Chapter 4

THE NAGA VILLAGE SYSTEM

For a long time, economists and planners have been making surveys of the problems of villagers and have drawn up plans for the amelioration of rural conditions. But in order to comprehend the actual situation of the village it is essential to examine the social and cultural matrix and physical environment. In this section, a holistic approach has been taken into account to understand the Tangkhul Naga village settings, socio-cultural and religious organisations. It also attempts to examine material culture of the Nagas. Hence, to examine the ecology and economic systems of the Nagas, it is important to investigate the village systems and functions.

4.1 The Naga Village

Generally, the settlers migrated from parent settlements to clear land with fire and axe and in the process they established new houses and means of livelihood. Thus, every new settlement gradually grew into a village. Village is the smallest unit of settlement having a definite territory by tangible social, cultural, political and economic bonds. To Prasad (1973:187), "(t)he term settlement as the geographer uses it, appears to mean an establishment with an abode with an established way of life with fixit and certainty in aspect of time and place.” The term “village” attracts and simultaneously denounces any legal definition. According to the definition given by the Census of India, the term village means an administrative unit having a parcel of land, the boundaries of which are defined, cluster of houses or more than one such cluster and bearing a distinctive place name.
To understand the village system and its geographical entities, the study of social system of the village community and functions is imperative. As noted in the earlier chapter, many tribal villages are compact and are the active social unit next to the family. In recent times, many anthropological studies focus on village community and the functional components such as social, cultural, economic, and belief systems. Sacchidanand (1968:vii) opines, "(i)n most parts of India, the village is not merely an administrative or revenue unit, but the basic unit of our social polity. It is enshrined in the tradition from time immemorial. The village community is a historical as well as a social fact. The inhabitants of the village have intimate social, economic, ritual and political relationship which is regulated by age old traditions and institutions." The importance of village as a subject matter of human study was realised very late and of the tribal village still much later (Vidyarthi and Binay, 1976). Tribal villages differ from the non-tribal villages both in composition and characteristics. The major factors for the differences are ecological settings, culture, society, economy and institutions.

The case for studying villages largely rests on its being close to people, their life, livelihood and culture and on its role as a local point of reference for individual prestige and identification (Marriot, 1955). However, as an important administrative and social unit, the village itself profoundly influences the behaviour pattern and economic system of its inhabitants. For many centuries, particularly in South East Asia, villages have survived hundreds of years of wars, either intra-village feuds or external invasions or any other form of intervention. To quote Lewis (1958:305), "(t)he village is an isolable unit does not mean that we should treat it in isolation."

Generally, the Nagas live in villages. The village is often irregular in settlement patterns and situated mainly on hill tops or the shoulder of a spur, where it is warm, well-defended and there is adequate supply of water. The reason for choosing hill tops
for their settlement was a strategic one and it was a necessity of time as they had to keep constant vigil over the invading enemies. In the olden days, there existed inter-village feud and hostility amongst the villages and one important reason is head hunting. They fear that any of these belligerent villages or some unknown enemies could intrude into their village territories. This inevitably led the Nagas to settle at hill tops (which is very strategic in terms of defending the village). For the Nagas, once settled in a place, it became a permanent settlement and they rarely moved out to a new place.

The first settlers of each village had carved out enough land which enabled them to become self-sufficient. Naga village is a well-defined entity. Horam (1977) pointed out that the popular practice in the Naga world for villages is to send people out of their inhabitants to form a new colony, or to exploit the territories of other villages, so as to reduce the population in the village. After some time such newly formed colonies became independent retaining only sentimental links with the mother village. Thus, they eventually became consciously defensive and it explains their strategic choice of hill tops as sites for their village. Each village maintained its identity. Persons belonging to the families of the same stock in the male line form themselves into a clan. The members of the clan work together and form a village under the authority of the eldest of the clan who takes the title of headman or village chief. The village itself is their identity in term of society, culture, tradition and economic status. To quote Das (1985:16), "(t)he Naga village is something like a protective shell, where they can lead a life based on their own cultural values. A village to them is a breathing space that has to be nurtured at any cost."

Before the advent of British colonialism, the Naga villages were isolated from one another and the inter-village trading and interaction was limited except among friendly villages. This was due to the practice of inter-village rivalry and head hunting.
During those times, trade relations between the neighbouring villages were minimal with the exception of some of the friendly villages. The different villages including villages of the same community were living in a constant state of feud. Hodson (1911:113) notes, "(t)he origin of many of the village feud is lost to memory, but 'the heritage of hate' persisted in full vigour." The practice of head hunting is now a thing of the past. "Some villages lived in a constant state of feud even though the original quarrel would be centuries old. This may to a certain extent, account for the great divergence of dialect from one village to the next" (Horam 1977:66).

The village consists of many homesteads and population of more than five clans. McCulloch (1859) said that each house is constructed with reference to its own convenience, the regularity of the village is not cared for, but no house is so far removed from the rest as to preclude its being included in the stockade or rampart of stones which usually surrounds them as defence, either from enemies or wild beasts.

