CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

Religion is an all-pervading supernatural phenomenon in man’s life. For this reason it has been considered universal. Religion has exercised the most profound influence over man’s thoughts and behavior from times beyond human recollection. It has been defined as the unique attempt of each society to express the meaning of its existence. Often people’s environment is hostile, which disturb the balance of living. So their religion provides people with a framework within which to come to terms with their environment and to give their experience a meaning.

Although no one is certain of the word’s origin, we know that ‘Religion’ derives from Latin and that languages influenced by Latin have equivalents to the English word ‘religion’. Various explanations of the word religion has been given such as “Re- reading” referring to the repetition of scripture which is derived from Latin Relegio; “treating carefully” or “to go over again” derived from Latin Relegere; “re-connection to the divine” or “to bind fast” derived from Latin Religare. An alternate interpretation of the “reconnection” etymology emphasizes a sense of servitude to God. (Longkumer & Moanungsang, 2012:2). Russel T. McCutcheon defines Religion in the following words, “It is today commonly used to refer to those beliefs, behaviours, and social institutions that have something to do with speculations on any, and all, of the following; the origin, end and significance of the universe; what happens after death, the existence and wishes of powerful, non-human beings such as spirits, ancestors, angels, demons and Gods; and the manner in which all of this shapes human behavior”. (Partridge (ed), 1982:10). The 19th century French sociologist Emile Durkheim offers a more comprehensive definition when he writes that religion is “a unified system of
beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden-
beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community”. (1912: 44). It is a strong
statement that the main function of religion in society is to strengthen human communities.
Anthropology approaches religion as an aspect of culture. Religious practices and beliefs are
important because they are central to the ways in which we organize our social lives. They
shape our understanding of our place in the world and determine how we relate to one another
and to the rest of the natural and supernatural order.

For pre-literate societies, religion is almost the same as culture. Religion becomes
more important to a tribal who live nearer to nature, and whose life is largely influenced by its
overwhelming forces. They have no religious writings or scriptures. Instead, beliefs are
handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. In India, under the influence
of E.B Tylor, the then British Government of India informed the official administrators
including ethnographers to employ the term ‘animism’ to explain the religion of the tribal or
indigenous communities. (Longkumer& Moanungsang, 2012: 29). Thus, J.P. Mills called the
Lotha religion as animism. (1922:113). The same term was used by the Christian missionaries
to describe the Lotha religion. Again the indigenous religion of the tribal people are described
by using terms like pre-literate, primitive, traditional etc,. In the present chapter, a brief sketch
is given on the nature of the Lotha religion. The chapter also deals with how the primitive
Lothas understood the supernatural, and how their religion shaped their life experiences, gave
them meaning and purpose, influences family life, provides the contours of the yearly
calendar, provides norms, values and key rituals that help solidify the people’s sense of
belonging in their communities and in the company of a higher power. Using sources drawn
mainly from oral narrators attempt is made to study meticulously the ritualistic components of
the traditional religion. It also takes note of the role of the religious officials.
Anthropologists have been concerned with the origin of religion and have put forward various theories. Animism, Animatism, Naturism, Naturalism etc all try to understand religion in its primordial form. This reference has been necessary because the religion that is to be studied belongs to a class which many anthropologists have called ‘primitive religion’. The use of this term to describe the indigenous religions of the tribes has run into difficulties. Some writers pointed out that the word ‘primitive’ cannot be used to indicate this religion on two reasons. Firstly, if we take the term ‘primitive’ in the sense of ‘early’, ‘ancient’, ‘’ or ‘primal’, it cannot refer to this religion, as primitive man and his religion in this sense disappeared from the world thousands of years ago. It is wrong to speak of the religion of living people as primitive. Secondly, the term ‘primitive’ could mean ‘outdated’, ‘unsophisticated’ ‘, ‘backward’, or ‘savage’. In this sense, the term ‘primitive’ stands at the opposite end of the pole from ‘civilized’. Thus, used in this meaning to refer to these religion, the term ‘primitive’ can indicate that they are unsophisticated and crude in comparison with the religions of developed civilizations.

E.E Evans Pritchard, while examining the theories of primitive religion writes; “in these theories it was assumed, taken for granted, that we were at one end of the scale of human progress and the so-called savages were at the other end, and that, because primitive men were on a rather low technological level, their thought and custom must in all respects be the antithesis of ours. We are rational, primitive peoples pre logical, living in a world of dreams and make-believe, of mystery and owe; we are capitalists, they communists; we are monogamous, they promiscuous; we are monotheists, they fetishists, animists, pre-animists or what have you and so on”. (1965:105). Primitive man was thus represented as childish, crude, prodigal, and comparable to animals and imbeciles. All this fitted very well with
colonialist and other racial and ethnic prejudice, and it indicate lack of understanding and sympathy from those races which considers themselves superior to others (Idowa, 1993:425-26).

P. T. Philips, while making a survey of the growth of Baptist churches in Nagaland wrote on the Nagas as having no deep rooted faith or elaborate practices. To quote him, “Their religion is only a matter of certain rituals and observances to appease the spirits. They are nothing but certain formalities and practices. In fact it cannot be called a true worship. Their belief is very shallow and unsophisticated” (1976:183). Naga Theological writers like Mar Pongener and Renthy Keitzar argues that calling the Naga religion as ‘ Unsophisticated religion’ or ‘savage religion’, as these writers puts it does not hold ground for, though they may not be as developed as other cultures, or though they may not have had a doctrinal clarity as other religions, their religion is certainly not absurd. These theories necessitate the search for alternative words to refer to these religions, and terms like ‘pre- literate’ and ‘traditional’ came to be used. Renthy keitzar suggests that the Naga Religion in general should be called ‘Naga Traditional Religion’ (1995: 83) in order to make it more specific to the ethnic group.

The validity of the use of the term ‘primitive’ to refer to the Lotha traditional religion may be brought out by understanding the nature and characteristics of primitive religions in general. Primitive religion is not a revealed religion, in the sense that it does not have a founder, as in the case of other major religions like Buddhism (founded by Gautama Buddha 6th cent BC), Zoroastrianism (Iranian religion founded by Zoroaster, Persian religious teacher, 6th cent BC) or Christianity for that matter. It has no doctrines, scriptures, prophets or places of worship like temples or mosques. Their beliefs, rites and rituals were handed down through generations orally. Secondly, it is a group religion. The primitive individual is so identified with the clan that he could not think away from it. Group thoughts, custom and tradition conditioned the life of the primitive people. (Srivastava,1974:28). Thirdly, the characteristic
elements of primitive religion are animism, spiritism, magic, ritualistic ceremonies and sacrifice.

Taking these into consideration, the term ‘Primitive’ may be used to refer to the traditional Lotha religion on several reasons. Like the pre-literate people who used primitive techniques such as hunting and agriculture for maintaining their life, the Lotha also depended on such methods to maintain their life. The Lothas, for centuries remained in isolation, and therefore out of general influence from other culture and religion, until hundred and fifty years ago or so when their isolation was broken by the inroads of the British rule and American Baptist missionaries. Until then they were pre-literate and primitive. In civilized religion, faith or adherence to it is a personal choice. But for primitive peoples, religion and the rites and rituals associated with it are a part of the socio-economic structure and a part of everyday existence. Every individual adheres to religion by way of custom and practice rather than out of choice. This holds true for the Lotha individual too.

The subsistence strategy of the primitive people conditioned their religion. For people living in mountainous region and primitive set up, the forces of nature plays an important role in their belief systems. Their subsistence depended on the whims and caprices of nature. Thus to get tangible results, the benignant as well as the malignant powers are to be appeased, to avert natural calamities and disasters. As any other primitive religion, the Lotha religion was shaped in such environmental condition which may not seek high inordinate principles of life and philosophy, but it is a pragmatic religion which allows a more powerful role to the supernatural forces and a larger area of operation. In view of the above reasons, the term ‘primitive’ is used, in an extended sense to refer to the traditional Lotha religion. Such has no racial or ethnic bias, and it is justifiable.

The indigenous cosmos is spatially divided into a series of overlapping tier. At its simplest, the universe has the earth sandwiched between the heavenly terrain of the Gods
above and the subterranean world below. (Partridge, 2007: 116). The Lotha understood that there is a pre-existent supreme being inhabiting the upper strata of the cosmology, and often remote from everyday human activity. Occupying the lower strata of the cosmos, alongside humankind and the flora and fauna surrounding it, were lesser deities or supernatural beings (spirits) some malevolent and some benevolent. These spirits, whether malevolent, benevolent or ambivalent are regarded as primary causal forces potentially influencing every facet of personal wellbeing and social relation.

The Lothas were religious from time immemorial, and hence no definite time or place about the origin of their religion can be given with certainty. Zanao Mozhui traced the origin of the word ‘Lotha’ by saying that the word is derived from ‘Lo’ which means ‘sacrifice’ or ‘offering’, while Tha means ‘fully’ or ‘satisfactorily’. For him ‘Lotha’ therefore means ‘people who fully sacrificed to the satisfaction of the Gods’. (2004: 4). So, from the beginning the Lothas were religious people. Like primitive people in any part of the world, the Lotha ancestors were awestruck at the natural phenomena like the regularity of day and night, the stars and planets, the change of seasons and natural forces like the rain and storm, lightning and thunder, earthquakes, wonders of life like birth, growth, hunger, sickness, death and so on which was beyond their understanding and control. These experiences, perhaps, made the primitive Lotha to realize and acknowledge the existence of a supernatural power or being who works behind these natural phenomena. The wonder and fear of the natural phenomena which was beyond their comprehension and control, and the belief in the existence of supernatural beings became the foundation of the Lotha traditional religion.

Thus, the traditional religion of the Lothas can be called animism. Dreaded potency of the unknown or fear is a constant element in Animism. The fear of things invisible which is the natural seed of religion has derived its germinating force from animism. (Clodd, 2007: 48). Edward Clodd further writes about the origin of the concept of the supernatural that the
primitive man, “having once conceived of objects as informed by something corresponding to man’s life and will, realizing therein that there was a distinction between the thing moved and the something that moved it, the idea of a twofold, a seen and unseen, must arise. And in that idea was the germ of the supernatural, which itself had impetus in the fact borne in upon man that he was at the mercy of powers stronger than himself, that crossed his path, that thwarted his schemes, and played havoc with anything to which he clung” (2007:49). Thus, the idea of the existence of the supernatural is conceived, and these supernatural, with their great powers could arouse wrath, calamity, misery and disaster to the people. To restrain them in their anger, appeasement in the form of sacrifices and rituals have to be made from time to time. Here, we cannot ignore the role nature has in the Lotha religion. Nature operates in its different manifestation like the sky, the Earth, the mountain and the water. Religion becomes all the more important to a tribal people who live nearer to nature, and whose life is largely influenced by its overwhelming forces. Religion becomes a part of their life and is interwoven in their socio-religious beliefs and rituals. (Sinha,1977:11).

It is a religion without a name or a definite place of worship, nor a structural set of uniform beliefs or tenets in black and white. Mar Pongener describes the Naga Religion in the following words: “The Naga Traditional religion did not possess any sacred books as norms of authority for the faith and practice of the believers. However, they did have rich heritages of rites and ceremonies, myths and legends, folktales and stories, wisdom and proverbs, forms and practices, mores and morals, customs and traditions which have been handed down orally from generation to generation” (2011:42). This applies to the Lotha traditional religion too. Their religion can be called a religion of life experiences and this, Renthy Keitzar calls the “primal Bible” of the Naga traditional religion. (1995:83). The people’s life experiences are dictated by the great fear of the supernatural power and spirits whom they appease. Therefore, the actual practice of their religion can be easily labeled animism, which Anthropologist Sir
E. B. Tylor defined as a ‘belief in spiritual beings’, or ‘the general Doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general’. They appease the Gods and spirits but did not worship any idols. Their worship of certain objects signifies worship of the spirits believed to be abiding there. But, significantly, no matter what God they worshipped they made no attempt to represent the God in curving or in picture.

The primitive religion of the Lothas is endowed with a duality of faith in benevolence and malevolence. The people in fighting against the order of nature believe that all misfortune is caused by the malignant influence of the supernatural, and ultimately they had to make their own philosophy of life which could give them a moral force to fight the various odds of nature, a philosophy which can see a universal role of supernatural in the destiny of man, and which invariably warrants an hierarchy of Gods, Deities and Spirits in shaping their small and big fortunes and prosperity in life. And each of these performs definite functions in its own sphere. (Sinha, 1977:22). Thus, like in Pantheism, the Lothas believe in one supreme God at the top, but there are also subordinate Gods, Deities and spirits below this supreme God.

THE KINGDOM OF GODS

The kingdom of Gods of the Lothas may be classified into three dimensions, viz; the Supreme God, the Deities and the Spirits. Different kinds of functions were associated with these supernatural beings, and with these functions the activities of the people are supposed to be efficiently controlled, either malevolently or benevolently. To turn malignancy into benevolency, and to ensure their blessings, invocations in the form of sacrifices and prayers have to be made from time to time.
The Supreme God

However primitive a religion be, there is concept of Supreme Being. P.T.Philips opines, ‘people in every part of the world whether they be white or black, or whether they belong to the east or west, believe that there is a creator of universe. The conception of a supreme being is not borrowed from any other religion, but it is handed down from the ancestors’ (1976:37). The Nagas in general believe that the Supreme Being exists above or beyond the sky. Even though they had the concept of the existence of the Supreme being, their idea of creation is vague. It is perhaps a universal characteristic that the tribals are ignorant of their creation.

