CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS
Extensive surveys carried on by me revealed that the Angami Nagas have democratic type of governing bodies and functionings in their political institutions. They had no system of dictatorial government nor kingship but pure democratic form of political institutions.

**Selection of Representatives**

The members of these institutions were not elected through ballot papers as it is practised today in a democratic government set-up but the members of such bodies were selected as representatives of the people according to their personality, diplomatic qualities, physical strength and power, wisdom, wealth and skill in war. The leaders of the Angami Nagas, therefore, were not selected on the basis of hereditary, nor on election basis. Mr. Selhoulie of Kohima village stated that according to the traditions of their fathers or forefathers

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1. Mr. Selhoulie, Aged 77 years of Kohima village, interviewed on 10-5-1994.
they used to select their leaders (Krutamia) in clan or village considering the economic status, wisdom and physical power which is still followed by their people in the villages today. Mr. Zasivituo of Jotsoma village while endorsing the same view said that they selected their representatives from different clans (Thino) looking at the personality and their reputation of being wealthy and wise. Persons thus selected will take full responsibilities for all matters of general interest of the villagers. Mr. Vipfuzhu of Mima village while sharing views on such matters also expressed that if there was any problem, like theft or murder in their village among the sub-clans (Thepfu) or clans (Thino), they usually refer such matters to the village elders (Phichumia) who by dint of their wisdom and knowledge used to solve the cases in the villages. Therefore, all these interviews with the people in different villages in the Angami areas indicate that the same type of political institutions are still prevalent in all the villages of the Angami people. It was noticed that though the leaders had immense powers in their hand in village matters, they never

2. Mr. Zasivituo, Aged 73 years of Jotsoma village, interviewed on 3-7-1994.

3. Vipfuzhu, Aged 90 years of Mima village, interviewed on 3-7-1994.
completely controlled the individuals because freedom of expression were also provided to the individuals concerned. Each individual could share and express their views and opinions in sub-clan, clan or village meetings. Mr. Helie of Kohima village stated that in any meeting of the clan or village, the majority opinion of the people are taken into considerations while deciding the problems or cases. This has been continuing since the age of their fathers and forefathers. B.C. Allen, E.A. Gait, C.G. Allen and H.F. Howard also stated in the Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India:

The ordinary Naga village is, however, a very democratic community and the leaders of the people exercise comparatively little influence. They are noted for their skill in war or in diplomacy, or for their wealth; but their orders are obeyed only so far they are in accord with the inclinations of the community at large, and even the wishes of the majority are not considered binding on the weaker party. 5

**Position of Village Elders**

The Angami Nagas never derecognised the contributions of the work of individual in any matter relating to the welfare of the society or community. It always

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used to take or consider the important suggestion or ideas which were given by individuals in the meetings. Mr. Lhoutuo Shuyha of Merma village\(^6\) stated that during their fathers and grand-fathers time he noticed that the elder people in the village were very simple and always tried to give their best to solve the problems with understanding. They also tried to bring out a collective decision in the village by giving full cooperation on any important issues relating to their community. He further said that with the changing of time the human moral and characters also completely changed.

The Angami Nagas honour and respect the elders (Phichumia) in the village. They always consult or take advice from the village elders or Phichumia in all important matters and affairs in the village. Mr. T. Pielie of Gariphema village\(^7\) stated that in case of boundary dispute between two villages, the elders or Phichumia will be contacted and consulted in order to take final decision in understanding as far as practicable for the settlement. If any unpleasant event or incident takes place, like murder or raping etc. in the village or

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6. Mr. Shuyha Lhoutuo, Aged 81 years of Merema village, interviewed on 26-6-1994.
7. Mr. Pielie, T. Aged 58 years of Gariphema village, interviewed on 4-5-1994.
between two villages the judgement will be pronounced by the elders.

The Angami Nagas established political friendship between villages and Thino (clan) to maintain and strengthen relationship through the village elders. Mr. Atuo of Khonoma village\(^8\) said that in order to help each other in time of difficulty in clan or village the Angamis used to make friendship between clans and villages. This friendship was renewed between the two villages by celebrating Kekinyi. Kekinyi means visiting one clan of a village by the clan members of another village using all traditional dresses. In the war time, this friendship was maintained very strongly in many villages for protection by the village elders.