To understand the morphology of Naga social organisation and economic systems, understanding Naga village system is essential. It is because the village maintains the integrity of the Nagas' social and cultural practices. The Naga village represents a social, political and cultural unit and each village is an independent unit. The village functions as a compact and well-knit society where the traditional customs and discipline were observed. "A Naga village state has (i) population (ii) territory and (iii) sovereignty as its components. Naga village was an independent unit and accordingly enjoyed the right of sovereignty. Every village state pursued an independent foreign policy and implemented its own customary laws on all walks of life of its citizens. Each village state had its own defence system. Administration was indigenous and independent. Its economy was local and self-sufficient. In the village, customary laws were to be feared and respected. Naga customary laws were strictly enforced."
Every Naga obeyed these laws for he himself was the maker of the laws. Laws of the *Morung* (dormitory) or the society- all these were accepted in the making of these laws. Each village state enjoyed the absolute rights to make war and peace. It pursued one independent policy of its own” (Shimray 1985:43).

As said, Nagas seldom shift or move their village sites. However, in recent times, there are some cases where new villages have been established. All the Naga villages have their own demarcation boundaries viz., streams, rivers, ridges or stone. But there are inevitable inter-village boundary disputes, which is common phenomenon even now. Nowadays, the spatial ties of marriage, politics and trade among the various Naga villages create an extensive network of relation as Lewis has aptly called “rural cosmopolitanism”. Figure 1 broadly presents the general Naga village system.

![The Village Naga Systems](image)

**FIGURE 1 Naga Village System**

*Settlement Patterns and Classification of Naga Village*

The Naga villages are mostly small hamlets and have compact patterns. It is mostly built in irregular cluster. The physiographic features also induce settlement patterns. The arrangement of the houses in the Tangkhul Naga village is irregular (This is true in the case of Angami Nagas, Sema Nagas and Lhota Nagas). The common features observed
in Naga villages are houses with home gardens at backyard, roads/footpaths, village court, church, village spring ponds and school and sometimes community hall. Size, shape, form, layout, types and patterns are all elements of a settlement. Generally, types and patterns of settlement are classified as compact, cluster, hamlet and dispersed. In other words, it can be categorised as shapeless or clusters, linear cluster and linear and square or rectangular clusters. The Tangkhul Naga villages belong to both shapeless-nucleated form and linear form¹. The general characters of the Naga village are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Settlement Patterns:</td>
<td>(a) Compact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Shapeless-nucleated Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Lineated Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Size:</td>
<td>(a) Very Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15 to 34 Households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(35 to 74 Households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(75 to 120 Households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(121 to 200 Households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Very large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(200 and above Households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Layout:</td>
<td>(a) Unarranged homestead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Street villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Main Street (motorable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Minor (footpath)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Social and Religious Organisations
The Naga village comprises several households and population of many different clans. So distinct is the clan from the village that it forms almost a village in itself and fortified within the village inside its own boundaries. The inhabitants are bound by rope of many strands- social, economic, and political as well as rituals. Naga social organisation is made up of cross-cutting group ties, that is, the households are integrated into the
society, by being members of larger functional units; lineages, clans, age groups and village community.

**Household**

A household is defined as a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen. As Nashat and Tucker (1999) mentioned, household relationships are at the heart of most societies, since families act as the primary culture-bearing unit. Many social scientists have regarded the family as the cornerstone of society. Murdock (1949) describes family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more own children or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults. Thus, the members of a household live together, pool its resources and work together and produce offspring.

In Naga society, Naga household is defined as a social, cultural, economic and religious entity. In other words, the household is the primary unit of economic production, reproduction and consumption. Also, the way the families are organised is linked as much as the relationship of economic production with culture. Household most often functionally encompasses a wide range of relatives, including grandparents, parents, children, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles. Even if these people do not inhabit in the same household or compound or village, the sense of communal responsibility, obligation, and authority is wide-ranging, strongly felt and encouraged.

Naga society is a patriarchal system and male descent is complete with them. The essential feature of the Naga household is that members are descended from the eldest male resident in the house, the mother being, under the rule of exogamy, brought in from another clan that is, an entirely different group of families. The Nagas followed
respective families right after their marriage. It is the eldest son who takes over the responsibility of the father when the latter becomes inactive due to old age or dies. Households are the fundamental building blocks of society as well as lineage, clan and village. Freepaothing (1994) comments that the concept of Naga family has a little kingdom within itself, over which the father is the supreme ruler. The authority of the father extends to his wife and to his children. The wife though holding a subordinate position, to that of the husband; exerts tremendous influence for good and evil over her husband and family. In the household economy, the labour of both males and females is included. However, in the domestic front, that is housework, as is often said, there is heavy dependence on women’s labour.

As noted above, Naga society being patriarchal the inheritance of family’s properties goes along the male line. Several theories might explain the observed differences in the division of family property between sons in virilocal marriages and daughters in uxorilocal marriages. The division of family’s properties serves an economic relationship binding a set of male kin and divides the family property more or less equally among them. Moreover, the division of family property among the males in fact, has socio-cultural obligations and duties for them to support their old aged parents. The parents choose either to live alone or to live with one of their sons or to live with all their sons in rotation.