Much of the Lotha cosmology comes from folktales. Strange story of the creation is told. These tales were told and retold from generation to generation orally. One of the many Lotha legends about the creation is that, in the beginning of time God created the universe and the Earth with mud dough. The Earth was created with artistic and scenic touch, but when God reached the Lotha country it was already dark and God was tired so the remaining roll of the mud dough became the hills and mountains. (Interview with P. Ngully, Niroyo village. 12-04-13). Having being tired, he leveled the plains of Assam without purposeful design like the valley, rivers and the mountains of the Naga hills (Murry, 1976:3). There is another Lotha folktale about the heavenly God who created the Earth and allowed the people to live there. One day, the God called upon the people, but they could not respond because they were having a feast. So a tree named ‘tsungsitong’ responded. The Heavenly God blessed the tree to live long and cursed the people to live short. (Lotha, 1993:55).

The Lotha stories of creation are vague which shows that they did not have a clear concept of creation. In fact, it matters little for this people how the universe was created. Perhaps they did not want to involve themselves into the indubitable argument, but believed
essentially in the God whom they regard as an embodiment of all pervasiveness and all consciousness. “Creation was unfathomable, something beyond their comprehension and understanding and the Lotha ancestors did not ponder about it too much for if they do so they may go mad”. (Interview with M.odyuo. Yikhum village. 10.10.2012). An unreliable source of creation story, no doubt, but they have the idea of the supreme God, the creator. Even though they do not clearly say about the creation of the Earth or heaven, the Lothas have the idea of pre-existent Supreme Being, the Creator. Since God is infinite and our minds can only conceptualize the finite, humanity has no access to knowledge of the supreme reality. The creation of the universe, the supreme reality was perhaps beyond the comprehension of the primitive Lothas.

The supreme God of the Lothas is potsow. (This word was later adopted by the pioneer missionaries to represent the Christian God). This word is the expression of the highest being they could ever conceive. The Lotha potsow is a supernatural being, an object of worship, the creator, the sustainer and the controller of the universe (Anglo-Lotha dictionary). Potsow is also addressed by the Lothas as Apo (father). It also mean po (father) tsow (Great), the Great father. Unlike the Angami, who attributed a feminine term pfu or ukepenuopfu meaning ‘our mother’, ‘birth spirit’ or ‘ancestress’ (Roy,2004:7), the Lotha Apo perhaps reflects the patriarchal society of the Lothas, where the eldest male member heads and commands the highest authority and respect. Thus, it may be to show that Potsow is the eldest and the greatest of them all.

The abode of the potsow is in the highest heaven or sky. He is the God Par excellence of the primitive Lothas and often referred to as the ‘high God’. The concept of a ‘high God’ who lives in the ‘highest heaven’ or ‘sky’ gives one the impression that he is distant and transcendent, so much so that He is not involved with people. He is very remote from the everyday concerns of ordinary people. To substantiate their idea of a ‘high God’ the Lothas
believe that the *potso* rarely comes down to visit the people. Even if He does so, nobody is supposed to see him because for a Lotha “to see *potso* is to die”. (Mills, 1922:113). The Lothas also has a folk story which says that there was a time when the sky, where *potso* dwelt was so near that the people decided to built a tower with the intention of reaching his abode. This angered God and made the men to speak different languages so that they could not co-ordinate their activities. Thereafter, God withdrew to the present distance. (Nzan Tsopoe, Sungro Village. Interviewed: 5:10:2010).

The remoteness and transcendent nature of the Lotha *potso* can also be explained by the lack of ritual observances for the Supreme Being. Since he is uninvolved with the everyday life of the people, the rituals people offer do not concern him much. Like the Lotha *potso*, with any other primitive people, the Supreme being is generally spoken of as being “existing beyond the firmament too exalted to be contaminated by the affairs of the ordinary people”. (Hardon, vol-1, 1968:54). The Lotha *potso* is the supreme spirit who rules over lesser spirits and deities, who governs the natural forces, created men, souls and all other things in the universe. He is the supernatural power surpassing the understanding and comprehension of the primitive Lothas, and therefore the feeling of duty, honor and reverence towards him. He was the first cause and creator of the world. He has a pre-eminent place in the universe, as the universe depends on him. This pre-eminence makes him greater than any creature, spirit or man. The greatness of this God makes him mysterious and incomprehensible. No one is able to see him, know him or understand his nature. This also explains why the Lotha *potso* is not represented by a figure, idol or image to honor him, but he is seen as the one directing every moment of their life. Thus, the Lothas calls him *potso* which is explained in the Anglo- Lotha Dictionary “object of worship, creator, sustainer and controller of the universe”.
The primitive Lotha experience the Supreme Being as the benevolent God who, though at a distance, exercised overall control over everything in the world and had true concern for people’s welfare. Thus the Lothas say that “He pours down rain and hail stones from his large reservoir above. He protects his children when the evil spirits, when angry with the children of men sometimes determines to destroy them by hurling down great blocks of ice. At such times potsow rushes from his abode and seizing the huge door of his dwelling raises it above his head and goes rushing hither and thither crying, a honoro nzana vana, a honoro nzana vana. (show my chickens favor, show my chickens favor), and the block of ice falling upon this door are dashed to pieces and fall to the earth as hail” (Witter, 1886:94). This brings out the benevolent and protective nature of the potsow, who has true concern for his people, the Apo (father), who protects his children. The Lothas again indicate their faith in his benevolency by saying that he is not in need of their offerings and sacrifices. Offerings and sacrifices were thus done mainly to propitiate the malevolent spirits. But in all the significant moment of their life the Lothas took recourse to the Supreme Being rather than to inferior deities. In the course of the day, they frequently pronounced the name of potsow, in the ethan tsopho (eating of the first fruit or rice) they offer to the potsow first, in the face of danger they call on potsow, in gain and benefit they attribute it to potsow, in death they call on potsow to have pity on them.

This omniscient God of the Lothas could see and hear anything. Hence, it was not only during feasts and ceremonies that they invoke potsow. In course of their daily life they would murmur a prayer to the supreme God. When they begin to eat, they would throw a bit of rice to one side saying, “potsow, eat first”. When someone lies or boasts too much, someone may say ‘don’t tell such lies, potsow hears and will punish us’. (Zantsemo Ngullie, N.Longidang village, interviewed, 10:10:2013). Considered as a benevolent God and the author of good, potsow did not need sacrifices or appeasement but they offer their festivities to him as an
expression of thanksgiving and prayer for protection from natural calamities. This omniscient, omnipresent but transcendent and distant Lotha potsow rarely visits the Earth, and the person who sees potsow would die. (Witter,1886:95). He visits the humans on earth from time to time lodging with the village seer ( Ratsen). Potsow sends his servants to the ratsen ahead of time to announce his visit and to prepare the seer, then he comes down with a train of attendants with articles symbolical of the fate of the village that year. No one except the ratsen should see God. To receive Potsow, the ratsen was required to observe some taboos (sari sapvu). He must not go out of the village land, nor kill any animals in his house, indulge in sexual intercourse or eat the flesh of anything killed after he received the alert. In honour of the God’s visit, the whole village should rest for a day called Mongts Emung, a genna day or no work day. This God is understood in anthropomorphic form and character, as the Lothas also address him as Apo ( father), who lives in the sky, and who cares for them. He was the provider and the sustainer. He sustains the universe by giving rain and sun, and blesses people with health and fertility and life. His supremacy over all Earthly Godlings is recognized.

The Deities

The deities are the supernatural powers commonly propitiated and supplicated to for most of the worldly things. A reference to the supreme God Potsow can be made only in times of crisis or as an appeal against the deities. When everything else failed, then only the supreme God was appealed, who was the judge of all, and to him, human turned during despair. (Longchar, 1991:7). The deities, since they guide most of the phases of human activity, are supposed to be closer to man. They exercise a closer influence over their destiny. (Sinha,1977:55). Often many names are used to refer to these groups of spirits. They are known as nature spirits, mythological figures, demigods and deities.
For the agricultural people like the Lothas whose subsistence depended on the produce of the Jhum cultivation, *Ronsü* hold important position among the deities. *Ronsü* is the Lord of crops who has control over the harvest of the year. He was the God of prosperity, success and good fortune. He blesses people with material success in life. Therefore, throughout the agricultural year, prayers and sacrifices were made to this Godling. *Ronsü Etsa* (summoning prosperity) is the most important sacrifice made to this deity. No one has ever seen one or knows what one is like to look at but the Lothas agree that *Ronsü* appears in the form of insects like bees, frogs and dragonfly etc, his abode being the fields and granaries. In his presence humans should not behave or speak irreverently lest he will be hurt (Murry, 1976:4). To ensure his blessings, he is to be appeased by way of sacrifices from time to time.

The ceremony of *Ronsü Etsa* (summoning prosperity) takes place when the rice began to sprout, and before the season of thunderstorm sets in, lest the thunder would prevent the *Ronsü* the God of prosperity from hearing the voices of those calling him. The ritual was conducted by the *pvüti* (priest) who kills a pig in his house, and taking a bamboo mat, some of the meat, an egg, a chicken and a little rice goes with the whole village to the outskirt of the village. The chicken is killed and omens are taken by watching how the excreta fall. Then the egg and forty (40) tiny pieces of the meat are laid on the ground where the *pvüti* has already placed bamboo sticks in the form of a square. Then a prayer is offered to *Ronsü* the deity of the crops, by calling out the names of all the villages, extinct and existing, for *Ronsü* to come and bless them with good harvest. The villagers then hold out their baskets on the ground calling out to *Ronsü* to fill them. The baskets were held as if someone were pouring rice into them, which they cover quickly with a cloth. All go home in single file with much grunting as if they were carrying heavy loads, then reaching their granaries, usually located at the outskirt of the village they carefully pours the imaginary rice in their baskets into the granaries.
It is *sari sapvũ* (taboo) to speak ill of this Godling, for failure to control one’s tongue will bring failure during harvest. When harvest begins, the presence of this deity is again invoked, the owner of the field would go to the field before daybreak that they may meet *Ronsũ*, which would bring good harvest, make fire and call out his name to southward, northward, east and west so that he may come to his field with plenty of harvest. (Mozhui,2004:16).

The deity who reigns over the wild life of the forest and protects them is known as *Sukhyingo*. Hunters and trappers may have good game if they have his favor. Sometimes he is seen as a small man and heard calling out to the wild animals in the jungle, but seeing or hearing him is not a favorable omen. *Sukhyingo* is believed to have a twisted head, and whose side he inclined was supposed to be fortunate and have blessings of animals. Considered as a benevolent deity he had concern for the well-being of the people. He not only looks after the well being of the wild animals and cattle wealth of the people but is also responsible for human destiny. Folktales of the Lothas says that whoever was not satisfied or contented with whatever *Sukhyingo* gave or complained, his blessings would be taken back, or would not get the next blessing. (Mozhui,2004:17). To be boastful of the prey or to despise it will prevent further blessings from *Sukhyingo*.

The Lotha *Sukhingo* is interpreted as destiny, good fortune, whatever came by chance or luck, a prediction of one’s future, success, great accumulation of wealth. (Anglo-Lotha Dictionary). It also meant soul, spirit or destiny attached to every individual. Therefore, to have the favor of this Godling is important.

*Oki sukhyingo* (house destiny) was the ambivalent spirit of the house. It was believed that this deity was like a man in appearance but has enormously long fingers and spotted all over. He was considered as an invisible deity but some men in delirium claimed to have seen him. (Interview with Churhon Murry, Wokha Village who claims to have seen this deity).
Being ambivalent, due respect should be given to keep him in good temper lest he could be harmful. To receive his blessing, respect was to be shown to him.

Another important deity of the Lothas is the Ngazo whose abode was the deep jungle. He was the jungle spirit, and the people owed their material benefits to this divine giver. He is identical with Sukhyingo in appearance but while Sukhyingo was the protector of animals, Ngazo was an agricultural God in whose favor people would receive a large harvest. The Lothas believed that Ngazo may be hurt by a little mistake in words, one should not speak ill of these God for failure to control one’s tongue will bring failure during the harvest. (Mozhui,2004:16). Ngazo literally means “expanses” or “galaxy”. (Anglo-Lotha Dictionary). This points to belief in the natural powers exercising control over humanity or human destiny. Here, the Lotha religion appears to have an element of Naturism, even though it may not be very explicit as that of the Vedic religion where the whole of nature was personified and worshipped. The universe, the expanse of the galaxy was beyond the comprehension of the Lotha and they were filled with awe and wonder and reverence, which perhaps caused them to conceive of a deity Ngazo. (Interview with Nzan Tsopoe. Sungro. 15.09.12).

Ngazo and Sukhyingo were two deities of the Lothas who were responsible for human destiny. They were powers at work throughout the whole life of the humans. Like the Atua of the Maori, the Polynesian tribal people who believe in power at work throughout the whole of life of the humans which they call Atua( Brown,1973:37), the Lothas believe that both the Godling affected their life in both good ways and bad ways. They gave greatness or powers and unlimited blessing like the expanse of the sky to a person, family or tribe. For this reason, the Lothas believed it was very important to respect them and try to please them all the time. In fact, in all the rites and rituals and ceremonies throughout the agricultural year the presence of Ngazo and Sukhyingo were invoked first.
The deity of rivers and streams of the Lothas was *jupvuo* (*ju-water, pvuo-master*). He was the divinity that had control of the rivers and everything that live in it. His appearance was like a man with hair of enormous length. His abode was the bottom of the deep pools and used human skulls as hearth stones. The Lothas believe that *Jupvuo* inhabited the deep pool in the Doyang river located at Morakjo village called *Jupvuo Ezhu*. To appease this deity, small offerings were made to him after the *oyantssoa* ceremony, before the fields are cut for the next year’s cultivation. Another ceremony called *phyotsso* is performed in honor of *Jupvuo* by the *pvuti* (priest) accompanied by all the grown-up men of the community. A bird hunt is organized, and when one has been caught alive all go down to the Doyang River. On the bank the *pvuti* kills a hen and lays out ten scraps of its flesh on his up-stream hand for *Jupvuo* and nine scrapes on his down-stream hand. A miniature raft of bamboos is made, on which put an egg, a little cotton and the live bird are tied by the leg. The raft is then allowed to float down-stream. If it upsets it is a bad omen and it is believed that someone will be drowned during the term of office of the *pvuti*. (Mills, 1922:125). It is believed that *jupvuo* bless anyone he would like to bless and drive away all the fishes for someone he does not favor.

