and Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) in History in 1989 and 1991 respectively from the Department of History NEHU, Shillong. He joined Ph. D Programme in the same Department in 1992.

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