*Clan Organisation*

In Naga society, clan system is one important social organisation. The clan organisation is the main pillar in Naga village system. The system existed in its own right and a child who was born into a family was born into a clan system. Without being a member of a clan no one could stand in the society and there was none who did not belong to a clan in the village. Horam (1977) mentioned that any clan could be traced back to a single
nuclear family system that consists of husband and wife and their immature unmarried offspring. When the male members get married, the parents and other remaining children shift out from the house to another newly constructed house. And the married son occupies the old parents' house. Ronald and Kramer (2002:475) wrote that, "(m)any demographic changes occur after a union is formed and the family life cycle unfolds. Children are born. Early born children become productive workers while their mothers are still in their child bearing years. Later-parity children are born into the family as older sons leave their natal house and establish households of their own. Finally, parents age and become grandparents while they still have dependent children living at home."

In Tangkhul Naga society we observed four types of households:

(i) **Single Member Household**: In such household only one adult member is found which can be either male or female. Usually, the person maybe a bachelor or a spinster or in some cases a divorced man or woman or sometimes the only surviving member in the household. This is the smallest unit of the household.

(ii) **Single Parent Household**: This is a kind of household in which only one parent lives along with the children. This is a case where either the wife or husband have died or have separated.

(iii) **Nuclear Household**: This is the universal type of household with husband and wife and their legitimate children.

(iv) **Extended Household**: In this type of household, either the husband or wife's relative(s) live along with the family. Or sometimes the husband or wife's parents live with them for a certain period of time.

The nuclear family with father and mother together with their unmarried sons and daughters is common. Extended households are not encouraged. The sons set up
family, which has multiplied into numerous families by remaining connected to each other. Like any other Naga group the Tangkhul Naga society is stratified into clan (Shang) and clan organisation (Shangnao) which is a conglomeration of numerous families. According to Hutton (1921) the Angami Naga clan is so important that it almost forms a village in itself. Many clans form a village. Clans may be spread over other several Tangkhul Naga villages. In fact, the clan system is the skeleton of the structural body frame work which shapes body politic, guides the socio-economic system and moulds the social and cultural values.

The name shang is being suffixed in personal names. Monogamy is prevalent while cases of polygamy are rare. Polygyny does exist but it is generally looked down upon by the society. The rule of shang, exogamy is strictly adhered to. Marriage with one’s mother brother’s daughter is accepted (first cousin marriage). Marriage with the mother’s brother’s daughter is obligatory sometimes in order to continue ties of bride-taking and the bride-given is called pam in Tangkhul Nagas. But marriage with the father’s sister’s daughter is not allowed and is called as shokhala (a social taboo).

Clans are hierarchical organisations; among them family is the smallest unit of the clan, and the next is lineage which is called Meiphung. And each meiphung makes bigger unit forming the clan organisation. It is a kind of organisation based on blood and legal obligation. The clan members have obligatory duties towards each other in times of agriculture, marriage, and death. They also have moral responsibility. When any member of the clan gets into trouble, becomes an anti-social element, they are to be the mediators or protectors from the fury of other clans. Inter-clan marriage is forbidden and is strictly maintained. If inter-clan marriage happens, the couple has to face dire consequences. Sometimes they are banished from the village.
When any clan related problems occur, the elders of the clan call a meeting. In such meetings all male members of the households should attend. The rivalry or antagonism of clan with clan within the village is one prevailing social phenomenon. Hutton (1921) mentioned that in war, even though the villagers were united, the jealousy and suspicion of one clan for another would inevitably be a source of weakness; in peace the village would from time to time break out into riot, while it is incessantly troubled by internal bickering. Historical rivalry among the clans is unavoidable and continuation of such feeling sometimes adds more problems to the social system and village administration.

**Traditional Administration Institution**

For the Nagas, the village plays an important role in the social system. Among the Konyak Nagas the powerful village Chief called *Ang* units the village as the embodiment of its fertility and cohesion (Furer-Haimendorf, 1969). Among the Lotha Nagas and Rengma Nagas, the unity of the village is expressed with the hereditary clan village chief. Ao Nagas have village council organisation. In Tangkhul Naga society, villages are ruled by the village chief or Headman called *Awunga*. In almost all the village the *Awunga* is hereditary. Horam (1977) states, *Awunga* does not acquire his position by chance but usually deserves it. He is usually the unanimous choice of the head of all the clans residing in the village. The village chief does not exercise unlimited power because there is also the Village Council (*Hangva*). The village council as well as the headman constitutes Village Authority (VA) that wields control over the village administration. The functions of the village authority are broadly executive, administrative and judiciary. But the priority and major concern of the village authority is the village land use and forest as well as village development. The figure 2 presents the structure of village traditional administrative institution.
Village Chief: The village chief (Awunga) is hereditary passing down to the eldest son. The village chief is prominent at all social and religious gatherings of the village (In the olden days, the village chief played a triple role: secular, religious and ceremonial). After the advent of Christianity and subsequent prosylitisation the role of religious head is taken over by the local Christian priest. In religious function, the village chief remains just a nominal representation. But as the head of the village administration, his duty is to summon and preside over either the village public meeting or council. In any function either executive or judiciary, the village council is bounded by the various unwritten customary laws which have to be followed accordingly.