Just as any other tribal people, the Lothas also have an abundance of folk tales with supernatural beings and animals and birds for character. One such folk tale connected with *Jupvuo*, the deity of the water is narrated as follows. One day a boy went down to the Doyang river for fishing. As he did not return when evening came his parents became very worried. The next morning his father took some men and went down to search for the boy, but he was nowhere to be found. The father was very saddened and did not give up searching hoping to find at least the dead body of the boy. As he walked on, he saw a hair lying on the path and he picked it up thinking it may have belonged to his son. But then he found that the hair was very long and he was holding only one end of it. He walked on winding the hair on round and round his finger. In this way he went on and on until he had passed eight bends of the river,
such was the length of the hair. At last the hair brought him to the water spirit Jupvuo, for it was the hair of the water spirit which he had forgotten to wind round his head. When Jupvuo felt someone pulling his hair, he was infuriated and screamed: “Let me go!”, but the man replied: “you have captured my son and kept him at your home in the water. I will not let you go till you bring him back to me!”.

At this the water spirit replied: “let me go and I shall bring your son and leave him here tomorrow morning when people go to the fields”. If you do not believe me I shall swear the most solemn oath known to men “. Hearing this, the man let the water spirit go and Jupvuo gave the man a dried fish, a fresh fish and some fish paste as gift of friendship. The man went the next morning at the time when the villagers go to the fields and there, sure enough, was his son on the river bank, safe and sound. Then the boy narrated to his father: “I saw a big fish and dived in quickly and caught it by its neck. But the fish dragged me down, deep into a pool under the rocks. Inside the rock there was a cave, in which there was no water. There on the dry sand was a hearth made of three white human skulls. It was the lair of the water spirit”. The father was very happy that jupvuo had not hurt the boy and had brought him out and left him on the river bank as he had promised. The father and the son happily walked back home. The tale is remembered till today. (Translated from Kyong Erang Motsu Ejoma, (some Lotha folk tales) Ngullie, 1984: 11)

The evil Spirits

The last in the hierarchal order of the supernatural powers are the spirits called tsungrham (evil spirits). These spirits were basically malevolent in nature and play an important role in the Lotha belief. Tsungrham are invisible spirits who were mostly ill-disposed towards men, and are supposed to lurk in every corner looking out for opportunity to attack them and do some substantial harm, causing diseases and sometimes even death. They
were to be dreaded for their capacity of doing harm. These evil spirits detain the soul of those who visit their abode causing illness, and so a Lotha when sick usually attributes his illness to the malice of ‘tsungrham. To get cured and avert death, an elaborate rites and rituals were to be carried out through the advice of the ratsen (village seer or medicine man), and montsae (caller of spirits). Folktales declare that the spirits are seen in ponds, caves, groves, dense jungle and mountains and also outside the villages. Believed to have a shadowy form they assume forms of human beings, animals, plants and inanimate objects.

According to tradition, the first among these tsungrham was Khyuham (house spirit), who persecuted the Lotha ancestors by eating their children and carrying the skulls of his victims about in a basket on his back. (Mills,1922:116). The Lothas believed that this harmful spirit stayed in every house so children were not left alone in the house without a ngaro epvui (sitter or caretaker) lest they were eaten by this spirit. (Interview with Nyimtsemo Ezung, N. Longidang.10.09.13). Rankhanda, one of the ancestors of the Lothas managed to shut him up in a hole in the earth. Thereafter, a yearly ceremony was observed called Epo Etha by the Lothas to ward off the evil influence of Khyuham. The ritual is done by killing a dog and the paws and nose were cooked with ginger and offered to the spirit. The rest of the meat was eaten to be eaten by the montsae (caller of spirit).

Ra- Mon (spirit of the jungle) is another malevolent spirit or tsungrham. This spirit was supposed to inhabit the deepest forest, and was believed to be very harmful. Phyopio Ngulli of Niroyo village, who claimed to have encountered the Ramon spirit on one of his hunting trips, likened him to a giant with enormously long hair and long nails and flying like a giant bird with booming shouts. (Interviewed 15.10.13). Whenever this spirit shouts no one should reply or shout back, for he tears people with his long nails and devour them.
"Tsungrham Eyimo" (mad spirit) is the most cruel among the malevolent spirits and considered to have no mercy at all, and could not be appeased by any means. When diseases could not be cured by the ratsen and montsae, the Lothas believed that the soul of the sick person was already detained by the tsungrham eyimo. Even sacrifice of a dog, which was the last resort, does not cure the sickness if it is caused by the malice of this spirit.

Yan mon (spirit of the village) was the spirit of village and was believed to roam through the village at night. Anyone who ventures out at night when everyone had gone to sleep, dreaded to meet this malevolent spirit who had the capacity to cause even death. Therefore, after dark the villagers go out in groups, but only in cases of emergency so as to avoid meeting this spirit.

Li mon (spirit of fields) is believed to be less dangerous than the other spirits, and believed to lurk in the fields after dark. Anyone who sleeps in the field can see or hear this spirit. Since he is less malevolent he does not require sacrifices or offering.

The Lothas believed that the dense jungle was haunted by fairies called Longkomvu. These spirits are supposed to be heard murmuring on the side of the village path and the fields and tempt people to follow them, and lead them to gorges and steep mountains and make them mad. The victims are often found dead on the steep hills or in a hilarious state in the thick jungles. These spirits are believed to live in deep misty groves and big rocks. They had a form of men but small in size and short stature, with their feet and hands pointed backwards. People could hear them speaking but could not understand. These wailing fiends roam in groups. Propitiation and appeasement in the form of sacrifices and rituals was not given as the spirits were less harmful, but care was to be taken not to roam alone to avoid meeting this spirit. There are stories that speak of these spirits playing the naughty game of calling people’s names and confusing them. If a person is taken away by this spirit, the relatives and friends had to go to the jungle and rocky gorges and misty groves calling out loudly the name
of the victim, the spirit then release them saying that the people were too noisy. It is believed that these fairies sleep during day and are awake at night, and for them even land is steep and steep land is even. Incidentally, the Lohas tell stories that persons taken away by these spirits are found on steep gorges, in a condition of trance or madness.

Thus, in the Lotha cosmology, there is a hierarchy of Gods, deities and spirits who rule over mankind. Raghuvir Sinha while observing the religion of the North East India writes; “The God Supreme above, with a descending hierarchical order of subordinate deities and the vast humanity below surrendering their destiny to this all omnipotent, all supernatural force, forms the fundamental concept of all beliefs in most tribal religions. Each of the God or deity has a kind of dominion status under the sovereignty of the supreme God”. (1977:50).

The Lotha traditional religion seems to give this concept its maximum expression. Each of the deities is responsible for a particular phase of human endeavor in the total mass of activities. As mentioned above, some of them are essentially malevolent and some are benevolent in nature. The deities and spirits were in turn controlled by the Supreme God who reigns above them and is the higher master of both the human and the unseen worlds. For peaceful living, the spiteful or harmful spirits were to be appeased through propitiations, which are made by way of rituals performed from time to time. The usual ritual was to offer fowls of which the head, feet and entrails were offered to the spirits with prayers and incantations offered by the priest. If they are neglected, their wrath may be aroused and cause some catastrophe. Therefore, every effort has to be taken to secure the blessing of the supernatural powers.

It is however to be noted that appeasement was not necessarily worship, but it was practiced in order to ward off the wrath of the malevolent spirits. The primitive life was unsanitary and the body easily yielded to sickness, ailment or suffering, but the people failed to understand that the causes of these were due to diseases or germs. Hence, they normally assumed that misery was caused to them by a malevolent spirit, thus motivating them to make
appeasement. (Partridge, 2007:116). This belief in the benevolent and malevolent influence seems to be based on the general principle of the world order which divides all things and all human order in the universe into good and evil, virtue and vice, good will and ill will, black and white. The primitive Lotha extremely fear the evil spirits. His life was guided by fear. This made him to live an honest and sincere life.

THE RITUALISTIC COMPONENT OF THE LOTHA RELIGION

Religion of the pre-literate Lotha society knows no religious code, no constitution, no religious injunctions and no ethical prescriptions in black and white. Their religion was transmitted from generation to generation through tradition, as part of their culture. The primitive Lotha recognizes the role of spirits in influencing his life malignantly. These spirits are not well disposed towards humanity unless propitiated properly and to ensure their blessing, invocations in the form of prayers and sacrifices have to be made from time to time. These turn malignancy into benevolency. These beliefs made the Lotha traditional religion integrated to a large network of rituals which develop around an elaborate ceremonial. The deities and spirits were supposed to be appeased by such ceremonials.

Two basic component of primitive religion is belief and rituals. Mere beliefs cannot constitute religion. They basically depended upon rites which bring conformity with nature. The worship of God in the ceremonial sense, like having his image in a place like Temple and paying obescience to it was not prevalent among the Lothas. Instead rites and rituals were widely practiced. These rituals and ceremonies were supervised by certain important officials who thus had a significant place in the Lotha community. Some of them were meant for individuals and families, while others were for the community as a whole. The Lotha rituals vary from simple acts linked with everyday activities like hunting, gardening, fishing, to
complex rituals, festivals and festival cycles lasting days and even weeks. The mithun (Bos frontalis), pig, dog and birds like the fowl figures in many of these rituals and festival ceremonies. Food, drink and sexual taboos accompany all the important rituals.

THE RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS

The socio-religious complex of these people involved the presence of an intermediary priest - the *Pvüti*. The priest was selected for the post, not because of his hereditary status or any privileged position, but on account of some special qualities believed to be inherent in him and which are supposed to enable him to discharge the delicate ritualistic duties. He is consulted on all important occasion of the village, private or communal, social or religious. Due to his vast social and religious duties, the priest was indispensible for the village community. The most suitable man becomes *pvüti* (priest) by force of character. He directs all public ceremonies in the villages and fixes the days on which they would be held. The office of the *pvüti* is not hereditary as in other tribes, but anyone who is qualified for the job, and has the necessary constitution of mind and fitness of the body can become a priest. Thus a Lotha *Pvüti* should have the following qualities or standards: the man in the village who has observed most social gennas is chosen he must belong to one of the clans who have provided *pvüties* for that village in the past, he must never have been wounded by an enemy or wild animals, or have hurt himself by falling from a tree or rock, or have burnt himself, he must not have any physical deformity or mutilation. He must not be an illegitimate child, should be well versed in all religious rules and regulations. These are studied and analyzed by the council members and the best was selected. At the death of the *pvüti*, the old men of the village discussed the question of his successor. The successor must perform the *oyantssoa* ceremony. The *pvüti* once chosen holds office for life. The sole charge on which he can be
dismissed is that of deliberately uttering curses instead of blessings at ceremonies. He is forbidden to go outside the village, lest he should fall into the hands of enemies and be killed.

The main duty of the pvüti is to perform sacrifices, keep the up to date procedures of the village yearly observances. He is the custodian of the village calendar. He declares all public Emungs (holidays). The community festival dates were fixed by him. He opens the agricultural year by performing the seed sowing ceremony. He also begins the harvest of all crops. On behalf of the village, he prays to the supreme God for his blessing of crops and harvest, increase of population, cattle to multiply and no epidemic to enter the villages.

The pvüti was assisted by the yingae appointed by the council of elders. The yingae (servant or assistant) was chosen from poor family or an orphan, and is appointed for life. He accompanied the pvüti in all ceremonies and carries his load. He receives a share of the meat at all gennas and a share of rice from each year’s collection. In times of illness of the pvüti, the yingae could perform the ceremonies as if he were the pvüti.

Vukjong (the one who pierce the pig or pig killer), was another assistant of the priest. He accompanies the priest in all the religious rituals and ceremonies. His duty was to kill animals at private sacrifices. In some villages, more than one vukjong is appointed to assist the pvüti.

Below the vukjong are two nchuko (hearth bringer), who bring the small stones with which miniature hearths are made at social ‘gennas’. (Mills,1922:126)

Sorhon or meat divider was supposed to set up the meat at all sacrifices and settle all disputes as to the respective share.

No one may act as vukjong, nchuko or sorhon unless he has performed all social ‘gennas’ and dragged a stone. There is nothing to prevent the offices of pvüti, vukjong, nchuko and sorhon being combined in the same person.
RESPECTING THE SACRED: THE TABOO COMPLEX

All social and religious activities in a tribal society are not only based upon some supernatural beliefs and universal principles, but they also seem to follow some ethical code of conduct. Moreover, they are regulated by a certain social restraints which assume a kind of socio-religious sanctity. The social restraints may be not be rigid or be liable for breach. There is no control over man’s mind and actions following from it, and therefore, the socio-religious restraints have to be given a religious coating. And it is believed that the supernatural force above always looks after this, and those who break these rules are punished by the supernatural beings. This improvised system operates in society in the form of ‘taboo’. Literally, taboo means a forbidden activity, something which is not permitted, something which stands against social approval and is disallowed by norms of behavior. (Sinha, 1977:104-105). The word is derived from ‘tabu’, a Polynesian expression which is used to describe something that is forbidden, as it is considered sacred or as it is something that defiles that which is sacred.

