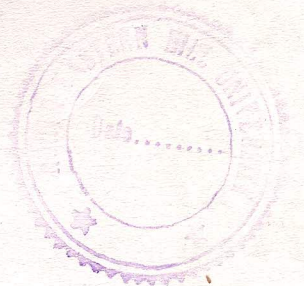


WANCHO THROUGH HISTORY

Miss. Pranjana Das
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Miss Pranjana Das has prepared the M.Phil dissertation entitled "The Wancho through history" under my supervision. Her work is based upon primary and secondary sources. No part of this dissertation has been printed by her.

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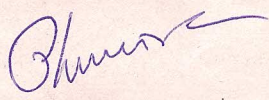
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Miss Pranjan Das has satisfactorily completed all the course requirements in the Master of Philosophy programme in Anthropology.

1. System of Theory and Data Processing
2. Bio-Cultural Evolution
3. Historical Methodology
4. Philosophy of Social Science.

She is permitted to submit her M.Phil Dissertation to the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Professor P.K. Mishra, Head, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong for his kind supervision of the study and painstaking in editing the manuscript.

I am also grateful to Professor B.N. Saraswati, Department of Anthropology, NEHU and my former teacher Dr. R.L. Hungloo, Department of History, NEHU for the keen interest and encouragement they had shown.

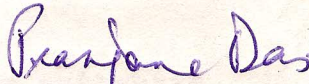
I will fail in my duty if I do not place in record my thanks to my superiors in the Directorate of Research, Itanagar, for providing me with necessary facilities in carrying out this work successfully.

I also remain grateful to the informants especially Bowang/Wanghem and others whose materials I have used in preparing this dissertation.

Last but not the least I thank Mr. Gupta of Ziro and my friend Mr. John Mao, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, for typing the manuscript.

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(Pranjana Das)

CHAPTER - I

Introduction and Literature Survey:

One of the questions which has remained in the minds of planners is how to develop the tribal populations retaining their identity and culture. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India laid down the policy of Panchsheel for tribal development which said that tribals were to be developed according to their genius. Dhebar underlined this by stating " the problem of problems is not to disturb this harmony of tribal life and simultaneously work for its advancement". These are beautiful statements but to translate them in reality is indeed a difficult task. In order to find out what is harmonic and genius of a group, one has to have authentic information about them. There are many such groups about

whom very little systematic information is available. One of the important tasks that needs to be done is to compile the information from all the sources and indicate what are the gaps in information.

I chose to study the Wancho tribe of Arunachal Pradesh to compile and to provide some information about them. Very little work has been done on them either by anthropologists or historians. The references about them are casual and are in the nature of track accounts of the British. Verrier Elwin has collected references about them in his book, India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century; J.N. Choudhury too makes a brief reference about them in his book, Arunachal through the Ages; L.R.N. Srivastav's tour diary - Among the Wanchos and the Tirap District Gazetteers edited by S. Dutta Choudhury contain some

details about the people and the area inhabited by them.

All these studies have not focussed on all the aspects of Wancho life. These studies do not give us much idea as to the process of change and tend to impose a static picture of Wancho life till the recent times. None of these works have tried to carefully examine the material constraints of this tribe. They have also failed to demonstrate the conditions in which the Wancho actually lived. The internal dynamics of their tribal social organisation has also remained undefined.

However in order to understand the nature of the life and condition of Wancho in the larger context of the Indian tribal society one has to carefully examine the (a) historical geography of the area they have inhabited for times past (b) their material condition, the process involved in their subsistence, the nature of

appropriation and the technology used in the production of their subsistence (c) the nature of their political organization and its role in administration of the tribe, (d) their social organization and the changes occurring in it, from time to time and (e) the various rituals and beliefs of the tribe.

In order to understand the Wancho tribe in its right perspective all the aforesaid concepts should be studied as the parts of a total design. In this regard, the eminent anthropologist Maurice Godelier¹ very rightly states - " To functionalist, with the exception of Evans-Pritchard and certain other brilliant field workers, a social system is a total whole, section of which are necessarily inter-linked, but according to them even a

1. see Man in India, March 1984, p.74.

history of a social system can tell us nothing of the necessary linking of parts, because history belongs to the order of consequential and accidental events and not to necessity. Laws of functioning exist but there are laws of their evolutions or necessary transformation".