The survey also revealed that the Angami Nagas did not have the system of hereditary chieftainship but depended only on those who can protect the life of the people at the time of difficult situation which arises in the clan or in the villages. Therefore, the villagers while selecting leaders always looked to the life of the person, his influences, wealth, wisdom and skill in war. Although the selection of the people to such

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8. Mr. Atuo, Aged 56 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 2-4-1995.
posts is not based on hereditary measures, but in some cases people of the same family are selected due to having such qualities but not regarded as hereditary. Majority of the Angami villages practised the same system which was endorsed by Mr. Kigwelie of Chiesema village. Mr. Sebi Dolie also shared the similar opinion. He stated, "Villagers who had exceptionally gifted men, like physical strength, wealth and wisdom were selected as their leaders." Therefore, it is found that the people who have some natural gift, influence, power, wealth and wisdom, were most commonly selected as their leaders and such people used to command and control the village. J.H. Hutton also noted:

It is most unlikely, however, that the hereditary—nature of such chieftainships depended on anything more than the influence, wealth, and intelligence of the chief's son's enabling him to retain the position afforded him by that of his father. At best the chief's position probably gave him no power except on the warpath. Nothing can be well managed by a debating society, but war not at all, and although a definite leader might be unnecessary for small head-hunting raids, pitched battles, such as sometimes

9. Mr. Kigwelie, Aged 85 years of Chiesema village, interviewed on 10-7-1994.
took place, and expeditions on a large scale would necessitate someone's taking the lead, while leadership in war would doubtless give influence, though not authority, in the village in times of peace. 11

To look into the village affairs and to solve the village problems the Angami Nagas always obeyed the orders of their leaders which have been in practice since a very long time. In Angami dialect their leaders are called as Peyumia* or Krutamia. The Peyumia or Krutamia are the people who control the village council or institutions like Thehu (Kichuki) or Baze. The Thehu (Kichuki) or Baze are meeting places particularly of the male folk. In some villages 'Thehu' and 'Kichuki' or 'Morung' are attached. Baze is an open space where the male villagers used to sit together, which is not like Thehu or Kichuki (Morung). This Peyumia and Krutamia (Leader) can influence the whole community and train them the war tactics from the Thehu or Baze. This was communicated by Mr. Golatuo Zinyu of Khonoma village. 12 In the early history of the Angami Nagas, the voice of Peyumia and Krutamia (Leader) was very strong. The Peyumia or Krutamia were the persons

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* Peyumia meaning wise man.
who will pronounce the final decision of different cases with their ability to exercise administrative powers as per law. The decision of Peyumia or Krutamia (Leader) was obeyed by the village people.

The presence of the British in Naga Hills, however, brought about a change in almost all aspects of the Naga political life. Appointment of village elders as Gaonburas* (G.B.) and Dobhasi** (D.B.), to assist the administration in different areas and regions significantly reduced the responsibility of the Peyumia or Krutamia in the villages. But Mr. Vilhoucha of Kohima village stated that although Kohima village has many Gaonburas in the village, the people are still looking up to Peyumia or Krutamia who is considered as having wisdom and knowledge to solve and settle the village problems like land disputes, murders, theft, etc. Likewise Mrs. Vihole Sale of Khuzama village also said that

* Gaonburas are appointed by the Government if the village proposes his name. They are given some honorarium in cash or kind at the end of financial year by the Government.

** Dobhasi are also appointed by the Government and they get their monthly salary from the Government.

13. Mr. Vilhoucha, Aged 82 years of Kohima village, interviewed on 1-5-1994.

if any difficulty arose in the village such as fighting, raping and land disputes, the villagers will inform the Peyumia (Krutamia) and Gaonburas and they will settle the cases. It was also found that the Peyumia and Gaonburas in different villages of the Angami Nagas were not of the same nature. In some cases the village people depended only on the Peyumia or Krutamia and whereas other people trusted Gaonburas more than Peyumia or Krutamia. But in some villages it is found that both work together with understanding. J.H. Hutton says:

The Pehumalt or chiefs, such as they were, seem to have had very little more authority than the 'Gaonburas' nowadays appointed by Government, and that is saying very little. There occurred in some villages cases of the chieftainship passing on by inheritance. 15