The Lothas used the term ‘taboo’ in two sense, viz; sari sapvu, meaning forbidden or prohibited activity, and sari emvu meaning profane or to show contempt. What is believed to be the ‘taboo’ is full of sacred powers. At times, however, people or things are considered taboo because they are believed to be essentially evil. People dying of accidents, women dying of childbirth, or anything involving blood are taboo, and they are to be avoided not because they are sacred but because of the myok (evil fate) associated with it. The Lothas also considered some places and things as taboo. For instance certain part of the jungle, certain trees, certain fruits, birds or animals are sari sapvu. This taboo sari sapvu concept perhaps helped the Lotha villages to preserve certain birds, fruits and animals. In the places which are considered taboo, profane activities are forbidden. An example is the Lotha field hut. It is
forbidden to bring raw meat of any kind into the field hut, or kill anything or have sexual intercourse in it. This is why the approaches to the field houses near paths are often ‘panjied’ as a gentle reminder to passers- by that they must not run in to shelter from the rain if they are carrying raw meat (Mills, 1922: 48).

Among the Lothas, the taboo complex is an effective tool to control social behavior and also surrounded all the ritualistic performances. It is the ‘taboo’ which prompts the individual to remain in a regulated behavior. It also reminds him of the supernatural force and be afraid of its fury.

The first taboo that is important among the Lothas as in all societies of the world is the incest taboo. It is considered a taboo for intermarriage within a clan. Such practices are considered incest and results in the loss of generation in that particular clan. (Interview with Nyimtsemo Ezung. N. Longidang village. 20:05:2013). In situation such as this, the persons involved were made to pay fine. They were exterminated from the clan because the Lotha believed that such acts incapacitates, blinds, handicaps and invites evil spirits in normal life. “The fine was usually a live pig, the length of which equals five measures of the hand stretched from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the middle finger, and a full grown cow which has a fully developed horns”. (Interview with Churhon murry, wokha village, 10:01:2013). The meat was to be divided among the clan but eaten only by the elders since the meat was considered a taboo. The strictest form of incest is sexual relationship between father and daughter, mother and son, and between brother and sister. Such relationship was unthinkable in the Lotha society, and any breach of this taboo is punishable by social law, and also punishment from the supernatural. The violation were strictly punishable not only by the village council but by the whole village community. Sometimes they were punished to the extent of extermination from society or village community.
Use of offensive languages, curses and expression of anger and violence in the presence of the maternal uncles was a taboo, illegitimate child were placed at the lowest rung of the society. Such individuals and those of the refugees and immigrants were not given status of leadership in the society because they were considered to bring infamy, division and betrayal to the village community. A delivering mother giving birth to twins was regarded a taboo. People were forbidden to enter their house and have relation with the couple. Seeds for cultivation in the fields were not to be shared with the couple. (Ngullie, 1994: 26.)

The Lothas also observe certain food taboos. Elephant meat is not eaten, as the person who eats it will become clumsy as it has difficulty in moving freely. Thus eating of its meat was a taboo. Bears are considered as dumb animals. It was assumed that this same dumbness shows up in the children of people who eat its flesh. It is taboo to eat tiger meat. It is taboo to eat the anteater, for its scaly hide and ugly appearance or deformity may show up in the offspring of the people. The large freshwater catfish is taboo for human consumption since the Lothas believe that the catfish was turned from a human. Eels and sheep are forbidden for they believe that eating their meat would cause the graying and whitening of hairs. Birds like crows are not eaten. They make people steal and caught easily for their crimes. Eagles and hawks are not eaten, they tend to make people addicted to meat and make people produce excessive saliva in humans. The meat of Vultures and other scavengers were taboo. The meat of Rhinos was a taboo because of the belief that its consumption make people to die in the hands of enemies. The ugly look of owls was believed to appear in the offspring of the eaters of its meat. Wild cats are not eaten fearing for the well being of the fields. Its consumption results in people landing up in all kinds of troubles and mischief. Flying squirrels are believed to cause people into illicit relation, sexual imbalances and disloyalty among the people. The brains of cows, pigs, dogs or other animals are not to be eaten by children. The flesh of monkeys is sari sapvu (taboo) for women because it was believed that if a woman indulges in
these foods, the consumption of rice will be extravagant and the store quickly used up. The flesh of the He–goat is taboo for the women for fear that they may acquire the lecherous propensities of the goat.

It is *sari sapvu* for a snake to cross the path of a raiding party. In such a case, the party postpones the trip to another day. Using three stones to make a hearth was taboo for a Lotha household because such was to be used only during religious rituals. It is taboo to mesh a ginger, and when eaten it is chewed only while turning to the side. (Interview with Thungdamo Ezung (65), animist, Longsa village 05:07:13). This is because ginger is considered as an infallible antidote against evil spirits and used by the Lothas in all their rituals.

Almost all the ritualistic ceremonies of the Lothas were accompanied or followed by taboo observances, which involves the *pvüti*, the households performing the ritual and the whole community in case of community rites. In most rituals, especially those involving the whole community like the *oyantssoa* ceremony and the *pikhuchak* ritual, the *pvüti* was required to go into prayer and abstain from taking certain food which operates from a day to, in some cases ten days. A couple who perform the *poniratsen* have to observe socio-religious taboo for few days. They are not supposed to come out of their house as long as the taboo lasts and thus have to store their needs in advance. A mother giving birth has to observe house taboo, a household which had faced unnatural death of one of its member, had to observe a taboo. This taboo prohibits the inmates of the house accepting a drink outside or accepting any social invitation from the people of the village. The flesh of animals killed at the funeral of such victims is taboo. Sometimes, when the situation calls for, the whole village was kept under taboo. During the taboo period the villagers have to remain strictly within the bounds of the village. In the most important rituals, it is necessary to keep the whole village under taboo so long as the ritual continues. No one is allowed to leave the village and no outsiders are
supposed to enter or trespass the village, lest it invites the wrath of the supernatural powers. Therefore, to avoid the wrath of the supernatural, and to let the village community remain under the ritualistic sanctity the whole village community is kept under taboo.

There is ritualistic taboo which applies only for the cattle of the house and not to people. After the ritual is performed, the cattle of the house cannot be sold or exchanged for a certain period. The agricultural taboo complex holds a special significance. The agricultural rituals were performed by the pvüti, immediately after which an agricultural taboo comes into enforcement. The field falls under taboo. All entry to or through the field was strictly forbidden when the villagers were observing the Emung or genna. Total suspension of all activity followed most of the rituals. In all the rituals sexual taboo was observed. The least negligence on their part to observe the taboo can put them in great peril, and the very motive of their ritual may thus be foiled. The taboos served as a regulative ethical code or a kind of defense mechanism to maintain solidarity of the society and also to maintain the sanctity of the ceremonials.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RITUALS

Primitive societies all over the world are known to have evolved elaborate rites and rituals which were connected to their socio-economic life. The Lotha tribe who lived in isolation on these mountainous tracts of land, uninfluenced by Hinduism or Christianity, strongly believed in the validity and power of ceremonials. They developed rites and rituals which were generally accompanied by small elaborate ceremonials which marked the personal or social event. Thus there were rites connected with birth of a child, naming of the child, first food given to the child, initiation into puberty and adolescent, marriage, various economic activities and other social rituals.
AGRICULTURE RITUALS

Since Agriculture was the primary economic occupation of the Lothas, the people developed an elaborate ceremonials connected to agriculture, which continuous throughout the agricultural year. With the Lothas all agriculture was in the form of shifting cultivation or Jhum cultivation, which was an arduous activity spread over a number of months and divided into a number of phases, beginning with choosing of the tract of land, cutting and clearing, burning, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Agriculture of this type involved hard labor and therefore it necessitates corporate activity, involving the whole family, clan, khel and village. For the Lothas, the ceremonials starts from the beginning of the jhum season until it finally culminates with their biggest festival, the Tokhu Emong (harvest genna).

The beginning of the agricultural year was marked by a ceremony called the Pikhvuchak (separating the fence) which was supposed to be performed before the clearing of the tract started. The Lothas had no knowledge of calendar, so they counted the season according to their yearly returns of the pikhvuchak rituals. Thus one calendar year is from the last year pikhvuchak to the next pikhvuchak, or from the month of the start of cultivation to the month of the next year of cultivation. “Even the children’s ages were counted in that way and records were kept by adding a twig of stick at the start of every agricultural season”.

(Interview with Myanbeni Ezung, Wokha Town,10:08:2012)). All agriculture was supposed to be controlled and guided by a Deity known as Ronsu (prosperity). He was the functional God for agriculture. He exercises his control right from the sowing of seeds to the reaping of crops and protects it from the ravages of the wild animals and pests. He also safeguards them against all natural calamities. Ronsu of the Lothas was supposedly an essentially benevolent Deity who bestows prosperity to them. Therefore, to ensure the favor of the Ronsu and to reap
a good harvest, offerings were to be made from time to time. Thus, during the pikhuchak ceremony, the pvüti invokes the blessing of this Deity.

The Pikhvuchak ritual commences after the pvüti announced the day on which the ceremony is to be, and every chumpo (bachelor’s dormitory) buys meat and the cock which is to be sacrificed. On the night before the “genna” sexual taboo is observed. On the day all men of the village assemble at the place where the ophya (wooden post) is set up. In front of the ophya the pvüti (priest) sets up a miniature ophya, and puts an egg on the ground with a leaf on each side. On the leaf to his right he puts ten little bits of pork and ten little bits of ginger, and on that to his left nine little bits of each. He then recites the prayer holding the cock in his left hand, and a dao (machete) in his right. The prayer goes as follows for which a free English translation is given:

okum nzu ehen chaksoi sia, ethani rheyiaka,
Let one season go and another one come, we are separating them,
Nzu eheni berup tssakong, chuso raso, tsushak hanshak, vara vari, joshi kheshi licho tssona,
Let death, pestilence, misfortunes and accidents, if there were,
Ezhu mpong na hana yitoksi,
Let the wind take it away,
Okum nzu ethani e- mhayikhelo,
Bless us with a new season,
Leko, penchu nichu, e- mhayikhelo
Bless us with fertile Earth, good grain and harvest,
Sukhying ngazo, harishi e- mhayikhelo.
Bless us with prosperity, good health and life for all.

The prayer being ended the pvüti cuts the cock’s throat, takes the omens from its entrails and ties it on to the miniature ophya. The old men sit down and eat some of the meat
which the boys from the *chumpos* have bought and all go back to the village with much chanting. Parties of boys walk singing six times round each *chumpo*. The rest of the day is given up to feasting.

The day after the ritual a genna or *Emung* was observed. It was a rest day, which forbids all villagers to enter or pass through the field. No one goes to the field but for a group of boys and few old men who were supposed to go on a mock head hunting raid. On the same spot, the old men sets up a miniature *ophya* and make the same offerings of an egg, meat and ginger. Then the group go to the jungle and perform the mock raid throwing spears and shouting at make believe enemies. Then they return to the *chumpo*. The performance of the mock head raid incidentally was supposed to ensure good crops, successful hunting, fertility and high birth-rate to the village.

With this ritual and the *Emung* being completed the individual families could begin the clearing of the jungle, but not before proper propitiation is given to the *Leko potsow* (Earth God) and omens taken. This ritual is called *Leko nano*. Here the *pvüti*, along with the *yingae* carry out the offering of a pig. “A pig is killed, cleaned and the entrails are removed after cutting open the stomach. Then the whole pig is taken to the outskirt of the village by the priest with the help of his assistants. After reaching the designated place, the meat is pressed on the ground several times. This was an offering to the earth. (Interview with chunkurhomo, Longsa, 14:06:2011). The meat was to be taken back to the village and divided among the priest, the *yingae* and old men of the village. With the completion of this rite, the individual families or clan could proceed with the clearing of the tract of land. The jungle once cleared is left till the month of March to dry. Then the entire tract was burnt on the same day. The priest consulted an omen in order to choose the right person to light the fire, by cutting little chips from a piece of stick and watching how they fall. The chosen man then makes a fire with a
fire stick and sets the tract alight. Then everyone joins in and lights a long line of fire which sweeps uphill till it dies out in the uncleared jungle at the top.

The next day the villagers observed Emung or genna called mimuk emung to ensure that the village was saved from any kind of fire destruction. (Ngulli, 2008:42). The operation of clearing and burning activities was usually performed in the month of March. Mention may also be made, as noted by Mills, of the Rangendri ceremony which was performed after the pikhvuchak but before the crops are sown. This genna was marked by hanging of imitation heads of enemies on the menkitong (head tree of the village). A pig was sacrificed, and going outside the village fence the pvüti lays thirty (30) tiny pieces of the flesh on each of two leaves and prays that in as much as the warriors of the village are following the customs of their forefathers, good fortune may come to all. Then the old men make bamboo baskets, in which the fingers, ears, bits of scalp and other trophies of Naga warrior are put and hang them up on the menkitong. The performance of this genna does not permit a man to wear any of the ornaments of a warrior, but entitles him to have one representation of a head put on his grave for each time he does it. (Mills, 1922:129).

The conclusion of the clearing and burning rituals among the Lothas is marked by the propitiation of the deities by observing the Mochu khurum also called Rhuven or Rhutsung nrok. This was the sowing ceremony and performed by the pvuti, and after him in the course of the next few days by anyone who has dragged a stone or done the Etha ceremony. The ritual was done at a spot outside the village. Offering of chicken meat, boiled rice, rice beer and ginger wrapped in plantain leaf was made to the spirits. Seed- rice and bean seed called orho was sowed in a small patch of ground and after the priest poured rice beer over the ground and some incantations were made. The following may serve as an example of a typical prayer:
“Mhayile!, Mhayile!
motsungro, motsunga, molanro motsunga shi thechicho lona,
lekhyak sangsu rhyuto, liyu likhum tumpang latsarhyuto phanthitukle,
osi ero liko ekuki rheyikhantokkhelo”.