By tradition, the village chief is the nominal owner of village land and forests. But in practice, the land and forest belongs to the whole village community. Each bonafide household of the village has the right to possess properties like homestead, kitchen garden, paddy fields, gardens, fish-pond, and woodland.

Village Council: The village council is also known as Hangva. As per custom, all the clans in a village have one or two representatives. Every village has about 8 to 12 clans. The councillors are either elected or appointed by the respective clan members. To be councillor one has to attain certain qualifications. Any married person (marriage
being a sign of maturity) is eligible to hold the office of the councillor. He continues in
office as long as he commands the confidence of his clan. He may hold office for a long
time, but the office is not hereditary.

_Village Court_: The house of the village council is called _Hangnga-shim_ or
village court. Here both men and women are permitted to speak and plead for a relative
who is a party to a case. Their clan representatives guide them. After hearing from both
parties, as well as from the members of the council, the chief or headman pronounces the
judgement. His order is final and binding.

In many Tangkhul Naga villages, the traditional administrative system is slowly
changing or being modified in course of time. For instance, in Kamjong, the village has
created a new parallel system to the traditionally existing Headman. And it is designated
as Chairman⁵ (also called Chairman of Village Development Board or simply
“Chairmanship” system). In this form of parallel village administration, the Headman
takes care of land and forest issues and also safeguards the village customary laws, while
the village Chairman looks after the village developmental issues and takes care of all
governmental schemes and other beneficiaries. In the case of Chingjaroi, Halang and
Ukhrul village, the traditional system of administration still prevails.

_Curch Organisation⁶_

The church is one powerful organisation in the Naga village as well as society.
Comparatively, the people are more obliged towards adhering to the norms and values
that a believer is expected to follow than conforming to the certain codes and structure
as laid down by the village authority. Much of the old powers, which resided in the
hands of the King and subjects have now been shared by the church. The village council
and church organisation functions in their respective provisional jurisdiction. However,
there is an inevitable power clash between the two authorities, for instance, in festivals, ceremonials and village politics. Generally, church administration includes Pastor, Assistant pastor, Accountant, Clerk and Deacon Board. The following figure 3 shows the administrative structure of the church organisation.

![Church Organisation](Figure 3)

**FIGURE 3 Church Organisation**

*Pastor:* The pastor is the head of the church administration. He/She is responsible for the growth of church and religious activities. He presides over the meeting of the Deacon Board and brings about a consensus in decisions regarding church growth and other reformation activities. Besides preaching and giving sermons to the believers every Sunday, he takes up counselling works among the church members, visiting and administering prayers to sick people along with his Deacons and Deaconesses. On the whole, he has to ensure that the over all moral conduct and deeds should conform to Christian ethics and philosophy.

The Pastor is a highly regarded person in the church hierarchy as well as in the village community. He is given due respect and honour in all village functions. He/She
enjoys an honorarium of some fixed amount of stipends paid monthly by the church. Besides the monthly salary, the Pastor is given rice (paddy) on annual basis.

Pastor post is neither permanent nor hereditary like village chief. He/She can be any one from the village itself or from other villages. The selection of Pastor is a long process. First, the church constitutes a body called “Selection Committee Board” among the villagers. The next step is for the constituted board to search for a Pastor keeping in mind that the person should have certain qualifications. Preferably, he/she should possess basic theological training, know the taste and pulse of the church members and of course have moral and administrative efficiency.

*Assistant Pastor:* The assistant pastor plays a crucial role in the church. His/Her primary work is to assist the Pastor. He/She should be capable of delivering the goods of a Pastor. In times of the Pastor’s absence due to touring or illness, the Assistant Pastor assumes the Pastor’s work as in-charge.

*Accountant/Treasurer:* The accountant maintains all the Church accounts. Every income and expenditure is taken care by the accountant. All the financial transactions must be authorized in his or her name. The accountant must be honest and transparent in all his dealings. The treasurer maintains the key of the church treasury.

*Deacon Board:* Deacon Board is the governing body of the church administration. The representation in the board is based on clans. Each clan group sends one representative member to the board of deacon.

*Women’s Organisations*

Every Tangkhul Naga village has women’s organisation called *Shanao Long*. All the Tangkhul females above 15 years old (including married women) of the village must be a member of the organisation. The executive body is elected by the women-folk
themselves for three years tenure. The women’s organisation or Shanao Long serves as one of the main pillars of the village community/society.

Shanao Long is a powerful force within a village. The main role and function of the organisation is to promote social and cultural values in the society. The organisation is largely responsible for regulating certain modes and codes of decorum in the village social set up. Strict enforcement and vigilance is made to curb and control social evils such as alcoholism, gambling, drug abuse, etc. Selling of alcohol is prohibited and banned.