In every village of the Angami Naga areas, the people have their own Peyumia (Krutamia) and Gaonburas who represent their clan (Thino or Thepfu) or sub-clan. Therefore, when any difficulty or problem arises these people meet together and discuss the village problem as best as they can do at their level. They have power to exercise according to existing customary laws and the people obey the

* Peyumia and Pehumas carry the same meaning.
orders of Peyumia (Krutamia) and Gaonburas if their orders are in accordance with customs. The Angami Nagas do not have a written record of law but the decisions of the members who meet to settle the cases or problems are treated as final if they follow on the basis of their customs. The members always try to do justice to any cases, as was stated by Mr. Kruvituo of Kiruphema village.\(^{16}\)

The Angami Nagas did not have village councils in early days. But in practice, in each sub-clan or clan they have some people of exceptional gifts who possess talent to speak or to solve the village problems in a peaceful manner. People always looked up to such persons in their sub-clan, clan and village in order to decide their cases. Mr. Lhouvinyu of Jotsoma village\(^ {17}\) said that in their village if there is any case, like land demarcation, robbery and quarrels between persons or among the sub-clan or clan they usually called the elderly people to meet and request them to settle such cases as soon as possible. The same process was followed in all villages of the Angami Nagas. Statement of R. R.

\(^{16}\) Mr. Kruvituo, Aged 70 years of Kiruphema village, interviewed on 5-6-1994.

\(^{17}\) Mr. Lhouvinyu, Aged 70 years of Jotsoma village, interview on 29-5-1994.
Shimray in this context is noteworthy:

It is difficult to imagine, as to how the administration was run in the Angami society where extreme type of democracy existed. The independent-minded Angamis did attach much importance to the Chief-tainship, as one Angami was considered as good as any other Angami. They had no village council. Any urgent problem or dispute was taken to a public meeting convened by any influential leaders. 18

The same procedure is practised till today by them. The Angami Nagas today have the village councils in every village which was introduced by the State Government of Nagaland in 1970.* In fact, it has its own village council in every village to solve their problems and development in the villages. In certain areas, when the village council members find it difficult to solve the village problems, usually recommended those to the elderly (Phichumia) people in the village to settle according to their customary law. Mr. Yaneilie of Kohima village 19 said that most of the Naga villagers respect the elderly


* Village and Area Councils were formed under the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act, 1970. The Area Council is non-functional at present.

(Phichumia) people because these are the people who practically bring peace at difficult times, which may be internal or problems with other neighbouring villages. They try to settle problems among themselves through their elders (Phichumiako) without going to the civil courts, which were established when the British people came to this region. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XVIII recorded that:

Many disputes, both of a civil and criminal nature, are decided in the village without reference to the courts. Theft was punished by the Nagas with utmost severity. If a man takes a little grain from his neighbour's field, he forfeits not only his own crops, but the land on which it has been grown, while theft from a granary entails expulsion from the village and the confiscation of the offender's property. 20

Most of the villages in Angami Naga areas still follow the oral tradition of customary law in any civil and criminal cases. It also cannot be denied completely that there are some people who go to the highest court in the country against the opponent if they could not do anything according to their customs and traditional law. One of such instances was stated by Mr. Pusal of Viswema

village, who said that Viswema and Jakhama villages were having a river dispute about 15 years ago. The two villages tried their best to settle the river dispute according to Angami Naga village customary law but it could not do so. Therefore, both the parties had to go to the High Court and Supreme Court. These two courts also could not bring about any satisfactory solution to the two villages. The Supreme Court gave its judgement by recommending to settle the cases according to the traditional customary law of the villages. Finally, the two villages settled the river dispute of Kerhuru among themselves without any difficulty through the initiative of the village elders (Phichumia or Krutamia).

It is thus seen that the elders (Phichumia) in the villages command great respect in all aspects of village life. The village elders (Phichumia) also have a specific way of setting the issues. In order to settle the difficult problems in the villages, the elders or leaders used to meet in a place called 'Thehu' or 'Kichuki' (Morung) or 'Baze'. These are the institutions of the Angami Nagas to discuss the important problems in the villages.