When translated it means: “Blessed be, blessed be, let this single grain, this paddy plant grow in good health like the grove of the Latsa (type of herb which grows lushly) plant, in abundance like the leaves of the banana groves. Let all weed enter into cracked Earth, away from the fertile soil”. For performing the ritual, the pvüti receive a measure of rice from the villagers called ‘samara’. Following this ritual, the pvüti go on a devoted prayer and follow a strict diet prescribing certain diet for consumption. The priest abstain from eating insects and game of wild animals and observe taboo for seven days. On the eight day the villagers observe Emung or rest day. Normal activities for the pvüti and the villagers resumes from the ninth day.

When the crop is about half grown the muthan Ratsen Mongtsu ritual is performed to ward off danger to the standing crops from insects and pests. It last for eight days and coincide with oden choro (month of June). The pvüti performs the rite which involved the sacrifice of a pig. After giving pre notice, the pvüti collects unhusked rice from the villagers and barter it for a pig. On the day of the ceremony, the pig was killed and the pvüti takes the meat to the outskirt of the village. On the designated spot, he lays ten pieces of meat and ten pieces of ginger on a crossed banana leaves which he place to his right, and to his left he lays nine pieces of meat and nine pieces of ginger on crossed leaves. The usual taboo which warrants the suspension of work follows the ritual which last for eight days. During this period, hunting was suspended and it was taboo to bring game animals inside the village. Selling and exchanging and any other business was suspended. On the eight day the Likhum
(ritual for the Field deity) ceremony was observed. The pvüti perform the rite by offering pieces of meat called mari mayo and soko (rice beer).

Another ritual follows called the Ronsu Ekhum (ritual for the deity of prosperity) ceremony, which carries the elaborate preliminaries of the muthan Ratsen. This was performed when the rice comes to the ear, to ensure a good crop. The pvüti (priest), accompanied by his wife and yingae (assistant) makes offerings of live pig, chicken, eggs and boar’s meat to the Ronsu, the protector of crops and the giver of prosperity. The ritual was performed in a spot outside the village. On reaching the spot, the pvüti makes fire and near it place four bamboo sticks in the form of a square. In the middle the egg flanked on either side with forty two small pieces of meat were placed on a yotso (banana leaf). Then the pig was killed, singed over the fire, cut up, the stomach and entrails cooked on the new pot and eaten by the pvüti. The rest of the meat was divided among the men of the village who had dragged a stone. Then an omen for the future of the village was observed by the pvüti by strangling the chicken. Then the pvüti watches how the excreta fall when the hen struggles. If they were dry, good weather for the crops to ripen well was foreseen. If it was watery storm would cause the crops to rot. Then the entrails were examined without taking it out. If it was full, good harvest was ensured, if empty, poor crop in that year. The chicken was placed on the ground with the egg and the pvüti builds a little fence round the offering, hangs on the fire stick with the pot turned upside down. After the sacrifices are made, the pvüti returns home and invites all the old men of the village to feast with the pig which he killed. The next day was Emung. The yinga was sent to see if some animals had taken away the sacrificed hen, for it was a bad omen for the village if it was taken away.

The seventh day after the Ronsu Ekhum genna, a day is set aside for a united path-clearing or Lanvon, where the whole village participate. During the six days preceding the Lanvon day nothing may be sold or killed in the village, and no one may touch a tiger’s kill,
or perform any “genna”. On the seventh day the working companies each kill a pig, everyman subscribing his share of the price. The next day is a general picnic and the whole village turns out to clear the jungle from the paths. There is much feasting and drinking, and the Chumpo (morung) boys have jumping competitions and performs feats of strength. A rest day follows.

Nshe etuk also called Ethan Tsopho by the northern Lothas, the ceremony of eating the first fruits was the next of the agricultural ritual, performed just before the crops begin to ripen. The ritual was first performed by the priest followed by every household in the village. During the operation of this ritual which last for two to three days, strict taboo was followed by the entire community. Strangers were forbidden to enter the pvüti’s house, selling and killing of fowls and animals and bringing of game meat to the village was prohibited. As usual a chicken was sacrificed by the pvüti with incantation addressed to the Ronsu, supplicating for good crops, protection from enemies, accidents and wild animals. Then the pvüti consulted the omen from the excreta and entrails in the usual manner. After the preliminaries are done, the pvüti acts as the first reaper by cutting the rice sown during the Rhuven(orhu even) ceremony with a small sickle, vekhu. (In many angami villages the first reaper must be women). The pvüti then husk the rice, throw some grains on his feet, on the hearth stones, on the sickle and on his forehead. The rest was wrapped up in a leaf and boiled. “Then he pretends to eat with murmuring that the rice was bitter. This was to make the squirrels, rats and birds to stay away from the crop.” (Interview with Myanbeni, Wokha 07:12:2013,).It was now open to the individual households to perform the same ceremony at home by bringing the first cut of paddy, except that no killing of pig or chicken was involved. This ceremony was done in the month of Rongorongi (October).

Now the villagers prepare for the harvest activities. On the first day of harvest, every family performs a ceremony at their field house in honor of the Ronsu, called Liri than (harvest sacrifice). They carried to the field the Ronsuha (load of Ronsu) of pig’s head, rice
beer, eggs, salt, cooked rice etc. He lights a fire in the field house and proceed with the ritual. The egg was broken and poured over six grains of rice, wrapped in a leaf and tied on the post of the field house. Then he lights afire a bunch of thatch grass and waves the smoke in a sweeping motion from left to right. This was meant to drive away the evil spirits. Then the pvüti offers prayer to Ronsu for good crops to fill their granary. Harvest is more than an agricultural exercise. It is the fittest occasion for harmony, cooperation, and mutual help which constitute the main pillars of the Lotha community.

The last of the agricultural ceremony is the Tokhu Mongtsu ceremony. It is also known as Rithak Tokhu (harvest) as this festival marks the end of the harvest. It is also called Khingro- Loroe Tokhu, and kijan or Echui vachi tokhu. This was the main agricultural ceremony of the year and its celebration spread over a period of about ten days and held in the month of chopuk ie, November. (Interview with Nzan tsopoe, sungro, 15:02: 2014). The constant shuttling between home and jhum field, the threshing and storing is at last over. It is a time for a breather. The granaries are full, clan and village contributions of rice have been made, and there are still enough to spare. This is the time when the Lothas observe the harvest festival, the festival which bids farewell to the souls of the departed. They are urged to leave the village and not to hover over their old haunts. It is a solemn festival especially poignant for those who have lost their loved ones during that year. Each of the ten days has a well defined observance.

The pvüti fixes the date of the festival by the lunar calendar which was announced to the village in advance. The date of the festival is fixed basing on situations. The priest cannot declare or announce if there is any death in the village. (Lilanthung,1993:20). If death occurs, the date of the festival is extended to another six days if the deceased is male, and five days if female. Therefore, proper clarification is done before the announcement. Before sunset the chumpo members assembled at the pvüti’s house, discuss the date, and the Yinga announces
the same to the villagers ten days before the fixed date of commencement. Activities spanning the ten days are as follows: on the first day the priest and yingae starts performing rituals. They go round the village collecting unhusked rice with which they make soko for the ceremony and also buys a pig. Men married in during the year have to make extra contribution to receive special blessing from the pvüti when he them on his round. On the fourth day, the priest, yingae and chumpo inmates collects husked rice from house to house for preparation of rice beer. On the fifth, the entire village stays at home to receive blessings from the priest. The collection of paddy rice was also done from house to house. Those who give more receive more blessing, those who give less receive less blessing, those who do not give receive only bitter curse from the pvüti. As such, in order to make the priest happy, and receive more blessing, all the houses are willing to contribute to the pvüti’s satisfaction for prosperity through the priest prayer. On the seventh day, a pig sacrifice was performed. The liver was cut into small pieces called Sontho or holy meat. This was meant for the spirit of the dead. The pvüti with the assistants then distribute the meat to the houses where death occurred during the year. It is taboo to eat the sontho or echuiso (meat for the dead). In the evening, the old women in the village gather at the pvüti’s house to perform a rite for the soul of the dead. The elders remain in the house of the pvüti late that day to discuss and make decision for important village issues. On the eight day, rebuilding of the chumpo ki are done. In the evening home visitation and procession was done.

The ninth day was the Kijan day, a day of prayer to the Deity of fertility. It is also the day of echui tokhu (ceremony for the dead), because it is believed that the soul of the dead are released on that day. The bereaved families are freed and separated from the souls of the dead on the Kijan day with the performance of rituals called kijan elhi to release the souls of the dead. The kijan tokhu is an important ceremony of the festival. In a designated spot called ‘kijanphen or Amongphen, an open space reserved for this purpose outside the village fence or
gate, the pvüti perform a ritual attended by all the elders, the chumpo boys and men of the village. A pig and a cock is sacrificed by the pvüti while invoking a long prayer for bringing rich harvest, for protection against diseases and natural calamities, accidental death, prosperity and blessing, and for fertility of the people to increase population for the coming year. After the Kijan ceremony the villagers go home in groups singing folk songs and chanting victory cries. New chumpo ki (morung house) were constructed before the kijan but roofing is done only on the day of kijan. It is to be noted that from the first to the eight day the village goes into taboo enforced on killing of any kind of animals, selling, and bringing of game meat inside the village. Movement of the villagers to other villages was restricted lest they bring bad luck. In the same way, visitors from other villages were also restricted, lest they enter the village they were to stay back in the village for the entire duration of the festival. The taboo on killing of animals and fowls during the previous days was lifted and the day is given up to feasting.

The working companies, the peer group, especially who worked together during the year hold little feasts and visit the houses of the different members. Since the kijan tokhu was connected intimately with the dead, it is also the time to take omens to see who is to die in the course of the year. In the evening the chumpo boys sprinkles ashes round the entrance of their sleeping rooms. If tracts are found in the morning fitting any of the foot of the boys, then it believed that the boy’s omon (soul) had gone to the land of the dead and would die the same year. The tenth day was an Emung, or mass genna called Tokhu emung. The ornaments and erections were thrown away. It was a rest day and no one should go out of the village. This festival closes the agricultural year of the Lothas.

Agriculture is an economic activity. It is essentially an individual enterprise. But it is also enjoined to society as shifting cultivation entails a community activity which involves the whole village, khel and clan and their cooperation in making the fields ready for cultivation.
Moreover, if the crops fail, it is not only the individual but the whole community that suffers the consequences. Therefore, the ceremonies connected with agriculture are important.

**LIFE CYCLE RITUALS**

**BIRTH**

The socio-religious ritual becomes important during different phases of an individual’s life. Even before a child is born, a pregnant mother is required to observe certain strict taboos to ensure the health of the unborn child. She must not kill a snake, for it is believed that by doing so the child would have a tremulous tongue, she must not cut her hair, and the meat of tortoise, pangolin, bear or the kill of any wild animals was taboo. At time of birth she is attended to by the traditional midwife, the *oshang essui*, (one who throw away the after birth, placenta). (Interview with Mhonchan odyuo, Yikhum Village, 15:06:2014)). In case of difficult delivery, the husband rubs a little of his saliva on the woman’s stomach. It is also believed that rubbing the skin of *sungrum*, (a lizard with smooth and glossy surface) on the navel and stomach make delivery easy (Interview with Mhonchan odyuo). Traditionally, when a mother give birth She cooks in a new hearth and new pots, eats in a new plate and drinks in a new cup. The *oshang essui*, the moment the child is delivered calls it by any name which comes to mind and not the real name which was to be given. This was meant to deceive the evil spirit, *tsungram* (evil spirit), who supposedly listen at the door.

The umbilical cord is cut by a sharp bamboo splinter and never with a knife. A worship offering of egg to the deities is performed after the cutting of the cord. Omens are also consulted on the birth of the child to ascertain his or her future prospects. The baby is then given a bath, and the *oshang essui* puts a little boiled rice into the baby’s mouth. The *oshang essui* then wraps the placenta in a piece of cloth, put it in a small basket and hang it on
a tree designated for the purpose on the outskirts of the village. According to Mhonchan odyuo, the Lothas does not bury the afterbirth as the Angami and Sema do because the Lothas believe that if it is eaten by a dog or wild animals, it would cause death or serious illness of the child. It would also cause madness among the offspring of the child. It happened to one of the ancestors of the Odyuo clan, whose placenta was eaten by a dog. That is why it is taboo for the Odyuo clan to eat the meat of a dog. (Interview with Mhonchan odyuo of Yikhum village. 15:06:2014). That also explains why it is not buried, but hung on a tree to keep it out of the way of dogs, pigs and other wild animals. The whole ceremony is performed by women only.

Cooking in a new hearth and new pots symbolizes the arrival of the new baby. It also signifies the undefiled materials used for the new born thus invoking good health, prosperity and long life to the new born baby. If a son is born, a cock is killed and if a daughter is born, a hen is killed. Before the naming ceremony of the new born child, omens are observed, and the name of the baby is pronounced. The ngaromuchuk (naming ceremony) takes place after six days from the birth in case of a boy, and after five days for a girl. The next six days and five days respectively for a boy and baby girl, the parents observe a house taboo. They were not to go out of the house or speak to anyone nor any strangers entertained. Then the ceremony of pvuphoden (first carrying the child) is observed. The baby is placed on the back of the first carrier who carries the baby around the house by a boy if the baby is a boy and by a girl if the baby is a girl signifying the baby has been named. The carrying by a boy or a girl conveys the sex of the new born child without having to announce the same. After two or three months the ears of the child are bored and ear-rings called No-ru or eno-thera are put in them. Piercing of the child’s ears is not attended by ceremonies.
MARRIAGE

Marriage is an elaborate ceremonial, though it does not entail much of the ritualistic performance. Before the proposal, phyali (lot) is consulted to know the auspiciousness of the proposal. If the omens are predicted hopeful, a go between, usually the boy’s mother or some elderly female relation is entrusted to carry out the marriage proposal to the girl’s parents. The go between visits the girl’s parents with soko (rice beer), and settle the bride price. Then the tsoyuta (eating and drinking or engagement of the couple) takes place at the house of the girl. The boy, along with an old relative and his best man takes soko and a cock for the purpose. The old man, holding sixteen tiny pieces of the cock’s meat on both hands prays for the happiness and long life of the boy and the girl. After the engagement ceremony, the boy is required to work in the father in law’s house for a year, until the next tokhu emong, when the hanlam (bride price) ceremony takes place. The marriage is completed with the ponyi Ratsen; (seer of the couple) ceremony. These rituals are significant because of the fact that on a good and auspicious beginning sought through divination depend the prosperity and happiness of the couple.