However, in dealing with the Wancho of Arunachal Pradesh there are many practical difficulties faced both by the anthropologists and the historians in pursuing the past of the tribe is the lack of recorded history. It is purely as a result of this lack of recorded information that one finds a great difficulty in accurately periodizing the study of the tribe and thereby it fails to point out the various changes which have taken place in the life of Wancho from time to time.

True that "Anthropology has opened historians'

eyes to the significance of political habits, the mixture of the universal and relative which goes to make up the ways in which people accustom themselves to living in group".²

My research indicated that there was very little written material on Wancho, which can be reconstructed for having a meaningful idea about the life and condition of the Wancho therefore I had to collect the information myself. The time which I had at my disposal was too short to plan a full length study them. Therefore I decided to concentrate on such aspects which may throw light on their life-style as well as indicate some events in their history. In a situation like this, the oral traditions are the only source and therefore I decided to collect information on their legends, folk tales and

2. Ibid, p.75.

folk songs. I have also observed them singing and found out about their rituals and festivals as part of their oral tradition.

A proper understanding of the oral traditions is possible only in the context of the culture in which they exist. Since I have not done a full study of the culture of the Wanchos I have not made an attempt to analyse the information that I have collected on their oral traditions. This is one the major limitations of this work. The limitation of the time and the scope of this dissertation also did not permit me to make a comparative study of the tribe but I have only tried to take the first step towards the fuller understanding of the Wanchos tribe.

The first chapter is on the Introduction and Literature Survey where I have given the kind of information that is available on the Wanchos. The second chapter is on

Historical Geography. In this chapter, I have identified the physical feature of the area inhabited by the Wancho. It also discussed the land, soil, climate and its overall impact on the life of the Wancho. The third chapter concentrates on the study of their material life of the tribe. The nature of distribution and various custom connected with it has also been discussed. I have also paid attention to the nature of their agriculture and industrial technology and their impact on the economical life of the Wancho. The fourth chapter is the Nature of State. In this chapter, I have tried my best to provide historical data to give an idea of the evolution of the state. The role of various dynasties from time to time and the system of administration also have been discussed to some extent. In the fifth chapter, I have tried to present a very brief account of the Social Organization. In this

chapter, I have described their institution of marriage, various customs connected with birth, ritual and beliefs, and disposal of their dead. I have also concentrated on their religious practices and their impact on the social and cultural life of the Wancho. The sixth chapter is the Conclusion.

Migration:

The Wancho like many other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have their own tradition about migration. According to one tradition, the original place from where they came is Nyannu Ofan³. Another tradition traces the courses of their migration to their present abode through Tangnu and Tsangnu, both in the Tuensang area of the present Nagaland. It is not known when they actually migrated. The Ahom Buranjis and the early British records, however suggest that

3. Srivastav, L.R.N., Among the Wanchos, p.1.

they came and settled in the south-western part of Tirap some hundred years ago⁴.

Origin: The Wancho narrate many tales in connection with their origin. The tales and legends differ from clan to clan. Some of these legends are interesting and through the years have perhaps become so coloured that now they seem full of romantic fiction and mystery. As regards folklore and its scope, P. Goswami⁵ put down that folklore was first coined by W.J. Thomas (1840) and it has established itself as a generic term under which are included traditional institutions, art and craftsmanship, customs and roles connected with marriage, inheritance, birth and death, festival, agriculture, fishing and hunting, cattle rearing, beliefs in spirits, fairies, witchcraft, spells, charms,

4. see Tirap District Gazetteer, p.32.

5. Goswami, P., Ballad and Tales of Assam, p.2.

omen etc. The Wancho do not have any literature but it is rich in folklore and other local tradition handed down from generation to generation. Of these some are written down and published in school magazines and some are simply preserved and handed down by word of mouth.

Legends:

The Chief is said to have originated from a pumpkin seed and some clans say from a gourd. But the queen was from Heaven. One day the Chief of Longthan had gone hunting. As he neared the river, he saw a few beautiful girls taking bath. He hid himself and watched. From their conversation, he came to know that these beautiful damsels were from Heaven and they had come to visit the earth. Seeing the river they could not resist taking a bath. The chief took a long stick and with it he managed to collect the clothes of these angels in a bundle. The poor angels could not come out of the water now.

The Chief went up to them introduced himself and told them not to be afraid. Later he married one of the angel and lived happily after.