In the village, village authority, women’s organisation, youth and church play a crucial role for socio-economic development. For instance, social ills like stealing, fighting, and selling illegal substances are stringently dealt with by the above organisations. The survey respondents feel that the government is not doing enough in development like village approach roads, electricity, water supply and health care system. Indeed, the inter-village approach roads were in bad shape and most of them are not motorable. But one important thing that is lacking in the village is health facilities. Absence of health care centre in many villages is causing a lot of problems for the people and they are compelled to travel long distances for medical treatment.

4.3 Material Cultures: House Types and Materials, Dietary system, Dresses and Festivals

House Types and Materials

Geography, since its inception has had primary concern with the material aspects of the earth’s surface (Kniffen, 1974). The traditional dwelling places are one of the important manifestations of social and cultural traits of any society. As Kniffen (1974) mentioned that the house reflects cultural heritage, current fashion, functional needs, and the
positive and negative aspects of non-cultural environment. Essentially it sees the house as a key to interpret the landscape, reflecting both diversity of cultures contributing to the formation of the landscape and the socio-economic changes affecting the people occupying it.

A number of construction techniques are used for building houses. The construction and building materials, space and usage are the main elements involved in the identification of their attitude in material needs. Naga houses are constructed according to the surrounding environment and the availability of building materials. The Naga traditional houses are built with carved wooden planks, bamboo, and thatch for roof. Building a new house needs certain rituals and also the availability of required materials, “Fashion, tradition, religious proscription, or prestige values” (Rapoport, 1968).

**Traditional House:** A typical Tangkhul Naga house is built in one storey on the ground, the bare earth roughly levelled forming the flooring, varies in length 10 metres and breadth of about 6 metres. One storey house is common to all the Naga groups. The houses are arranged along the road or footpaths with home garden at backyard. The houses are usually thatch roofed, plank walled and mud floored. The building material consists of bamboo, wild vine, grass (elephant grass), wood pillars, roof holder post, and wooden planks.

The type of construction and fashion of the Tangkhul Naga houses is the same. However, in the interior structure there are slight differences. Generally, every house is divided into three sections or compartments with two doors; one front and other at the backside. The first front room (usually small in size) is used for keeping domestic animals like pig and chicken. Also, it is used to store granary (*machum*) and keep the
traditional rice-pounding log (*shimkhur*). This room is also used for storage of split fire wood.

The second room is separated from the first room by a plank wall. It generally serves as kitchen (*chakshang*) with the hearth (*meithalung*) in the middle. The hearth is composed of three stones embedded in the earth so as to form a stand for cooking. Above the hearth, there is a small rectangular shape mat made of split bamboo one hung over about 1.20 metres above the fireplace. This mat serves to preserve meat, seeds, chilly, also used to dry paddy in the raining season. The smoke coming out from the hearth provides natural preservation to the food articles. At the extreme corner of this room, there is a small platform to hold water vessels and other food items. Small cabinet is attached to the wall to keep kitchen utensils. The wood and bamboo made tools are hung on the wall pillars. This room has to be swept and mopped everyday otherwise the mud floor gets dusty. The other room is used as the family bedroom. One small room is often extended to keep paddy, seed, pulses and vegetables.

The housing materials include poles (*pakra*), roof supporters (*khanchi*), wooden plank (*chikhai*), bamboo (*kahā*), elephant grasses (*ngashi*) and rope (*kharar*). When the construction starts, friends and relatives come and help in the work. They are given food; no payment is made.

**Prestige House:** The traditional Tangkhul Naga houses are often well decorated. In fact such decoration manifests certain socio-cultural, economic and ritual status of the household. The front gable, which is often furnished in the case of men of wealth with heavy beams carved with heads of *Mithun* or men, and other symbols of riches or valour, rises from 15 to 30 feet in height. The same kind of practice is found in Angami Nagas. In Angami Nagas, the front gable is edged by two large boards running up from the eaves to the point of the gable.
The Naga prestigious houses are decorated with carved horns and the front wall is made of great board of wood. Those walls are elaborately carved with human figures, heads, female’s breasts and mithun horns indicating that the house owner has given many “Feasts of Merit”. The same pattern is found in Angami Nagas and Mao Nagas (Hutton, 1921). Such elaborate house displays the socio-economic wealth of the household. Only those households who have given feast to the whole village can erect and displays such monumental wooden carved boards. In some villages, only the clan of the village Headman can build such houses.

*Morung*: Morung or Bachelor house or dormitory system was prominent in Naga villages in the olden days. In Tangkhul Nagas is called Long-shim. The morung is usually situated in the middle of the village. This is a focal centre of various village activities including political, economic and cultural. However, the morung culture has been discarded from the time of prosylitisation to Christian faith.

*Introduced House*: Today, there is remarkable change in house morphological structure, design as well as materials. There is eventual departure from the conventional Naga house patterns of thatch roof to iron (Galvanize Iron Sheet) roof and concrete cement. The major changes in Naga houses have resulted in greater freedom in the layout and the arrangement of rooms. Now kitchen is separated from the main building. However, the building materials remain the same. One interesting observation in Naga house is that the main door of the house faces towards the east.

