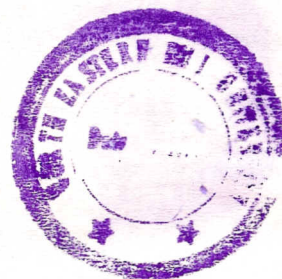


**THE HISTORY OF VILLAGE FORMATION AMONG THE ANGAMI NAGAS :
A CASE STUDY OF KOHIMA AND KHONOMA VILLAGES**

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INTRODUCTION

It is now widely established that materialist dialectics helps in analysing human society in a multi-faceted manner. It helps in classifying the nature of the process of development from the earliest foundation of human habitation down to contemporary capitalism. In Indian parlance too, the application of this scientific approach has proved immensely useful in understanding Indian society. Researchers followed researchers and each time debates tried to improve upon the study carried out previously. But when we look at the overall picture of Indian society, the characteristics of some of the regions remain unproduced. The North Eastern region with its predominantly tribal society is one among such regions which have not received the adequate attention of scholars. However, this serious neglect cannot be attributed to scholars alone - one has to appreciate the equally serious lack of materials available to them. For quite some time, the regional historians too did not handle the theme because of an unfamiliarity with the dynamics of the developed scientific approach. Reconstructing the history of societies dispossessed of any written records was an extremely difficult task requiring unique and unconventional methodology geared to meet this particular problem. But the persevering efforts of regional historians operating as it were within all these

limitations did, however, unveil the peculiarities of the region's history in the overall Indian context.

At this stage let us consider the point that various tribes with all their distinctiveness and varied patterns of development formed the subjects of study by travellers, anthropologists, civil servants, missionaries and soldiers much before the onset of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is established that only Assam, Manipur and Tripura in this entire North East region finds a place in the traditional local chronicles or in any other form of written literature prior to the nineteenth century. Curiously enough the other areas like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh which are predominantly tribal have remained unrepresented even in the traditional records of the region. To choose the entire region would have facilitated an orientation to the study of this area, but that would not help in breaking the tradition of neglect. Therefore, we limit our study to the Angami tribe of Nagaland, and that too, to two important villages of Kohima and Khonoma as a case study. In both these villages, the transition of society seems to have followed in the colonial and post-colonial phase. Before looking into the various features of Angami tribal society, we have got to resolve a number of problems:

- a. What do we mean by tribal society?
- b. Why a tribal society?
- c. How does it differ from other societies?
- d. Why is this tribal society concentrated in this region?
- e. What are those elements which determine the social progress of such a society from time to time?
- f. How can the nature of the process of development of this tribal society be estimated?
- g. What is the position of these two Angami villages of Kohima and Khonoma in the Naga Hills?
- h. What led to the formation of these villages?
- j. How can the various processes of transition involved in the growth and development of these villages be explained?*

However, at this stage one can only return to these questions by taking up a few aspects of the problem in full perspective. They include: (a) the nature of migration which led to the formation of these villages; (b) the process involved in the settlement question in pre-colonial times; (c) the role and position of these villages in the colonial phase; and (d) the post-colonial development and the transition to modernization.

In advancing the analysis of these chosen aspects one would really benefit by adopting models or methodology suitable to such a historical situation, the nature of every model being finally determined by the source material available. In the Indian context, the wide application of Marxist analysis has already been carried out and the nature of Indian social formation has been interpreted variously. Therefore, one cannot really ignore the fact this scientific approach has laid bare the fact that history also shows that it is not only the type and productive capacity of the instrument of labour but also the relations between man in the process of social production. The nature of productive forces and relations in these villages are peculiar. Their study can neither be explained in any of the definitions of social formation or feudalism in the pre-colonial period nor do they come nearer to any level of state formation. This makes the analysis all the more difficult but interesting.