21. Mr. Pusal, Aged 72 years of Viswema village, interviewed on 12-9-1993 -

* The name of the River dispute was called Kerhuru.
practice, the male members used to meet in the morning
and evening discussing or talking about the daily affairs
in the village or other villages. Here the power and
application of custom and traditional law of the community
are discussed by the elders like taking oath, land dis­
putes, quarrelling, raping, murders, etc. Mr. Neiseliie
of Kohima village\textsuperscript{22} and Mr. Pfulhoutsu of Jotsoma vil-
lage\textsuperscript{23} stated the same views.

It is said that if there is any important issue
relating to the clan or village the elders or leaders
in the village are informed to meet in a particular place
of 'Thehu' or 'Baze' to discuss their problems. Mr. Nilesa
of Khonoma village\textsuperscript{24} also gave the similar views when
he said 'Thehu' (Morung) or 'Baze' is a very important
place where we discuss the problems and try to solve
such issues which occurs between sub-clan and clan or
village and village. It is a place where we have to find
out ways and means to bring about peace and understanding
by forgetting and forgiving one another. Thehu and Baze
are therefore important places or institutions among

\textsuperscript{22} Mr. Neiseliie, Aged 69 years of Kohima village, inter­
viewed on 19-9-1993.

\textsuperscript{23} Mr. Pfulhoutsu, Aged 73 years of Jotsoma village, inter­
viewed on 26-7-1993.

\textsuperscript{24} Mr. Nilesa, Aged 54 years of Khonoma village, inter­
the Angami Naga society. It is found that if there is any land dispute or murders between two villages, the two parties will meet in the Thehu or Baze to discuss such cases. If it is difficult to solve the land dispute or some other disputes among themselves, they will also invite their neighbouring village elders (Phichumia) and leaders (Krutamia) to settle their cases according to their traditional and customary laws by fixing the date and place of Thehu or Baze. The elders (Phichumia) and leaders (Krutamia) of the neighboring villages when they meet in a particular place of Thehu or Baze on a fixed day, they will listen to both the parties and will try to settle the case without taking oath. But in some other cases if it is difficult to settle the case unless they give chances to both the parties to take oath according to their traditional customary practices, then the parties will take oath in case of land dispute or they will divide the land equally, and if only one could take oath, the party who did could claim the whole land, as was stated by Mr. Neilihou of Kohima village. J.H. Hutton also correctly stated:

In deciding disputes questions of customs would be, and still are, referred naturally enough to the old men of the clan,

and, as even the Angami has some respect for his elders, the decision of old men in regard to matters of custom is more or less final, though it sometimes happens that a young man will snap his fingers at custom and defy his fellow-villagers to do their worst. Question of fact are usually decided by oath, and an oath, at any rate if the lives of others are made responsible for its truth as well as the life of swearer, is usually accepted by either party. 26

It is observed that the institution of Thehu or Baze is an important place of the Angami community for settlement of peace and agreement since time immemorial and plays an important role till today. It is also found that the traditional village customs and practices are also continuously discussed in such gatherings. The implications and applications of all these traditions are discussed which plays a great role in preserving cultural heritage of the Angami Nagas.

It has been mentioned earlier that the Angami Nagas have different Thino or Thepfu (Clan) in each village and in each Thino or Thepfu again have a relationship with another. For instance, Khonoma village of Thevo Thino (clan) has a good relation with Dapfetsu Thino (clan) of Kohima village as stated by Mr. Yiechurhicha

of Khonoma village. Mr. Sebi Dolie of Khonoma village also gave another example of Merhuma Thino of Khonoma which have a relationship with Mekhu Thino (clan) of Kigwema village. Every village of the Angami Nagas have relation with one another in terms of power and understanding since many many years and which still continues today. It is also found that at the time of difficult situation faced by one Thino or Thepfu (clan) of the village, the other Thino (clan) of another village will try their best to help. Some of the Thino or Thepfu have a blood relation from their ancestors, and they want to keep up that blood relationship in their lives, though they are living in different villages and distant places. J.H. Hutton stated that:

These 'thino', to use the Angami word, all trace their descent to some ancestor, a member of another of the kelhu,* and though going under different names in different places do not forget their relationship with collateral clans neighbouring, or even very distant villages. Moreover, these 'thino' were until comparatively recently undoubtedly really exogamous units, though their place is being rapidly taken by the kindred, in spite of the strong disapprobation of

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27. Mr. Yiechurhicha, Aged 70 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 26-5-1994.