DEATH

The death ceremonies of the Lothas are not intricate. At death the nearest relation present closes the eyes and washes the face of the corpse. A very old man ties cowrie beads to a chicken’s leg and places it for a moment in the dead man’s hand. He then kills it in order that it may go clucking along the Road of the dead. (Mills1922, 157), and gives warning that the deceased is coming. It is hung by the neck above the head of the corpse, and after the burial the wings are cut off and stuck up on the wall of the house and the body either thrown
away or given to the mungpen (buriers) to eat. The deceased relatives or closest friends bring meat, rice and rice beer for the inmates of the dead man’s house, for no food is cooked by them that day. The corpse is buried as soon as possible, but not after sunset, in front of the house, where the grave is dug by the mungpen. The body is buried fully dressed, and a cornelian bead is tied to the dead man’s wrist to give to the Etchhili vantamo (keeper of the gate to the abode of the dead), whom he will meet on the road of the dead, in exchange for a drink of water. The body is wrapped in traditional shawls and carried outside by the mungpen. Then it is placed on a bamboo mat, and tied with thin strips of bamboo on six places if male and on five places if female (Interview with Pilamo tungoe, Changsu Village.10:12:2013).

After the burial, the grave is covered with heaps of stone and thorns to prevent pigs and dogs scratching up the earth. A low fence is built round it. Two bamboo posts are then put up, one at the head and the other at the foot, with a cross bar between them. A basket containing a guard filled with soko (rice beer), rice and six pieces of meat wrapped in a leaf is hung on the post at the head. The ornaments and wooden dao handle and fire sticks are hung on the crossbar. The spear of the deceased is stuck upright on the grave. In case of a female, a basket containing boiled rice and five pieces of meat is hung on the post. Her ornaments and weaving tools are kept on the grave. A fire is lighted on the grave. After this rituals are over, the family members of the deceased go into ‘genna’, for six days after the death of a male and five days after the death of a male it becomes taboo for the family members to talk to strangers or kill any animals. To bring the household out of the taboo, fowl is sacrificed and a prayer is offered that the spirit would not haunt the house. Then a pig is sacrificed is sacrificed for a man who has not taken a head and a mithun for a man who has taken a head. When this taboo period is over, the valuables from the grave are taken out and old, unusable ones are placed. The fire is to be kept alight on the grave, and offerings of bits of food continued until the Tokhu Emong, when the echu enyia ceremony is done to release the soul
of the dead, which incidentally goes to the land of the dead. Bamboo stick are stuck up on the path, by the side of the village which leads to the Land of the dead, and guard of soko, rice and six pieces of meat for a male and five pieces for a female are tied to it to refresh the dead while on its way.

The Lothas believe that the Land of the dead is situated at the mount tiyi, the highest peak in Lotha area, situated on the north of Yanthamo village at an altitude of 1969.61 meters above sea level. It is considered as the ‘abode of the dead souls’. There are several mysterious tales about the Mt. Tiyi. Legend says that the keeper of the gate of this abode were etchili vantamo, apisangla and jungkhumrhoni. Incidentally, there is a stone slab called Lonkalup which produces sound when stepped upon, which the Lothas believed that every passing soul step upon to send message to the keepers of the gate. This gate is called the ‘the dead hole’. Legend has it that in the olden days an unknown disease which seemed like a chronic skin disease spread in the land and many people died. There was a man who had a very dear son. Unfortunately, his son died of the disease. The grieving father, determined to prove where the soul of his son had really gone tied nine rounds of strong cane rope around his waist and went towards Mt. tiyi. He tied one end of the rope to a tree and climbed the cliff. On reaching the mouth of the hole he found the scabs of his son stuck to the side of the hole, and confirmed that his son had really gone in there (interview with Penathung Ngullie, Longla village, 05:06:2013).

Another mystery found on the mount Tiyi is what tradition calls the ‘fountain of the dead’. It is believed that the soul of the dead bath there before proceeding towards the ‘dead hole’. It is also believed that Etchili vandamo and Apisangla fetch water from this fountain and waits for the souls of the dead. Therefore in the olden days, when a person dies, an ornament was tied around the wrist of the corpse before burial, which is exchanged with water from the two gate keepers of the dead hole. The rituals thus completed the Lothas believe that
the village can begin a new year without fear of haunting by the dead. Thus, the most important agricultural festival of the Lothas, the *Tokhu Emong* end with the *Etchu enya* ceremony.

Besides the usual funerary rituals, mention may also be made of the rites performed for persons who died of unnatural circumstances which the Lothas called *mmen echui*. In such cases, the normal procedure is not allowed. The Lothas believed that these deaths are caused by the wrath of the evil spirit (*tsungrham*), therefore strict purificatory rituals are necessary. In such cases as deaths caused by falling from a tree, childbirth, killing by wild animals, accidentally falling on one’s spear or *dao*, by fire or drowning while fishing, strict taboos are observed. As soon as the news of such disaster reaches the village, an old man makes a fire on the village path. It is *sari emvu* (taboo) for the dead body to be brought inside the village and so they are buried on the spot where the accident occurred or where the victim died. Persons entering the village must step through the smoke of the fire, and also hold their weapons and tools over the fire for a moment. Then they must wash their hands before entering the village, lest they bring the evil with them inside the village. The house and all the property of dead man, including the granary are abandoned. The family of the deceased move to the *Emvu Ranki* (taboo hut) built for them by the villagers and the whole household observe a taboo for six days, during which they must not speak to anyone. Among the southern Lothas the usual custom is for the household to remain in the old house for six days. At the *Emvu Ranki*, a ritual expert is called to perform a purificatory rite for the family at the end of the taboo days. A cock is sacrificed, and they pass through the fire and wash their hands and feet. When they are ceremonially clean they move to a little house built for them outside the village, where they remain until the next *Tokhu Emung* when the ceremony of *Kijan* or releasing the soul of the dead is performed.
ESCHATOLOGY

For the Lothas life on Earth was the main concern, life after death was a vague and shadowy concept. But the idea of the soul which live on after death was understood, therefore it was necessary for the dead to be properly buried with proper funerary rites to pacify the spirit of the dead that it may not come to disturb or take away the living members of the family, and also to allow the departed spirit to go freely and peacefully to the abode of the dead. Offerings were made too, partly to keep their memories alive. Among the Lothas, the practice of burying the dead before sunset was meant to enable the soul of the dead to reach the abode peacefully. Cowrie beads are also tied on the wrist of the dead to trade it for refreshment while on their journey to their abode. It is believed that the souls of the dead reside in the underworld, whose entrance lies in the Mount Tiyi. Very little attention is paid to their mode of life there except that the Lothas pictured it as similar to existence on this earth. The soul of the dead person is believed to be his exact image at the time of his death, with the same marks and scars. They believe that the souls go to the nether world where the ancestors meet them, and the life they lead there is a repetition of their lives on Earth. If they were poor on Earth, they remain poor there too, and if rich, they have wealth. (Interview with Pilamo Tungoe. Changsu village).

Zanao Mozhu writes that “the spirit of the forefathers was worshipped in times of trouble and sickness” (2004:22), implying that the Lothas practiced ancestor worship. However, ancestor worship or the worship of the spirit of the dead was not practiced by the Lothas. It cannot be denied, certainly, that the departed occupy an important part in the Lotha religiosity, but it is wrong to interpret it as ancestor worship. Libations and the giving of meat and soko (rice beer) during the different Lotha ceremonies are tokens of fellowship and
respect and symbols of family continuity and contact and therefore ‘worship’ is the wrong word to apply in this situation.

DEVELOPMENTAL RITUALS

The first of the developmental ritual required to be performed by the parents of a male child is ‘Raho’. Before the performance of the ceremony, the pvüti sees the omen by cutting a bamboo cup filled with soko (rice beer). Literally ‘ra’ means ‘enemies’, and ‘ho’ means ‘slay’. So this ceremony was meant to initiate a boy to a warrior, a head hunter. The boy is made to proclaim, ‘before this cup dries up, I will take the head of an enemy’, thus saying the cup is cut into two with a dao. If it breaks exactly in the middle, the proclamation was believed to come true. If it did not, it was taken as a bad omen. Then the pvüti utters this prayer:

Let it be a good omen, we are opening the mengkitong today,
Let good fortune come, bless us with lots of animals, sons and daughters, meat and fish,
Let no harm come upon the young men and women of this village,
Let them live in harmony. (Ngullie, 1994: 35).

After pronouncing this prayer the pvüti perform the ritual. The ritual is done at the house of the pvüti. The preliminaries of the Raho ritual is describe by Ngullie as follows: “the Raho maru (pieces of meat) was cut into six tiny pieces and kept aside, then a chicken is killed and roasted, the meat is then wrapped up in banana leaves. The boys for whom the ritual is performed are given six pieces of meat and a kilo of salt. The entrails were given to the elders, the chicken is given to the eldest called shorhe (meritorious group). They also collect rice for the purpose called tssikhu rikhya from those performing the Raho which is kept at the place of the Vukhjong (pig piercer). The rice is also distributed to the boys. After
all is done, they disperse from the house of the *pvüti*. This ceremony is performed usually in
the autumn season, soon after renovating the *chumpo*.

The *Zhutan* is the next ritual for the Lotha young man. It is a very simple ceremony
observed by a man before marriage. He hosts a feast where all the man of his clan who has
already done the *Zhutan* was invited. A bull is killed and presents of meat and *soko* (rice beer)
are given to the guests.

This genna is followed by the *shishang*, a more elaborate ritual which is performed
only after marriage. Two pigs (*sonkyu* and *ejo*) and a cock (*ozhu eyen*) are killed and *soko* (rice beer) beer are prepared. The pigs are slaughtered by the older members of the meritorious

Then the one called *sonkyu* is given to the in-laws (*ejanphyoi*), the pig slayers
(*vukjong*), the one bringing the leaves for wrapping purpose in the ceremony (*yusi*) and those
who take care of the things (*yupen*). The *vukjong* are given one and a half kilo each along with
salt of the same quantity. The remaining part is distributed among the relatives and in-laws
(Ngullie,1994:36). Then a small pig is sacrificed and the *vukjong* offers this prayer for the
performer’s welfare while facing eastward:

“If this *ozhu* is performed by killing a pig, let there be no deaths,

Let him prosper in his entire endeavor,

Let his friends be like grasshopper.

May you bless him with your words that one hornbill can bring a buffalo,

Let him buy precious ornaments with maize,

Bless him with abundant blessings”. (Tungoe,2010:21).

The sacrificed is then cooked and eaten by the *vukjong*, but it is a taboo meat for the
host of the ritual. This is followed by a ceremony called *tssungcheno khoroi rhovoala*
(entering the backyard to erect a post). For this an egg and a chicken is used. The village
elders and the in-laws participate by carrying rice and rice beer. The food is eaten and a lot is placed where the post is erected. In the evening the owner holding the cock ask the sorhe (meritorious group), “did I pass the ozhu or not?”. Then the members in union say, “yes, you passed”. The cock is then killed and divided among the vukjong and the Yusi. Then the “shyuilang (fats in the stomach) of the pig killed is chopped into small pieces, wrapped in two leaves, thirty pieces placed into each and hung on the ‘senki’ (post for hanging things). The observance of this ritual entitles the performer to wear the ‘phanrubsu’. (a shawl made with combination of red and black with white in the middle, where pictures of spears, daos and animals are embroidered). (Ngullie, 1994:37). With the performance of this ritual a man climbs another step of the social ladder.

The third social genna is called Etha, the preliminaries of the ritual follows much the same as that of the shishang ceremony. The performance of this rite entitles a man to wear the shawl called Ethasu. Then a ceremony called osoni ewo (granary) is performed at the granary of the man who has done the sacrifice. The two vukjongs sacrifice two pigs and two fowls outside the granary. The meat is then divided up and the fowls’ feathers are tied to bamboos outside the granary as a sign that the ceremony had been performed there.

After the work of Etha is completed, a bull or mithun (tssiro) without any blemish is brought in to start the tssiro Etso Osho. (mithun feast). A man intending to hold this feast informs the vukjong in advance, who in turn inform all the married men folk of the clan. These men becomes the wothang (announcers) entrusted to give public notice in the village. In preparation for the feast, rice is pounded and soko (rice beer) prepared. On the day of the ceremony, a bull without blemish is tied up in front of the sacrificer’s house, given water and allowed to lick salt out of the hands of the sacrificer’s wife. The vukjong touches it on the head with a stick and recites this prayer:
Let there be blessing.

The young men and women has entrusted me this responsibility saying they can lean on no one else.

I am holding this spear and like God’s spirit, I am sheltering you, may you protect the front, back, right and left of your people. (Ngillie,1994:35).

