

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

ABSTRACT

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BY

Y. BEN LOTHANAGA
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The Wokha District is situated on the mid-west of the State of Nagaland and adjoins the plains of Assam on the west, Mokokchung on the north, Zunheboto on the east and Kohima district on the south.

There are as many as fifteen major tribes in Nagaland. The Lotha Nagas who occupy Wokha district constitutes one of the major tribes of the State. Like any other tribes of the Nagas, Lothas also have a distinct dialect, culture and tradition which are different from the rest. Besides, they are endowed with a distinct traditional polity and society which still plays a vital role in the political, social and economic life of the people. Although of late, there is adoption of modernisation, the traditional institutions cannot be completely wiped out. In fact, the new concept of development has been adopted with the incorporation of the old traditional culture and institutions. A study has also been made of the traditional political and social lives of the people and the changes brought about by the British rule.

The dissertation has been organized into eight broad chapters.

The first chapter describes the land and the people. The land (Wokha district) is topographically very rugged and deep, though in some places we find valleys where agricultural crops are cultivated successfully. The district has ideal climatic condition throughout the year. It has different vegetations varying from grasses to tall trees useful from the economic point of view. Different kinds of animals and birds are also found.

The people are of Mongoloid stock of the Tibeto-Burman group. The district has three ranges, namely - upper, middle and lower ranges but speaking the same dialect. Medium of communication between the Lothas and non-Lothas is made through the Nagamese, broken Hindi and English.

Attempts have also been made to discuss the prevalent traditions and theories regarding the origin of the Lothas and also the migration and settlement pattern. The origin of the Lothas is shrouded in mystery. Traditional legends and theories tell us that three brothers, namely Limhachan, Limhathung and Eyimo, the ancestors of the phratries of the tribe, came out of a hole with the help of a dog near the miraculous stone at Kezakenoma. Another tradition says that the Lothas came from Mongolia or Manchuria. Some say that they came from a place called Bable. Again, one tradition holds

that they came from Lengka. It is said that they came in big group and at the present Kohima the chief or the leader of the group counted the number but due to the largeness of the number, he could not enumerate and so they called it as Khayima which simply means 'uncountable'.

It is said that 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 political and social institutions took concrete shape. But it can be reasonably asserted that it happened at quite an early stage of evolution of their group life.

Chapter two dealt with the nature of origin and evolution of chieftainship and their powers and functions. The institution appears to have grown out of the collective needs of group life. It was also found that the chief was only the figure head of the independent functions of the village administration and the most eligible person of the village became the chief of that village. He was vested with military, judicial, police and legislative powers. He also, in consultation with the council of elders made peace treaties with neighbouring and enemy villages. He was the chief judge in matters of trial of cases. Though his position seemed to have

been rivalled by none, in practice, his powers could be checked by the individuals and collective powers of the villagers, and well-established norms, customs and practices of the society.

As a chief, he also enjoyed certain privileges like meat from hunting or trapping of animals etc. His house was constructed by the collective effort of the villagers. Importance was also given to the death ceremony of a chief. The position of a chief in Lotha village was like the position of a father in a patriarchal family. The villagers were regarded as his own children.

The village officials and their respective powers and functions were discussed in chapter three. The village chief or headman was assisted in their smooth functioning and administrations by village officials. The Chochangs who were called Council of Elders, were the chief assistants and helped him in his various duties. In fact, they were the chief advisers. While executing the powers and functions they were guided by the social norms. Further, it was the customs and traditions that were required to be upheld in judicial matters as in the case of administration. However, with the introduction of British administration many changes had eroded the force of customary laws. Thus, the introduction of court was viewed by the society as an exploitative design.

Chapter four is devoted to the social organisations and social lives of the people, the village, dormitory, its functions and social significance, public and individual ceremonies, various festivals and their significance, games and sports, fishing and hunting and the manufacture and agriculture and ceremonies connected with it. An attempt is also made to show their effects on the social organisation and social lives of the people due to western culture in the name of modernisation.

Chapter five deals with the exogamy, polity and village organisations. Property and inheritance, adoption, settlement of various disputes according to the law of the land. Friendships, war and head huntings, the position of women in Lotha society. The changes brought in by the impact of the modern administration on the traditional customs and practices are examined.

Chapter six studies the deities and spirits, their functions and significance in traditional beliefs. The soul and life after death, magic and religion. Religious officials, their roles and functions in various worships and ceremonies, social 'gennas', birth and death. It also studied the encounter with Christianity and the disappearance of traditional religion from the area, where the priest and his

assistants were replaced by the church pastors and the deacons.

Chapter seven deals with the occupation of the Lotha area and the introduction of colonial administrations and its impact on the village polity. Contact with the western culture and the erosion of traditional and indigenous culture. Introduction and development of education in the area, under study, and its impact on the Lotha society. In short, the constructive or positive and negative impacts of the British rule on the Lotha society are dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter eight is a concluding chapter embodying the summary of the preceding ones and presents the major findings of the research work.