* Kelhu, Hutton uses as generation.
the elders of the clan, who prophesy barren marriages or idiot and diseased children as a result. But marriages even within the kindred are not nowadays unknown. 29

Mr. Viyalie of Nerhema village correctly stated that at the time of one Thino or Thepfu having land dispute or murder cases, the other Thino or Thepfu (clan) of another village used to visit or enquire about the case in order to show their blood relation or connection which they have had from their grand-fathers or fore-fathers. Or even in case of fire which destroyed their houses or village they used to present essential commodities like cloths, money and other materials. It is observed that in order to continue the blood relationship of the Thino or Thepfu (clan) in different villages, the people of the Angami villages maintain, Thino (clan) even when they live in separate villages. The population of the Thinos are found to vary to a large extent from village to village. However, the bigger Thino or Thepfu cannot insult the smaller Thino or Thepfu (clan) of having less population and in case of such insult in a particular village the other village of Thino or Thepfu will help

30. Mr. Viyalie, Aged 61 years of Nerhema village, interviewed on 13-9-1993.
the smaller Thino or Thepfu if they have blood relation. Sometime if such a thing happens in the village the smaller Thino informs the other Thino who are living in other villages. This was stated by Mr. Khetso Pienyu of Chiedema village.  

The Angami Nagas, in order to remember their ancestors, they used to pay a visit to one another Thino (clan) during the Sekrenyi / festival season, which is called Kekinyi* in Angami. But in this Kekinyi only the members of the malefolk who can walk and look after themselves will make such visits as some villages are located at distant places. If such visits were organised between the two villages of Thino (clan) they used to stay for a day or two in a village and discuss about the relationship of their grand-fathers and forefathers, etc. By this arrangement, a better tie of relationship and unity is established among the people, which furthers the relationship and friendly tie among the children of different villages. Mr. Kruneigwe of Kiruphema village- stated that Kekinyi is one of the important programmes for all

31. Mr. Pienyu Khetso, Aged 75 years of Chiedema village, interviewed on 15-12-1993.

* Kekinyi one Thino (clan) will pay visit to another village during Sekrenyi festival season by using all their traditional dresses.

32. Mr. Kruneigwe, Aged 76 years of Kiruphema village, interviewed on 5-6-1994.
the Angarai Naga people as in this Kekinyi, the people came to know their Thino or Thepfu (clan) blood relationship or agreement made by their forefathers between different Thino (clan).

It is very interesting to note that although the programmes of Kekinyi were organized for a particular Thino (clan) group, people of other Thino or Thepfu (clan) groups too contributed to the extent possible in terras of cash, kind or discussion. This indicates the tie of friendly relationships that existed among the Angami Nagas. Presents of Guns, Daos, Spears, Mithun, etc. were also exchanged as stated by Mr. Aruno of Khonoma village. 33

Thus the Angami Naga villages have a strong unity and understanding among the Thino (clan) even if they live in different villages. They never forget to help another Thino (clan) at the time of war with another village of Thino (clan). Therefore in memory of their noble work of help and support in time of difficult problems or war, the Angami Nagas still preserve such things in continuing such practices. Mr. Neizovi of

33- Mr. Aruno, Aged 65 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 14-5-1994.
Kigwema village^4 informed that among the Angami Nagas, the Thino or Thepfu (clan) was one of the important institutions in the Angami society as it tells us about our blood relationship or references to our forefathers. Therefore, in order to recognise or to remember our forefathers' work, we use to offer presents to one another at the time of pulling village gatedoor or bridge. This is one of the true stories of the Angami village. If one Thino or Thepfu (clan) organises a function of pulling village gate-door, bridge, monoliths and Kichuzhu,* they will invite other Thino (clan) of other village, and after receiving the invitation, they will bring cash or materials for presentation.

The practice of participation of traditional functions of one Thino by the members of other Thino tells of high degree of unity among the members of Angami village. Thus, Thino (clan) is regarded as an important political institution of the Angamis.

34. Mr. Neizovi, Aged 64 years of Kigwema village, interviewed on 23-8-1993.

* Kichuzhu is a sleeping bed of malefolk, female were not allowed to climb or go there. Fifteen to twenty can sleep at night.