The mithun is then killed by an old man with a spear thrust into its heart. The meat is divided up as follows: the chest to the clan of the performer of the sacrifice, the hindquarters to his wife’s clan, the fore- legs to the husbands of women of his clan (ejaneiphyoi), the meat of the head to the wotung (announcers), the tongue to the man who helped to buy the mithun, and the lower part of the stomach to the old man who killed it”. (Mills,1922:141). It is taboo for the sacrificer to eat the meat of the sacrificed animal. The performer is allowed to hang the skull and horns of the mithun after he perform the stone dragging ceremony, until which it is kept in the chumpo (morung). With the observance of the mithun sacrifice being completed, the feasts and merry- making begins. For this a pair of pigs and cows called sonki is brought, butchered and the meat are distributed among the members who have already given the osho depending in their status. The meat is also given to his well wishers and in- laws. The pvüti then say the following prayer for the host couple:

Let there be blessing upon this couple.

Let nothing bad said about them.

Like sunshine, moon and stars, let their life so shine.

Like the hornbill perched on the tree after a refreshing drink,

Let no misfortune befall them.

Let their hearts be like the covering of orange and lemon”. (Tongoe, 2010:pp39-40).
The feast is celebrated with much singing and drinking, *eramoren khen* (traditional ceremonial songs) are sung, and *soko* (rice beer) distributed to every house in the village. This is called *yan sho* (feeding the village with rice beer).

The following year the *ozu esu* (stone dragging) ceremony is observed. This is the most important developmental social ‘*genna*’ and plays significant part in a Lotha life. Beginning with the dragging of the first stone, the rituals increase in costliness and importance. The social standing of the performer is elevated each time he perform the ceremony. Therefore it is the ambition of every Lotha to perform the full series, from the first, where one stone is dragged and erected, to the second and third and so on when two stones are dragged in each. There is no limit to the number of times the stone-dragging ceremony may be done. “In fact, there was a time when, in the final feasts, after completing the whole series, even birds, beasts, chicken and other domestic animals were invited. Meat and rice were scattered on the ground for the village pigs and fowls, and rice and food were taken to the host’s fields for the birds to feed on it”. (Interview with Thungdamo Ezung, Longsa village, 05:05: 2012)).

To begin with the ceremony, a *emung ranki* (genna shed), is built at the back of the performer’s house where he and his family must sleep till the ceremony is over, then a stone is selected. The *wotung* (announcers) are to announce the date of the ceremony on behalf of the performer who is not supposed to allow any stranger into his house till the completion of the ceremonies. He was also to remain chaste throughout the ceremony. Rice is pounded and rice beer prepared with much singing. On the appointed day the in-laws (*ejanphyoi*) drag the stone, and bring it to the selected place called *zuchanphen* (stone viewing place), where they are met by the men folk of the performer’s clan in full dancing dress. Then the wife of the performer comes out with full traditional attire to serve the *pvüti* with *zutsu* (pure wine). The *pvüti* pours a little of the beer on the stone and says a prayer. Then the senior *vukjong* sacrifice
a chicken by cutting its throat with a sharp piece of bamboo, and with an egg lays it on the stone. The stone is then carried to the performer’s house. The next day a hole is dug where the stone is to be set up. Feasting, singing orueya (‘fall of enemies’ where they recounted the number of heads taken from enemy villages) and drinking continues. Then the pvüti (priest) says this prayer:

They have brought the stone, they have started the feasting.
Bless this couple, let no calamities befall their fields.
Bless them in their trade, exchanging hornbill with a bull, maize with ornaments.
Bless them with abundant piglets and chickens.
Bless them with healthy children, fit, strong and good looking, like vines of cucumber and millet.
Bless them with long life and abundance.
For this couple, may a cup of rice beer serves many people, a spoon of curry serve many.
Bless them.

The rest of the evening is spent in feasting and singing. The following day, the stone is set up, and the pvüti says the zu chan (stone viewing), prayer as follows:

“This is our pledge; we will not place you in our backyard or leave you like that, but place you on a high place where people can see you, admire and praise your beauty. Dear stone, glide to your destiny, wild and free without any hindrance as we sing this song for you. Let there be no division but help us to live and exist like this stone” (Tungoe, 2010:28).

Near the monolith, a forked post (Y shaped wooden post) is erected, perhaps to represent the female organ of generation, and thus a symbol of fertility. This is followed by the soki chana. Literally, soki means ‘animal head’ and ‘chana’ means ‘serve’. Here the host couple clad in full traditional attire display themselves to the people. The wife pours zutsu over the mithun’s skull which is displayed outside the house. It is the occasion where the
performer gets honor and respect from the people and thus earn the title of an Ekhyo Ekhung (one who boasts in victory). The performer is entitled to wear the longpensu (black and blue shawl). It is to be noted that only married men can perform the series of osho (feast of merit), for the wife plays an honorable part throughout the ceremonies.

The feast of merit (osho) is no doubt a means to climb the ladder of social recognition, but it is also a means for distributing wealth in the community. It shows that among the Lothas the accumulation of wealth was not for selfish or greedy motive but wealth was accumulated with the idea of sharing. It also contributed to the communitarian spirit of the Lothas.

COMMUNITY RITUALS

_Epo Etha_ (giving what is due) ritual is performed in remembrance of the Lotha ancestor, giving him his due share in the community and to ward off evils and deaths. (Murry, 1999:22). It is widely believed that the Lotha tribe came across the Himalayas and settled in the present area. While on their way of migration, they came across a path where they had to cross a cave. Rankhandan, the Lotha ancestor, because of his stag like horns could not pass through the cave. He requested the Lothas to follow the rituals to remember him. Thus the Lothas perform this ceremony in fulfillment of this promise once a year, usually before the _rhuven_ (sowing) ceremony. A pig is killed and twenty-three little pieces of meat, a handful of rice, boiled egg, boiled rice, pieces of ginger (considered as magical disinfectant by the Lothas) and a bamboo cup filled with soko are put in a basket which is to be taken to the outskirt of the village by an old man called in for the purpose. This ritual is performed by every household in the village. Then the old man sprinkle soko on the house posts and throws pieces of ginger on the ground and says a prayer addressing Rankhandan:
“oki shilo tsutsailan topvu lona khichei ni khumaka,
osi pothe pori topvu ethzhua nzyu shilo ni khumaka,
nochonori osi ezupetsu etitssotukkhe,
osi mhona evanthok khelo” (Murry, 1999:22).

When translated it means: “we have given you all the things in this house, let no diseases or deaths or other misfortunes befall us in the future”. Having done this, the old man takes the prepared basket, calling all the evil spirits to follow him, goes outside the village, lights a small fire and sprinkle soko (rice beer) on the ground. Then small sticks of bamboo, five pieces on the right and four pieces on the left are laid on the ground. Then five pieces of the boiled egg, five pieces of ginger and scrapes of the meat, little heap of boiled rice and rice husks are put on the right, and four pieces of the egg, ginger, meat and rice are placed on the left. Then the old man spits soko over it while saying a prayer. Then the bamboo cup which holds the soko is split into two to see the omen. If both falls inside up or outside up the omen is good. But if one falls one way and one the other it is bad omen. (Mills 1922:133). The split bamboo is placed on either side, and the old man eats the food and goes to his house. It is taboo for the performer and his household to see the old man on the same day. The next day the basket is returned by the old man for which he receive a handful of rice as his fee.

The Oyantssoa (making of village) is another important community ritual of the Lothas. This ceremony is performed on several occasions namely, at the establishment of a new village, at the death of the pvüti, when the Menkitong (head tree) dies by itself and at intervals of nine to ten years when it becomes necessary to renew the blessings of the deities. This ritual was observed in the winter season (vamithung), before sowing begins. In all these, the procedure follows the same. The pvüti announce the day on which the ceremony is to be performed. Rice is collected from the whole village by the pvüti accompanied by the yingae and soko (rice beer) prepared. Then the ritual begins with the dog killing ceremony held
outside the pvüti’s house. The ears of the dog is then cut off by the yingae and hangs it on the roof of the pvüti’s house.

The next day the ophya chuma ceremony takes place. The Chumpo boys, after having observed sexual taboo for three days, go to the jungle to cut the Ophya (wooden post). A big tree is felled, and a post of about six feet in length and two feet in width is cut out of it. This is trimmed flat on one side. Then the unmarried men drag it to the designated place, usually outside the village fence, with the flat side facing the village and sets it up. The next three days are Mongtsu Emong (whole village genna). It is taboo (sari sapvu) for women to see the ophya being dragged in or to sew or weave during the taboo days. At the close of the taboo days, the men folk of the village assemble in the place where the ophya (post) was set up, with full traditional dresses. The pvüti then sees the omen (phyali) of the village by cutting the throat of a cock and observing it entrails. Then he says the traditional prayer for the prosperity of the village. The sacrificed cock is put up on the ophya, and bamboo spears are thrown at the Ophya, while chanting the Shamashari, the chant of warriors who are bringing home heads. A fence is built round the ophya.

The next day the Oha (Luck stones) kept under the Menkitong (head tree) are counted. It is believed that if the numbers has increased from the previous year’s count it is a good omen for the village, but if it has decreased it is a bad omen. After five days, the fence is removed by the pvüti by performing the last rites, with an offering of an egg and thirty (30) tiny pieces of dog’s meat. These mark an end of the oyantssoa ceremony.

HEAD HUNTING RITUAL

The real basis of head-hunting among all the Naga tribes is the belief that the head is the seat par excellence of the life-essence which informs human beings as well as many other
animals. (Hutton, 1921:408). The practice originated out of a belief that the soul matter, on which all life depended, was stored in the head of human beings. So, whenever a person was beheaded and his head taken to another village, the soul matter inside the severed head was also transformed to that village. The recipient village, it was believed, would gain in prosperity, its population would increase, cattle would multiply, and the crops would be luxuriant. (Elwin, 1959:35). The severed head was therefore taken home by the victor as his hard-earned trophy. (Penzu, 2009:10). Besides the economic motive, heads are taken for ritual purposes and to gain honour and respect in the society. Taking of an enemy’s head conferred on a man the right to wear certain dresses and ornaments, not entitled to others. (Thong, 2012:15). The man who has taken the most heads is considered as a hero and is ceremonially honored in life as well as in death. Heroes seek honor, glory and renown, believing that to obtain these is of much greater importance than life itself. So for them, it was partly religious, partly to show social maturity and partly for fertility and agricultural prosperity. Such a trophy was treated with solemn ceremonies.

Among the Lothas, every male member, after attaining certain age limit undergo compulsory training in the art of warfare in their chumpo (morung). During major war all adult males participate in the fighting. Every male member took such a battle as an opportunity to exercise his maturity and feats in fighting. Though considered to be a sign of valor and courage, often the heads were taken in ‘treacherous and cowardly ways’ (Philip, 1976:11), as in most instances heads were taken in ambush on helpless children and women and not in open warfare. Joseph. S. Thong, however, says that high honor were heaped on those braves who brought back the heads of women and children as trophies, for women and children were usually protected in the heart of the village, and could only be killed through exceptional feats and courage. (Thong, 2012:13).
The proper preparatory proceedings to head hunting trips open by sending a messenger to the village with which the challenging village desired a trial of strength. This messenger is chosen from men who are well versed with the dialect of the challenged village. After the message reached the challenged village, preparation commences. The pvüti and the old men of the village consult omen by killing a chicken and breaking and egg. In some villages, omen is seen by slicing the stem of a type of plant called Mungsentsung (Adhatoda zeylanica) and observe which side it fell to the ground. If the omen is propitious, the raid party set forth under the command of a man who has experienced such raids and noted for valor. The warriors strictly adhere to the taboos associated with head hunting. A man intending to go to such raid had to remain chaste. The women, while their husbands were away must not weave or spin. If a warrior hiccup or cough while eating dinner it is a bad omen for him and so should stay back.

The heads taken are brought to the village with much chanting of shamashari, the wordless chant of warriors who are bringing home heads. The head was usually carried by the one who took it. As they approach the village, the villagers welcome them with food and drink outside the village fence to refresh them. From each head, hair is cut off put in a stick set up outside the village fence. Then the heads are taken to the Menkitong while chanting “Oh ! ! shamashari, Oh! pangashari, Oh! Yanunghari! Oh! Emhayile. (Oh! We have killed an enemy, oh! Bless us). (Interview with Merithung Odyuo, Wokha Town. 20:12:2012). Sometimes the ceremony of hanging up the heads take place the next day because of time being needed to prepare for the ceremony and also for the warriors to take rest. The raiders could not go to their houses that day because they were considered ceremoniously unclean. The raiding party had to sleep in the Chumpo, the heads being put up on a ledge of the Humtsen, the main post of the Chumpo.
The next day the *pvuti* and warriors kills a dog and a pig and feasts on it. Then the heads are taken to the *menkitong* with the usual cry of *shamashari* and hung it in the presence of the entire villagers. A sharp bamboo stick is run into the base of the skull, a strong cord of cane is attached to the edges of the bamboo stick and pieces of red flowers are stuck to the ears. Then the *orri Luma* or *orri khata* ceremony takes place in which all the *Chumpo* boys intending to join such raids in the future are allowed to throw their spears at the head. *Orri luma* means warming the village on account of the enemy’s head, so the whole village observe victory celebration, *Ramvu*, by feasting and drinking and going for procession around the village chanting the *shamashari*.

With this ritual done the *pvüti* says a prayer calling the deities to bless them with fertility, good crop and prosperity of the village and also for blessing of more heads. For the next six days gennas are observed. The warriors were forbidden to sleep with a woman for six days and also not to eat meat of prey during the taboo days. On the fifth day, the purificatory rite was performed by washing the hands, dao and spears of the warriors. On the sixth day, all assembled at the *pvüti’s* house and partake dinner with him, marking an end of the taboo period. Sometimes, the raiders could bring only bits of the body parts of the slain enemy. The ceremony follows the same in such cases too. When an enemy is brought to the village alive, called *Worantssan* by the Lothas, they are released only after a fine of a cow and Mithun is paid by the victim’s family members. (Interview with Nzan Tsopoe, Sungro village, Wokha. 15:02:2012).

