

The Intra-Clan Equation in the Village Formation Processes in early Angami Society : A case study of the origins of Khonoma village

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Over a past few decades the studies on tribal history have acquired a significant position in Indian historiography but still the major areas of tribal society continue to receive a step-motherly treatment. The basic justification generally offered in this regard is that there is no literature or any other written records to reconstruct the tribal history, particularly in pre-colonial period. But the recent developments in the history writing have proved that the oral tradition can be equally helpful in exploring the nature of pre-colonial tribal society.¹

In India too the growing emphasis is being laid on these oral methods for exploration and preservation of history where recorded information is lacking.² It is with this in view that a modest attempt is made on intra-clan equation in the formation of village structure in the early *Angami* society of Naga hills. Since the entire *Angami* society spread over many villages in Nagaland and cannot be taken at a time, we have chosen only *Khonoma* village as a sample,

From ages past the entire *Naga* tribal society was divided into various settlements of tribes and each tribe was independent of other.³ They had no centralized political institution and thereby each of them was administered by its own chiefs or elders under various tribal customs and traditions, till *Angami* established at *Khonoma* a village-state in the real sense of the term.⁴

A series of efforts over a period of time had gone into making of this village settlement at *Khonoma*. *Khonoma* is situated in the West *Angami* country in Nagaland. Though most of *Khonoma* is mountainous in nature, there are vast stretches of agricultural land within the village. In the southern direction *Khonoma* is bordered by picturesque *Dzuku* valley which stretches to Manipur, northern side faces *Kohima* and her neighbours in the western side being faced by *Mezoma*. In the eastern direction is the village *Jotsoma*. The whole area is rich in forest resources and has enumerable varieties of trees. It is of a mixed *Deciduous* of evergreen forest with vast *jhum*-stand, predominantly by *Alnus Nepalensis*, locally known as *Rupo*. Climatically the area is neither hot nor cold but winter can be quite cold with mild snow falls on the hills.⁵

Before settling in *Khonoma* the entire *Angami* population was scattered in various tribal settlements in Naga hills. Their transition

from the most primitive settlement to a relatively developed *Khonoma* village is of course accompanied by various factors involving the pressure of increasing population, the struggle for subsistence and the need of important material sources. But that was not all which could bring them together in the process of formation of a village. The tribal past was rich in a number of respects though it had its own lacuna. But it will not be wrong to say that the *Angami* tribal past had some inherent characteristics of a democratic nature. To quote Butler, "Every man follows the dictates of his own will, a form of the purest democracy which it is very difficult indeed to conceive as existing even for a single day ; and yet it does exist here, is an undeniable fact."⁷

The various member of the tribes did not only share their resources communally but if any activity was to be carried out among the *Angami* tribe, support was sought of almost every member of the clan.⁸ True that since the beginning of human history, the search for settlement was a part of struggle for subsistence in tribal society and it is also true that the physiography, ecology and environment proved more suitable and became an important factor in the emergence of *Khonoma* settlement.

The *Angami* had reached a stage where hunting exercise could not satisfy them on subsistence front. They seem to have deeply felt their position when tribes all over the world were speedily getting transformed due to growing process of interaction among various societies. After a thorough probe of various available records, folk literature, traditions, the geneological tables and careful examination of the oral tradition we have come to believe that *Khonoma* got transformed into a village settlement somewhere in the 14th century-the time when the Turks had entered India and established their suzerainty. By that time the *Ahoms* were well settled in Upper Assam.⁹

By this time relatively developed technology of agriculture had been widely exposed to the Indian population, and the people living in the hills, particularly on traditional frontiers had an easy access of these developments. The *Ahom* influence led to an increasing plough agriculture in place of hole in some frontier regions.¹⁰

It was at this stage that some members of *Angamis*, founders of *Khwiikha* clan, *Khate* clan and *Vokha* clan during a hunting expedition discovered *Khonoma*.¹¹ Though they were immediately tempted by the scope of settled agriculture that the physiography and environment of *Khonoma* provided to them, they had their own

problems as well. The settling down at *Khonoma* did not merely mean the need for a more labour power to look after cultivation, protection from enemies and other activities connected with it in the village settlement, but it also demanded support and approval of various other Angami clans. Because *Vokha*, *Ratsa*, *Khate* and *Khwikha* who had decided to migrate to *Khonoma* permanently did only belong to one moiety i.e., *THEKRINOMIA*.¹²