The significance of the Naga tribes, of which the Angamis are one, cannot be underestimated. There are various theoretical attempts to characterize the Nagas, but the generally accepted view is that they are a powerful tribe that have for centuries inhabited the Naga Hills. Varied opinions also testify to their non-Indian origin. Angami is one of the prominent tribes of the Nagas, mostly occupying

the southern and to some extent the western portion of Naga Hills.¹ Although the Angami tribe has been one of the earliest settlers in North East India, there is an extreme paucity of recorded information on them. The only authoritative work exclusively focusing on them has been left by J H Hutton² who served as an administrator in Naga Hills from 1917 to 1935. Although Hutton tried his best to include all aspects of Angami life in his account, when the question of singling out the essential features of their life arises, his account reveals certain inadequacies which can probably be attributed to his European origins and his ties with the government which he came to represent in the region. It appears more so because he was not writing about them with the basic proposition of the materialistic view of history. However, his account continues to retain its significance particularly for those who are still unfamiliar with the Angami tribe. There do exist a few other written materials on the subject (both published and unpublished) but they do not contain the detailed information necessarily required to reconstruct the history of these Angami villages. In spite of all these difficulties, what encouraged us to proceed

1. J H Hutton, The Angami Nagas, London, 1921, pp.14-15.

2. Ibid.

with the proposed study is the lately developed and fruitful Vansinian approach which will certainly prove useful in understanding such societies. To quote Jan Vansina,³

"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 the greatest wonders one can study, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Because the wonder is so great, it is also very complex. Oral tradition should be central to students of culture, of ideology, of society, of psychology, of art, and, finally, of history."

It is this approach which we have pursued in the analysis of the various aspects while studying the two villages of Angami Nagas in this thesis. In fact, Jan Vansina has brilliantly demonstrated the pertinence of the application of the oral approach to such areas where very little exists in terms of written source materials. His efforts in reconstructing the history of kingdoms of the Savanna depended primarily on hearsay, visions, dreams, hallucinations, verbal art, personal traditions, traditions of origin and genesis, epics, tales, proverbs, sayings, memorized speeches and so on.⁴ He has fully established the congruence between

3. Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History, Wisconsin, 1985, p.xi.

4. Jan Vansina, Kingdoms of the Savanna, Wisconsin, 1975 (reprint), pp.37-70.

society and its traditions. He believes that "traditions are perfectly congruent with the society. Any alteration in social organization or practice is immediately accompanied by a corresponding alteration in tradition."⁵ In studying the kingdoms of Savanna from oral sources, he has integrated Marxist insight by pointing out the ascent of material history from a less developed type of society to qualitatively new and higher types - surpassing the earlier ones in all the major economic, social, political, cultural and the moral criteria.

However, the application and importance of oral tradition varies from place to place. While pursuing this study, we have conducted detailed field work and interviewed the older generation of traditional story-tellers. This stock of folk tales, poems, legends, sayings, prayers and proverbs has not only enriched our understanding of this phenomenon but has also urged us as to which question to pursue. The various festive occasions and traditional performances were also carefully observed to yield the analysis. However, it has not been possible to go into the analysis in detail and some aspects will remain unsettled

5. Jan Vansina, Op.cit., p.120.

at this stage. By and large, efforts have been diverted to stress the leading role of the mode of production and the basis of socio-economic structures. Since the study has been a micro-level enquiry and only two villages have been chosen for study, discussion with regard to politico-judicial, ideological and superstructural aspects remains limited particularly during the pre-colonial times.

It needs to be further specified that we have tried with all our limitations to avoid the reduction of analysis of the proposed aspects solely to the definitions of the mode of production which would possibly have led us to widen the basic dialectical unity but dismiss the importance of the socio-economic formation as a coherent of social organism. Generally, the process of the origin of the Angami Nagas has been examined with the view that all cultures have taken elements from other cultures. We have kept in view how various changes were effected through borrowing concepts and practices and migration of families from village to village. The aims and objectives of the British in subduing the Angamis and the process involved in the subjugation have been illustrated with different variables - i.e., force, persuasion, role of missionary activity and the nature of self inclination of the Angamis. An estimate of the representatives of colonialism vis-a-vis the Angami Nagas is also

accounted with the idea of observing transition and transformation which has been further taken up in detail when we begin to study the nature and process of modernization.