The granary store room is also built at a distance from the main house. Instead of using the traditional conical-shape bamboo, the Tangkhul Nagas built granary store-room with wooden planks.
We observed that in all the sample villages, the traditional house typology and building materials has been changed significantly. The old rectangular three room system with thatch roof is confined to few households. Otherwise, most of the households have adopted different house types. Now, many of the houses have separate kitchen from the main building. The house types observed in the study villages are generally L-Shaped, U-Shaped and one storey building. However, these types of houses are observed among the rich and well to do households only.

An examination of the household goods, tools and implements and its usages indicates how the Nagas closely interact with the surrounding ecology. The household articles are made of bamboo, wood and mud and are also used both for storage and cooking purposes. Most of the storage items are made of bamboo and wood. Iron and aluminum based household items are utensils, knife, and agricultural implements. Hutton (1921) mentioned that the utensils found in the Naga house usually include an assortment, more or less varied, of tin and enamel mugs, bowls and plates, iron or aluminium cooking-pots, and rice beer bottles. The principal indigenous household utensils are comprised of the following items: earthen pot (for cooking), basket (for straining and mixing liquor), vats and jars (for fermenting liquor), gourds (for storing and carrying liquor), cups and drinking, vessels of bamboo, wooden spoons, wooden platters, wooden stools and bed.

**Dietary System**

The nature of ecological settings influences the Nagas' food habits. The staple food of the Nagas may fairly be said to be rice, but meat plays a much more important part in the Naga menu. This is supplemented by millet, maize, wild plants and animals both domesticated (exception to cat, which is treated with respect)\(^9\) and wild including birds. The common crops and vegetables found in the Naga Hills are yam, potato, ginger,
sesame, soyabean, beans, chilly, pumpkin, cucumber and local variety of pulses. The Nagas in general are non-vegetarian and consume meat in large quantities. Consumption of wheat and other commercial pulses is unusual, as these kinds are not grown in the Naga Hills. The local varieties of pulses are available abundantly. Chilies and ginger form indispensable ingredients in every meal. Another common traditional food is pickled bamboo shoot and soyabean, which is very common in the Naga society. In olden days certain restrictions were imposed in the food system based on marital status and sex. There is an old saying that chicken head is eaten by the father.

The household members eat together around liphan. We have mentioned that Liphan is a traditional dinner table for the Tangkhul Nagas. The shape of the liphan is round made of cane and bamboo and the height is about one foot. Traditionally, Naga takes food three times in a day. First meal is eaten in the early morning around 7-8 am; and the mid-day meal is taken around 12-1 pm and in the evening. However, adults seldom eat mid-day meals except at the time of working in the field. Otherwise, they leave it for the children. Each time, one adult takes about quarter to half kilogram of rice. Vegetables are taken according to availability. The household having six members normally cooks two and half to three kilograms of rice.

The conventional method of food preparation is indicated below. The medium of cooking is water, most of the Naga food is plain steam (oil and ghee are rarely used). Unhusked paddy (ma) is first dried in the sun; then it is pounded in the pounding log (shimkhur). The husks are then removed by fanning the winnowing round mat called yamkok. The rice (sam) is stored in a bamboo basket (sopkai). Firstly, the water is boiled in the cooking pot and then the required quantity of rice is put. It is cooked till the rice is properly boiled. The pot is then removed from the hearth and placed over hot ash, so that the gruel may be dried in slow heat. Rice is now ready for eating, and is called zat.
Meat (sa) is boiled in plain water with salt and red-chilies. Sometimes leafy vegetables are added. Naga rarely used spices in their food. Meat is also smoke dried (sa-kao) for future use. Another form of preserving pork throughout the year is (dry fermented) sa-yung. Like meat, fish (Khai) is also boiled in water with salt and chilies. Smoke dried fish (khai-kao) is very common in every household. Bamboo shoot (kaha-shon) is found in plenty in the forest. The curry of bamboo shoots forms a very delicious item of the Naga cuisine.

Drinking rice beer (Khor) was very common before the advent of Christianity in the Naga society. Since then, the Church is strongly against consumption of rice beer. Hence, many Naga Christians “abstain” from it. Inspite of this, the practice of drinking rice beer is still continuing in many Naga villages.

The introduction of Christianity and education in the Naga Hills brought about many changes in the Naga traditional way of living. Even the food habits too, changed drastically especially for the Nagas living in urban areas. For instance, drinking tea or milk is not known in the history of Naga dietary culture. Today, tea is the most popular drink among the Nagas. A cup of tea in the morning has become a regular feature in the Naga household. In spite of the changes taking place in food habit, the Naga traditional dietary system still exists in many villages. One important aspect of Naga fooding system is the whole village community eating together at the time of feasts and other religious festivals. The fact is that the practice of such community eating together manifests the communitarian consciousness and has immense socio-cultural implications.