There are a number of legends connected with the migration of these clans which will not be of much help at this stage. But the coming together of the two moieties (*THEPA/THEVO*) with their various clans is one of the most historically significant event in the history of Angami tribe. Though in course of time settled agriculture of *Khonoma* tempted a good number of members of various clans, but looking at the tribal structure of *Khonoma* it becomes clear that the entire *Khonoma* population had branched out from three major clans (*THINO*), *MERHU*, *SEMO* and *THEVO*.¹³

One section, as we have already illustrated, came from *MERHU*'s branch, the other *SEMO* is formed by two clans, *KUTHOTSU* and *CHALIEUTSU*. The third clan *THEVO* consists of *KOTSU*, *PHETSU*, and *CHATSU*. *KO*, the founder of *Kotsu* clan, also seems to have heard of the growing of *Khonoma* and he sent his brothers, *KEVISO* and *KEHIEKHA*, to settle in *Khonoma*. Our sources reveal that *KEVISO* and *KRHIEKHA* came from *MER-EMA*.¹

The other section of *MERHU* clan who were brought to *Khonoma* by *KHATE* owed their origins to *PFUKHA*. In fact, *PFUKHA*'S own sons lived and died in *Kigwema*. But there is evidence to prove that he had an adopted son called *NRIU* whose descendants later shifted to *KHONOMA*.¹⁵

Out of the present three *MERHU*'s sub-clans, *GWIZANTSU*, *LEVIISE* and *MEYASE*, the first two sprang directly from *Nriu*. *Nriu* was a great hero of his village. He was adopted by *Pfukha* just for all his qualities of head and heart but, *Nriu* has his own right to claim very significant place for himself in the entire Angami history. It seems that he had a great insight. He was the first man who introduced a new pattern of earning, subsistence and change from hunting to agriculture in the entire Naga society. He made liberal use of his ideas and was said to have produced a hundred baskets of millets which was a great boon in those times. In fact the entire oral source support this view very clearly and strongly that the Angami settlement at *KHONOMA* was nothing but translating in practice the dreams of *Nriu* for settled agriculture which was

developed by his descendants. In fact from this observation it becomes clear that he had deep sense of history when he realized and assessed very intelligently that hunting was incapable of supporting the growing Naga population in general and Angamis in particular. Even among the *Chakhesang* tribe there is a strong belief that one branch of *Chakhesang* clan was an offshoot of Nriu's descendants.¹⁶

There is a very significant episode connected with Nriu's life. He had gained unparalleled popularity not only among his family members but in the entire village. In fact when *Pfukha* married his daughter he realized that Nriu was the only loyal and sincere son to accompany his daughter in the new set up. But once his daughter got settled, Nriu was not sent back to *Pfukha's* house. Because in course of time his sincerity and devotion had influenced people to the extent that they were ready to pay anything in return to *Pfukha* and were not ready to part with Nriu. All through his life Nriu spent his energies in inspiring the existing generation with his virtues and sense of oneness.

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that it was coming together of these various clans and sub-clans - who generally trace their origin to Nriu that laid the foundation of *Khonoma* into a village settlement and *Khonoma* gradually expanded with the growing technology, population and resources. From the settling of *Khonoma* it was for the first time that they began to organize themselves at village level shunning their inter clan differences. It was as a result of this well knit village structure that they resisted even the efforts of British colonial masters for a quarter century.

References

1. There are only a few travel accounts by some of the European civil servants and some Christian missionaries which are also silent about the precolonial history of the tribes in N.E. India; but then this non-existence of written documents cannot be a solid justification for these big gaps in the tribal history. This does add to the difficulty of scholars working on various themes of tribal history, particularly in pre-colonial period. But the methods of oral tradition have really made tremendous progress in past few years in tracing the detailed history of various such societies in the world. See J. Vansina, *Oral tradition as History*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985 ; J. Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, London, 1975 reprint ; Steven

- Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom A History*; Univ. of Wisconsin Press 1974, R. Brown and C. D. Forde, *African systems of Kinship and marriage*. London, 1950.
2. It is very interesting and important to observe here that tribal society with the age old tradition, cultural aspects and political-administrative organism even at village level is a store of information for historians by itself.
 3. Possibly the long drawn process of migration of these *Naga* tribes, which finally ended and permanent seat was established in village-formation, did not permit all these tribes to come together to form a state structure with a centralized administrative authority.
 4. Though the migratory tribal settlement of *Angamis* had some of the features common to a well developed systems like communal organisation of labour for agriculture (*PELI* in Angami) and other community works of a village (*NECRUTHO*) it was more because of the lack of necessary technology and inadequate amount of labour while as in migratory tribal settlement it was more a part of the entire traditional structure.
 5. *NAGALAND GAZETEERS, KOHIMA DISTRICT, 1970*, pp. 1-11. See also, J. H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, 1969 reprint, pp. 5-15.
 6. The other tribal settlements of *Angamis* in Naga hills were *Kigwema, Jakhama, Viswema, Merema, Kohima, Seoima, Jotsoma* etc etc, For details see J. H. Hutton, op. cit, pp. 5-40.
 7. John Butler, "Rough Notes on Angami Nagas" J. A. S. 1875, Vol. XLIV, No. 4. quoted from *NAGAS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY*, Edited by V. Elwin.
 8. J. H. Hutton, op. cit. pp. 43-105.
 9. The general sociological theory is that a generation can be counted for 25 years ; but our sources do not confirm this proposition in case of Angami tribal society. The life span of tribals anywhere in the world has been usually more than the other peoples in the world. The people of Khonoma believe that Khonoma is a thousand years old. But this information is not based on any authentic source. Such kind of incidence not only lead to the misrepresentation of the past but can prove a great hazard for the future scholars as well. It must be noted that Angami settlement in Naga hills is much older, but Khonoma is relatively a new village in Angami country.
 10. A. Guha, "Tribalism to Feudalism 1600-1750" in *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. I No. I, Delhi, 1974, p. 67.

11. The materials derived from folklore, folk traditions and other information has been carefully examined to prove its authenticity. Compared with the myth of Mbegha, who founded the Shambaa Kingdom in a hunting expedition. S. Feerman, *The Shambaa Kingdom*, Wisconsin, 1974. pp. 40-64.
12. To understand the various internal mechanisms of the tribal structure, particularly of Angamis, one should very carefully examine the literature that we derive from various kinds of written or oral information. The entire Angami population sprang from two brothers, *THEVO* and *THEKRUNO*, in the remote past. The growth of population and many other intricacies like fighting, religion etc, divided Angamis into various clans but all of them trace their origin from *THEVO* and *THEKRUNO*. In fact in course of time down to present day all these Angami clans are indentified under these two moiety system known as *THEPA/THEVO* ; one group of clans that mulitiplied from the branch of *THEVO* and the other from *THEKRUNO*. —J. H. Hutton, op. cit. pp. 109-117.
13. *MERHU* and *SEMO* belong to Thekriuno moiety (*KELHU*) and thevo belongs to *THEVO* moiety. Here in order to understand the coming up of this moiety structure known as thepa/Thevo (Hutton coined this division as *KELHU* for want of a better term but Angamis themselves never used the term) we should look at the various stages which are involved in the making of the kinship, lineage, clan, phratry and moiety i.e., *PFUTSA*, *THINO*, *THEPA/THEVO*, the smallest group developed on this kinship is *PFUTSANO*. This group which emerges by bringing various kinship together is the clan *THINO*. Then emerges a group of clans (*THINO*) and formed a phratry also known *THINO* and these clans are divided into two divisions, *THEKRUNOMIA* and *THEVOMIA*. This intricate moiety system is simply known as *THEPA/THEVO*. N. K. Das, "Land management among the *ZOUNA-KEYHONUO NAGAS*", *AGRARIAN SITUATION IN INDIA*, Vol. I. Anthropological Survey of India 1985, p. 85,
14. This information was given by Vivor (72) of *KOTSU* clan.
15. The story of Nriu has become a popular folklore in *KHONOMA*.
16. *Puroh* clan of Chakhesang tribe is believed to be an offshoot of *Nriu's* clan. This detailed information was given to the author by *Thevevizo* (85,) of *MERHU's* clan of *Khonoma*.