All these concepts have been based on the empirical studies of the two villages of Kohima and Khonoma - two prominent Angami seats. Various notions offered by Peter Skalnick and H J M Claessen,⁶ and in the Indian context by R S Sharma,⁷ Romila Thapar,⁸ J B Bhattacharjee,¹⁰ and others were verified with all the materials while exploring the nature of the formation and the process involved in the settlement of these villages. It should, however, be observed that although these scholars had started with the basic premise formulated by Morgan¹¹ and Engels¹²

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6. Henri J M Claessen and Peter Skalnick (ed.), The Early State, The Hague, 1978.
 7. R S Sharma, Indian Feudalism, Macmillan, Delhi, 1965. See also, Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India, Delhi, 1983, by the same author.
 8. Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, Bombay, 1984.
 9. Surajit Sinha, "State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India", Man in India, Vol. 42, No. I, January-March, 1962.
 10. J B Bhattacharjee, "State Formation in Pre-Colonial Tribal Northeast: A Case Study of the Dimasa State", The North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. II, No.3, July-September, 1984.
 11. Lewis H Morgan, Ancient Society, London, 1877.
 12. Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, London, 1972 (reprint).

on the characteristics of the primitive societies, yet the case studies carried out by them evolve the specificities not suitable to this model. However, although it was necessary to keep such varied concepts in mind, yet the understanding that the Angami villages of Kohima and Khonoma show a considerable degree of peculiarity in their varied phases of transition and transformation forms the basic discussion in this thesis.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in the foregoing chapters warrants the conclusion that the tribal social formation of Khonoma and Kohima, like any other historical process was a succession of socio-economic formations, surpassing the old one in social, political, cultural and other spheres. However, what the analysis of the chosen aspects reflects in this study needs to be considered at greater length.

The waves of migration from western China and South East Asia to these hills were many and spread over a long period of time. These waves of migration were chiefly necessitated by the incompatibility that was rapidly developing due to shrinkage of resource potential and the population growth. These conditions were given further impetus by the aggressive rulers. But before these tribes could complete their march to settle down in these hills which came to be named after them, they cut across different politico-cultural regions but that should not be seen as an ascent from one socio-economic formation to the another. These Naga tribes passed through a complicated and protracted process of settlement. The Naga hills were not endowed with rich resources to attract the Angami tribe, particularly with such a geographical remoteness, but in this regard their history was determined by their own circumstances.

In fact the history of tribes all over the world has clearly revealed that wherever the tribes settled they preferred to remain isolated as far as they could from the relatively more developed societies. However, for all the mongoloid tribes who migrated to north east India, the climate which suited them so well seems to have played a significant role in their process of settlement in this region.

The Angami villages of Kohima and Khonoma in Naga hills had the similar factors in their entire process of formation. In this entire process the role of productive forces was of course the most crucial condition, but this fact need not be overstressed, for their spiritual, cultural and ethnic mechanism has also run ahead of the development of productive forces in the establishment of these villages. In the pre-colonial phase they continued to lag behind in most spheres of political, social and economic aspects of life in the entire Indian sub-continent. But that did not prevent them from producing great warriors, craftsmen, men to practise agriculture in such harsh and unsuitable terrain. Though the formation of these villages strengthened the Angami tribal organization and generated a cohesiveness and cooperation among its members to reproduce their relations of production with gradual improvements in hunting and

agriculture, animal husbandry and craft-making, the mode of appropriation continued to be communal in character and a dominant feature of Angami society. This did not usher in complete transformation of Angami society into a class society. Though the process of generating surplus was not completely absent, the channels through which it was extracted lay more on spiritual and cultural rather than on purely economic lines. The Zievo (priest) was the most important figure among the Angamis before the evolution of the institution of Angami Peyumia (chiefs) at the village level. The Zievos' demands, which was mostly on the pretext of pleasing tribal deities, sacrifices and other rituals, were satisfied by the share from hunting harvest and human labour. Since the Zievo's material tendencies were limited because ultimately he was a part and parcel of the same tribe or clan, the extraction did not take place solely for economic purpose. It was as a result of this that most of the Angami Zievo did not get transformed into a political group and instead legitimized the position of the village chiefs when the transitional forces penetrated. Possibly this would have been one of the factors in prolonging transition. Lack of material forces also contributed to this slow transformation of the Angami tribe but the simultaneous existence of institution of priesthood and chiefs did play a greater role in the entire picture and the village formation continued to rest on its laurels. The other factor responsible