**Dresses**

Naga society is very rich in its traditional cultural attire. The main dress is the ethnic shawl. These traditional shawls differ from one Naga community to another one. In fact,
the shawls of each Naga group possess their own distinctive peculiar colour and designs. With this shawl one can easily identify which community she or he belongs. In addition to the shawl, wearing ornaments like shells, beads, wild boar teeth, bronze bangle, etc. is very popular in the Naga society. In some Naga groups painting tattoos especially among the women is very common.\(^\text{11}\)

The dress of Tangkhul Naga men consists of a simple cloth worn round the waist and tied in a knot in front leaving the ends hanging down. These ends are fringed with straw pendants. The waist cloths are made of stout cotton woven in red and blue stripes two inches wide and horizontal. Over the body they wear in cold weather a long cloth in red and blue stripes. The women wear small caps of blue cloth when working in the fields. Their petticoats reach from the waist to the knee and are made of cotton cloth manufactured in the weaving villages with red and white or black and white stripes two inches in width. Occasionally those who have some pretence to wealth or position wear petticoats of red with small stripes of white and black.

Though there are common costumes for both males and females, there are also some costumes exclusively for male and females. For instance, *Haora* is exclusively worn by men-folk whereas, *chongkhom* is worn by the women-folk.

Growing cotton (*vat*) was very common in the Naga Hills at one point of time. In fact, cotton was the only source for providing them clothes. But the trend of growing cotton has drastically declined in the last decades. The reason is because of easy availability of commercial woollen thread. Most of the Naga shawls are made of woollen thread replacing the traditional cotton made shawl. This shawl is used all the year round because of the prevailing climatic conditions in the region.
Wearing ornaments is less visible except in the few isolated villages. In olden time wearing ornaments was very common. The ornaments include necklace, earring and wrist band. In case of males, piercing ear is considered as one important social phenomenon. The present generation wears only imported western attire and traditional Indian clothes. However, this does not imply that the Nagas are losing their traditionalism. In fact, the traditional dresses are well regarded and respected.

**Festivals**

There are a number of social and cultural festivals in the Tangkhul Naga society. The main festivals are Seed sowing festival or *Luira-Phanit* and is considered important for agriculture (The festival begins in the later part of February and continues for about three to four days), *Yarra* (youth festivals), *Mangkhap Phanit* (completion of cultivation), *Dharshat* (Harvest offertory), *Chumphut* (opening of granaries) and *Thisham Phanit* (Festivals for the Death) are other festivals. In olden days, these festivals were permeated with rituals and cosmology. The festivals are all agricultural and social oriented and indeed it is ultimately connected to their way of life. They celebrate the festivals with a lot of gusto. Dancing and drinking rice beer and eating meat form an important feature of the celebration. Most of the Naga festivals are agriculture related. Horam (1977:41) points out, "(t)he Tangkhul Nagas calendar is thus generously dotted by big and small festivals, mostly with a strong agricultural flavour and origin. For instance, *Luira* is the main agricultural festival of the year. Right after this festival seed sowing activity begins. The festival is determined by the full moon fall in February.

Today, in Manipur state, all the Naga groups celebrate the seed sowing festivals together as *Luira-ngai-ni*. It is celebrated in a big way in Manipur. The Manipur state has declared it as state holiday on 15 February. Here all the Naga communities come
together and celebrate the festival in a colourful manner. Though, many festivals have been abandoned after the Nagas embraced Christianity, only few festivals have been maintained especially those festivals related to agriculture like seed sowing festival. Today the greater emphasis is given to Christianity-related festivals like Christmas, Easter Sunday, and Pass Over.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

A Naga village is usually well defined and demarcated by natural boundaries like hillocks, streams, rivers, etc. No doubt, the concept of village in Naga hills differs from that in other states where a village is to be cadastrally surveyed for proper revenue. However, in case of Naga hills villages have not been cadastrally surveyed but every village has a traditionally recognised boundary. Traditionally, changes in village are very slow. People are slow in changing their customary, social and religious beliefs and viewpoints and slow to take on new technologies in their productive economies. Individual houses last only some decades, but house types and village patterns persist for centuries. Descendants do as their ancestors did. People cultivate the fields in the same way, go to the same market and follow the same social patterns as their father (George, 1955).

Inevitable changes are taking place in the Tangkhul Naga village system. The villages are no longer isolated from outside influences. The changes in the villages are seen in different forms and perspectives. The trends of change would appear to signal deterioration of the community structure as well as social fabric. Broadly, the transformation in Tangkhul Naga villages could be observed in two perspectives, that is, change in village morphology on the one hand and change in social system and institution on the other hand. However, in economic front there is no significant change. 

106
Morphological changes take place due to factors like introduction of developmental activities like construction of village approach-road, electrification and water pipelines. However, the changes are more conspicuous on social front. The patterns of social life in many Tangkhul Naga villages are changing, owing to new “conditions”. Today, it is noticeable in many villages that the family members are working either in government jobs or in any other private firms in nearby towns. The main reason for the change is due to the introduction of formal education in the village.

Village is seen as a family centered, parent-controlled, continuity-seeking institution and ideology (Charles, 1974). To some degree, one can suggest that the traditional social cohesion of the traditional village is coming apart at the seams. In Tangkhul Naga case, there is evidence of excessive dependence on kinship/clan-ship ties. As Fukuyama (1999:37) rightly point out, “(m)any cultures from China to South America, promote what is called ‘familism’, that is, the elevation of family and kinship ties above other sorts of social obligations”. Such ‘obligatory elevation’ of clan-ship in the Naga society is observed at the time of inter-clan disputes. They are strongly bonded to their clan groups. Interestingly, even the wife though legally becoming a member of her husband’s clan, has an emotional bond with her original clan, that is, her parents’ clan. In fact, this clan-based issue often threatens the cohesive social system of the village community. As said, the excessive dependence on clan-ship ties can produce negative consequences in the social system.