SHAMAN

Shaman is a person who acts as intermediary between the natural and supernatural worlds, using magic to cure illness and foretell the future. Some people, it is believed, possess
a divine power to foresee things to occur and can discover whose spirit and in what manner an appeasement is to be made for healing sickness and epidemic. They are thus consulted for all kinds of sickness and for appeasement. They are regarded as physicians those days when there were no doctors nor physicians to be consulted, and there were no medicines available in the ancient days. (Presler, 1977:29). Shamanism is practiced in small-scale societies in which hunting and agriculture are dominant forms of subsistence. The shamans are skilled practitioners of a technique which induces a state of trance in order to create connection between the human and non-human worlds. In short, shaman is the name given to the specialist in spirits whose domain of expertise comprises both the visible and the invisible world.

There are two types of Shamans. The first type becomes shaman either by hereditary or by learning. They receive training and education from master shaman. They pass through some initiation rites before they begin functioning as shaman. The second group of shamans become shaman by choice, chosen by the gods to act as mediator between the supernatural and humans. He experiences dreams and ecstasies. The Lotha Shaman is called Ratsen (medicine man), and belong to the second group. The Lotha Ratsen is not Hereditary and any man or woman is liable to develop the symptoms associated with shamanism. A person affected with these symptoms goes into a fit or into deep trance or delirium, especially during full moon. The Lothas believed that it was during those fits that the soul of the Ratsen goes to the next world to communicate with the spirits. When a person shows these symptoms for the first time, an experience Ratsen is called in to diagnose the case. If he proclaims it to be genuine he strangles a cock, from the head of which he is believed to extract a small stone called Ratsenha. (Mills, 1922: 164). This stone is believed to be kept by the new Ratsen in his head.
The function of the Ratsen is to dream and to foretell the future. But his main function is to cure illnesses caused by the evil spirits. That is why the Lothas called him the Medicine man. By falling into a trance and separating the spirit from the corporeal body, the shaman is believed to cure the sick, escort the souls of the dead to the underworld, foretell the future, and transcend time and space as well as the boundaries between the living and the non-living, in order to find something lost or to assist hunters in tracking down prey. (Partridge, 2007:124). The Lothas attributes all sickness to the malice of the tsungrham, the evil spirit. This evil spirit cause sickness and epidemic by introducing some foreign objects into the body of humans or by taking away their souls. In such cases, the Ratsen is consulted to find out the foreign objects, which may be a stone, piece of wood or sticks or even hair, and extract it. The Ratsen is also entrusted to trace the soul of the sick person. The Ratsen then instruct the Montsai (soul caller), usually an old man, and the sick person to go to the place he indicated to perform the appropriate sacrifices. The Ratsen is also called in to remove poison from the head and stomach of the people, and since the people had faith in him, it actually brings relief to the pain stricken people. (Interview with Merithung odyuo. Wokha, 20:12:2012). Penathung Ngulli of Longla village narrated that Pithungo, the Ratsen of Niroyo village cured him of a severe headache by drawing out blood from his head (Interview). The ratsen not only diagnose but also prescribe herbal medicines, which are supposed to have been revealed to him in dreams or while in a trance. For wounds, the shoots of a type of bush called mungnunng is crushed and applied. For weakness, a bat’s flesh is prescribed, for diarrhoea, roasted goat’s hoof and gall of cow or pig, and for intestinal diseases gall of a python are prescribed. Whisks of the dog which had bitten the man are burned and put on the wounds and for stomach pain, leaves of lemon is put on the effected portion.
The Lothas believe that the soul of the *Ratsen* could turn into leopard or tiger which they call *sonyuo*. If his *sonyuo* is killed, the *ratsen* fall sick and eventually dies. The fits from which a *ratsen* suffers are believed to be in some way connected with his *sonyuo*.

**FETISH AND MAGIC**

The animistic belief of the primitive people made them to believe in the use of Fetish and magic to control the power of the spiritual forces and use them for their own advantage. The term ‘fetish’ is derived from the Latin ‘facticius’ and the Portuguese word ‘feitico’ which meant an amulet. The Portuguese adventurers first used the word when they saw these practices among the primitive people. John. A. Hardon described a fetish as “a common object of no value in itself but which the primitive keeps and venerates because he believes it is the dwelling-place of a spirit”. (vol-1,196:33). A fetish may be a stone, wood, skull, hair or any other object for that matter, but these objects are powerless without the presence of the spiritual powers.

The Lothas practiced the keeping of a fetish stone which they called *oha* (luck stone). These *oha* were smooth pebbles which they keep in the *Mengkitong* (Head tree, usually a banyan tree which every village must have for ritual purpose). They also keep them at the foot of the posts of *chumpo* (*morung*), or by individuals in their houses or granaries. They are of varying size and significance. The large ones (usually the size of a man’s head) are believed to bring fortune to the whole village and thus kept under the *menkitong*, the head tree and maintained by the village authority. Those kept in the *Chumpo* (*morung*) affect the prosperity of the particular *morung* inmates, the smaller ones kept by the individual families as luck stones are supposed to bring good harvest, beautiful children, blessing of wild animals and domestic animals and success in warfare. The *Ratsen* (seer) are believed to keep the *oha*
inside their head. The *oha* which brings luck in trade are kept with the money and the rice *oha* is kept in the granary. *Oha* are treated with great respect and in the various ceremonies of the Lothas, the people make small offerings of meat to the *oha* too.

Among the Lothas, stones with peculiar or curiously shaped appearance are liable to become objects of superstitious awe. Stone celts are regarded as thunderbolts from heaven. The Lothas regard them with some awe and oaths are taken on it. They call them *Potsow pvu* (God’s axe). There is a story about a stone called *Matishi* which gives rain. According to Lilanthung Lotha, ‘a man and his mithun went for a journey but on their way the Mithun died because they could not find water to drink, and it turned into a big boulder. This boulder came to be called *Matishi* and lies between Akuk and Lakhuti village. It is said that the Mithun left a footprint on the stone which the Lothas call *Tssiro khosu* (mithun tract). At one point of time, rain did not come after the seeds were sown, so the old men of Akuk village went to this place, cleaned the Mithun’s footprint and poured water over the *matishi* (stone). Rain came as the old men were proceeding along the path to their village singing *khothesanga* which means ‘Let there be rain’. (Lotha,1993:28).

There is a legend about *Longsio* (long stone) which fled from an Ao village called Aliba. One day the villagers killed a pig and went tracking the stone. On finding the stone, offerings of meat was given and the stone was asked to follow them. But it refused to go back telling them that it had occupied a good place. It is said that the Lothas paid great respect to this stone, and the people of Pangti village used to take oath on this stone. It is believed that the guilty would go mad if they take oath on this stone holding an egg. When the village menfolk went out for a game, they used to see a mark on this stone supposed to be left the *sukhingo*, the jungle spirit. Their hunting trip is successful if they see a mark on the stone made by this deity who sharpen his dao (machete) on this stone. The Lothas tells a story that a piece of *phitson long* was brought to Pangti village from Kezakhenoma, broken off from the
stone which miraculously increase paddy dried on it. According to Lilanthung Lotha, it is in the possession of Tsensao odyuo of Pangti village, and the odyuo clan of Pangti made offerings of meat and rice to it for good harvest. *Tiyulong* is another stone on which the Akuk and Lakhuti villagers considered sacred, and on which solemn oaths were taken. Similar veneration of stones is also attested among many civilized people. In the Old Testament (Isaiah 7:6) the Hebrews are reproved for pouring libations and bringing food offerings to smooth stones. (Clemen, 2005:25-26).

Tradition says that the *Yantung* (big knife or dao) believed to have used by Ramphan, the legendary hero, to kill the tiger which killed nine women at Tiyi Longchum is retained by the Tsopoe clan of Akuk village in Wokha. It is believed that the Lotha ancestors lived in Tiyi Longhum for many years until they were forced to migrate to other places due to shortage of water and fear of the tiger (kikon, 2007,03). The graves of the nine women killed by the tiger still exists in a place called Longhanchu, between the present Yanthamo and Yimkha village. (Interview with Penathung Ngulli, Longla village, 05:06:1013). This object (*Yantung*) is believed to possess spiritual powers and the Tsopoe clan performed offering of meat to it before harvest every year for longevity and good harvest for the clan. Ceremonial display of the *yantung* was held every thirty years, on the occasion of which every male of the clan gathered to look at it with the belief that it would bring good fortune.(Lotha,1993:28).

The above shows that the Lothas believed in the power of fetishes. However, it may be noted that this practice of the Lothas could not amount to stone worship or worship of inanimate things (non-Living things) in any symbolical sense. Of themselves, these objects are powerless, but what makes them powerful and sacred is the presence of the spiritual powers. So the animistic belief of the primitive Lothas made them to take these objects as the supposed home of a spirit, or as in some sense a vehicle of power. Thus, for the primitive Lothas, fetishes effectively brought about contact between them and the divine beings.
Besides the use of fetishes, the use of magic played a great role among the primitive people in their effort to come in touch with the spiritual realities. Among the Lothes, magic is used by the Ratsen (seer) to diagnose, treat and heal the evils in people and society. However, witchcraft and sorcery in the evil sense or black magic was not prevalent among the Lothas. As mills writes; “witchcraft, in the evil sense of the word was never common among the Lothas, though the practice used to exist of making a straw image of an enemy in another village, and after addressing it by name spearing it. This, however, could never be done by one Lotha to another”. (Mills, 1922:168). Supernatural magic or black magic with its own form of worship, incantations, rites, sacrifices and special meeting places, practiced with the intention to bait, bewitch or poison, thereby effecting the individual and the society, as may be prevalent among other primitive people, was not practiced by the Lothas.

DREAMS

The primitive Lothas attached great importance to Omung (Dreams), the office of which is normally held by a woman called Havae. She acts as a mediator between the souls of the dead and the living relatives. It is believed that in the dreams, the souls of the dead visit the living relatives. When a person dies, the family consults the Havae to know the will of the deceased. The family of the deceased prepares a sacrificial package of food and keeps it with the dreamer for the night. The soul of the deceased is believed to meet the dreamer in her dreams and communicate the will to her. Whenever, there occurs a prolonged illness or repeated deaths in a family it is believed that the spirits of the dead captivated the soul of the sick and a sacrifice called Monso (soul retrieval) is offered through the dreamer. (Murry,1976:8) Echui- eni ( placating the spirit of the dead) is performed through the Havae when there occurs constant illness of someone in the family.
Dreams are taken as symbolical and taken to the Havae or old men and women to be interpreted. Anything of red color in dreams is regarded as blood and therefore foretell accidental deaths in the family of the dreamer or in the village. Water symbolizes crops, and therefore dreaming of a deep pool means a good harvest. But a dry pond means a lean harvest. Dreaming of one’s teeth falling out meant a death of the person or family members. If a man dreams that he is carrying a child along the Road of the Dead the child will die, and the dreamer may die too. But to dream that he is driven back by the dead souls means that he will have a long life, for the souls of those who had gone before are not yet ready to receive him. (Mills, 1922:171). To kill a chicken in a dream is bad because the chicken seen is the soul of that chicken which will be killed at the dreamer’s death not long after. The Lothas believed that the only way of averting the fate ahead is by performing sacrifices by killing a pig or a dog and giving the meat to the Havae, the professional dreamer, who offers it to the souls of the death in her dreams.

Among the Lothas, religion is so intertwined with their everyday life that distinction cannot be made between the sacred and the secular. Every dimension of their life is linked with the invisible world of the spirits. They believe that that their existence on the earth is not in their hands but it depends on the supernatural, and this feeling developed an attitude of fear towards the divine beings. Therefore, their religious belief is guided by efforts to appease the supernatural to get tangible results. Hence, their approach to religion is utilitarian and egoistic. It is utilitarian in the sense that they wanted to be on the safer side as far as the divine beings are concerned, as displeasing them may not be good for them. It is egoistic in the sense that preserving themselves from the wrath of the supernatural becomes their main religious concern. The prayers, rituals and sacrifices offered are characterized by selfish motives. The study brings to light that their motives are obtaining food, victory over enemies, averting evil and illness. There is also a great deal of materialism inherent in their religion, because the
motive behind their prayers and sacrifices are for obtaining material gains or favor from the deities. Again that is the reason why great care is always taken to appease the spirits to ward off their malignancy. Their religion aimed at life, fertility, prosperity, harmony between people and spirits in this world rather than the next. There is also little speculation about the origin and nature of the cosmos.

Though fear is the basis of their religion, we also find that their attitude towards the Supreme Being is not one of fear. They considered the Supreme Being as one who cared for them as a father would to his children, and attributes many moral qualities to him. The Supreme Being is the one they would call upon in all the significant moment of their life, and offer him prayers and thanks for his goodness. Moreover, throughout the different seasons and stages of life, they establish rituals and ceremonies to keep in touch with the supernatural. What people in the west would regard as typically secular, such as planting and harvesting crops, is closely connected to religious understanding among the Lothas. The fundamental concern of the Lotha religion with health and well-being are expressed through rituals. These religious ceremonies built up genuine bonds among the people of the village, clan and family. Festivals, feasts, dances and songs celebrate communal existence. Because religion focuses on communal well-being, the Lothas were not much concerned with eschatological concepts. For them the past and the present find their meaning in the present. Since their religious activity focuses on how positive benefits for society can be enhanced, the Lotha traditional religion is a form of humanism, which is a communal humanism and not individualistic. Therefore, in spite of the limitations, there is also a great deal of richness in them. Though they are primitive in their nature and expressions, the Lotha religion is pragmatic, concerning themselves with securing and maintaining material advantages which promote the well-being of the community as a whole.