for the slow transition were the slow growth of technology and other productive forces. The structural phenomenon of these villages revolved around the priesthood and village elders with a more democratic apparatus who alone possessed the political-judicial authority to settle the conflicts - though rarely. In the pre-colonial period it is historically inconceivable to think of the Angami villages as the form of state at any level. Though the Angamis of Kohima and Khonoma emerged powerful at times even to exercise their tribal authority not only on the entire Angami villages but stretched over to non-Angami Nagas as well. But this super-imposition cannot be translated into the existence of a full-fledged superstructural phenomenon. Though western scholars have formulated various theories with regard to state formation often widely testing the empirical situation of Africa, all these studies failed to persuade us in following any of them because the case of Angamis is a case of a purely non-state society with some elements necessarily involved in the tide of historical advance. These elements of cohesion etc. before reaching a stage and assuming new dimensions were disrupted by the penetration of colonial forces. This suddenly arrested the developmental processes in that direction and super-imposed a new apparatus with two tendencies of persuasion and subjugation at the hands of Baptist missionaries and the British colonialists respectively.

This opened up an important and transitional phase in the entire history of Angami society. The Angamis fought all through to preserve their autonomy for almost half a century. The strength with which the Angamis countered the British has been recognised as unique by the British themselves in their entire history of their colonization of the Asian people. In this struggle, the Angamis derived immense strength from their singular ethnicity and exhausted their potential to stop the British from disrupting the rhythm of their tribal social formation. However, the tendency to subjugate the Angamis by force was much helped in its advance by the persuasive forces of the missionaries who sincerely carried out their programmes of economic welfare, medical care, education and religious activities. These developments appeared more tempting to the Angamis and were certainly not linked directly with the controlling of productive forces of the Angami country. They did not represent the British colonialism but were purely American Baptists who made centres in the Angami villages of Kohima and Khonoma. This process led to the unevenness in social and economic affairs of the peoples life, but did not delink the cultural values.

Since the advanced socio-economic formation always triumphs over the reactionary and doomed formation which clashes with the vital interests of people and which acts as a drag on the development of new social relations, the Angamis were no exception to this. The appearance of missionary culture imposition of the British political apparatus released the forces of detribalization. The priestly classes with new religious values did away with what was much unnecessarily attached to tribal religious traditions. Though it saved what was risked on the pretext of sacrificial ritual tendencies, it had its own limitations. It could not cut across cultural barriers completely and delink some of the traditional practices which continue even to this day as part of the tribal past.

The colonial political structure which was a temporary phase because it was short lived did initiate the destruction of tribal organization to the extent of leaving it utterly powerless in its affairs in the long run. The British appointed their own officers to settle the affairs concerning Nagas in general and Angamis in particular. The creation of new Angami village chiefs (Gaon Bura) by them curbed the tendency of revolt at the hands of Angamis. The succession of a chain of officials, the limitation of boundaries of the areas and other reform activities connected with the cultivable

and non-cultivable waste resulted in the destruction of a singular ethnic and tribal strength. Thus began the gradual process of class formations which were ultimately fostered by the process at the hands of independent India's central structure. When finally the British colonialism came to an end their distinct ethnicity posed serious problems for the Indian government because the Angami voiced their feelings again with the rest of the Nagas for preservation of their independent political identity and for their past history. But they were left with little to back their cause and had to finally choose to co-exist as a part of Independent India. However, events did not run that smoothly and many temptations were offered to the newly created state under various developmental programmes. Unfortunately the development continued on more uneven lines bringing in easy money to transform a few into the nouveau riche and the rest dependent on them for their daily bread. The growth of population was a simultaneous process which helped to intensify the social stratification of Angami society on class lines if not on caste lines. Hence a non-state of Angamis got transformed and directly linked to the capitalism which gave room for much faster growth but what determined these social formations remain unsatisfactorily explained due to limited amount of source materials at this stage.