An old and childless Wancho couple were extremely happy about an extra ordinary pumpkin that they had found growing near their house. The pumpkin was taken inside with a lot of care. At night, the couple heard strange noises. They woke up to find out if any one had entered their house. They looked up and down and to their surprise saw that their prized possession the pumpkin was rolling to and fro. Thinking that the pumpkin was haunted the man took his dao and hit the pumpkin. At his stroke the pumpkin broke open and inside they saw a baby crying for he was hurt on the head by the dao. The couple took him out and tended to his wound. They reared him and

called him Chang. He grew up to be the king - 'Chang' -
wound and wang chief. He married an angel from Heaven.
His wife was called Changwangsia or addressed as Asen
Rangkhie.

The Wanchos believe in ghosts and spirits. They
believe that seeing a ghost is bad omen. Why is it taken as
a bad sign?

The Longsom Raja narrated a legend which goes thus:
Long long ago the earth was occupied by the humans, the
spirits and the animals. These three were constantly fighting
with each other to gain supremacy. The 'Bou' satan wanted
to wipe off the human beings intellect. One day 'Bou' saw
a man, the man was carrying a naked 'dao' or a sword.
It hung from his cane basket. The 'Bou' thought the dao
must be the man's tail and made a swift snatch at the
dao. The naked dao cut and injured the Bou. He had to

admit to the human's intelligence and agreed that the human being was superior to all spirits. This was an insult to the Bou and in his embarrassment he turned himself invisible. The Wanchos believe that Bou is on the lookout for revenge and if any man meets a Bou he is in for trouble -, sickness, poverty, death and even famine might befall on him.

Fight for Fire:

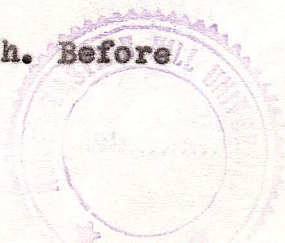
The three - human, spirits and animals that lived on this earth, long long ago were facinated by fire. The fire that they saw in the sky - lightning. The fire that struck the land during a storm. They felt that this fire would be an useful weapon. All three contemplated on conquering fire and owning it. But to master and own fire was not easy, they needed to know how to make fire. so they

decided to hold a competition. The first turn was given to the spirits but they failed, then the animals too failed. Now was the turn of the human, while the spirits and animals watched the man took a piece of wood and a bit of string and began rubbing. Soon a spark appeared and there was flame. The human's skill in kindling fire was appreciated by the spirits and the animals. So man became the sole owners of fire which helped them to become superior over spirits and animals.

Origin of thunder and lightning:

The Wanchos believe that thunder and lightning is the sign of anger of those live in Heaven. Once upon a time the Queen of Heaven came down to visit the earth. She was given a pira (wooden stool) to sit on. The poor queen was very uncomfortable on this pira . She was angry at this and considered that she was given a very bad treatment by her hosts i.e. the people on earth. Before

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she left, she asked them - "Of what wood is this pira made off?" Her host replied, "of Zake". The Zak tree has splinters and do not make good seats. When she reached Heaven, the Queen told the king of this he laughed. His laugh is said to be the thunder. The queen was so angry and humiliated that she ordered the fire of heaven i.e. lightning to strike and burn down the zak trees. Even now zak trees are normally hit by lightning and thunder can be heard then.

The Gourd Prince:

The first Wancho king is said to have come out of a jati lau (water gourd). The Wancho usually leave gourds to dry and when it is dry they clean it well and use it as a vessel.

Long long ago one such gourd was left to dry and insects began to form inside it. When people went near the

gourd they heard a whispering sound and so they broke it open. To their surprise they found a human baby inside.

The people were thrilled they thought the baby was extraordinary - a super being called him Chongwang; chong mean insect, and wang to settle or thrive on. They considered this baby to be the son of God. They gave him presents and respects and made him their king. This how kingship got started.

Methodology:

In collecting the oral data care has been taken to select only those which are considered to be most authentic. Census Reports, Gazetteers, Newspaper reports, journals, British account, tour diary of Srivastav have been consulted and used profitably.

Tools used:

The tools of field data collection includes interviews with the Chiefs, Gaonburas and selected knowledgeable persons, participant observations.

As the study is based on the interpretation and analysis of the folklores and the oral informations, and the description of the factual data, the method being followed in preparing this is empirical in its study.

I have considered and incorporated the suggestions made by the experts who had attended my pre-submission seminar. I thank them for their guidance and showing keen interest in my work.

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