Today, a change in village traditional administration system is found in many Tangkhul Naga villages, for example, Kamjong village (The sample village). This dual administrative system is established with due initiation by the government. As said, the essence of this system is to implement the developmental scheme by the village itself instead of resting the whole responsibility to the village chief alone. However, this new
system is not working adequately. Instead it has brought partisan conflict in various village issues. At the same time, there emerges clanism among the village community. It is observed in some villages who have adopted this new system reverting back and restoring the traditional administration system. The reason is that in Chairmanship system it involves too many "partisan interests" and clanism. However, in Kamjong village, the village chief and chairman function according to the respective constitutional provisions.

However, one conspicuous phenomenon that is taking place is commercial activities like logging and shop keeping. In fact, such activities were not taken up by the local people but by certain business minded people from outside who came and settled in the hills and introduced such commercial activities.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the subsistence lifestyle that they lead, the majority of the villagers consider themselves "happy". Even those households who have migrated to nearby towns like Ukhrul and Imphal are constantly in touch with the village and never cease their membership. And they do have a moral responsibility in any kind of problem faced by the village. The people who are educated and hold a position in a government jobs have great respect from the fellow villagers at the same time they always seek their advice regarding the village problems. When asked what they thought they would most prefer to change in the village, responses were quite variable. For men folk, improvement in life in the village would rise from an improvement in the standard of living, and better transport. However, females are totally against the commercialisation of forest and also emphasised on adequate water supply in the village, electricity and health.
Notes

1 (a) Lineated Form: those that are formed due to the alignment of buildings along one or more lines. (b) Nucleated Form: Those that have grown due to concentration around one or more points.

2 During the colonial period the village chief is called Goanbura.

3 (i) The Manipur (Hill Areas) Village Authority Act, 1956, provided the local level government in the form of village authority.
(ii) Manipur Hill Areas (House Tax) Act, 1966 provides to levy tax in villages having more than 29 households. As per the Manipur Hill Areas (House Tax) (second Amendment) Bill, 2003 the taxable amount per household is fifteen Rupees.

4 By tradition, woman cannot become a member of village council.

5 The Chairman is directly elected by the villagers through consensus or collective decision in a village public meeting. He or She is assisted by the Village Secretary and Village Council. However, in some villages, the Chairman has Board Members represented by each and every clan. As said, this system is parallel to the traditional Awunga system. The villages having this dual system clearly demarcate the powers and jurisdiction. The traditional Awunga and Councillors take care of land and forest issues, inter-village and intra-village land disputes, law and order, cultural festivals, and safe guard village customary laws. On other hand, the Chairman takes care of village developmental schemes, grants-in-aid from the Government, and village school, veterinary, etc. This system is initiated by the Government.

However, Chairmanship system is losing its credentials and accountability. Many Tangkhul Villages who adopted this new system were reverting back to the old traditional system. It is learned that the reason for reverting back to old system is mainly due to the clan rivalry politics. The problem is every clan want to send their candidature for the Chairman. In such a situation villagers seldom come into consensus. The clan rivalry create social tension in the village therefore, the villagers often revert back to old system giving full endorsement to the village Awunga. (The Chairmanship system introduced in the Naga villages is more or less synonymous to the Panchayat system. At the same time such introduction aims to discard the traditional administration system. Author's remark)

6 The first converts to Christian among the Tangkhul Nagas were baptised in 1887 by Rev. William Pettigrew in Ukhrul village. The Christian denomination among the Tangkhul Nagas includes Baptist, Catholic, Seventh Days Adventist (SDA), Pentecostal and Church of Christ. The majority of the Tangkhul Nagas follow Baptist (or Protestant). About 90 per cent of the Tangkhul Nagas are Christian. The non-Christian are mostly old men and women who still follow the Naga traditional animism.

7 Machum, is the traditional granary store-room made of bamboo. It is a conical shape that accommodates about 2500 Kgs. to 3000 Kgs. of paddy (rice). The Machum is placed one feet height above the ground to protect from mice and other insects. The bamboos are split and woven in regular fashion.
It is called *Shimkhur* in Tangkhul language. It is a massive table like a log, five to ten feet long, with a broad wooden keel and round holes of two or three at interval, in which the paddy is pounded.

In the villages only few households kept cats. Cats are subjected to certain superstition and it is usually regarded as “genna” to sell cats (today cats also sold like other domestic animals; however, keeping cats remains to few households). In olden days, cats were given as gifts or just like that without any compensation.

The idea that the properties of animals eaten are liable to pass to the eater is the cause of certain kinds of flesh being taboo to young people, for instance, the flesh of a black forktail with a white head is eaten by the old men, but never touched by the young men for fear that they will become prematurely bald if they eat it.

Tattooing is one common feature for Tangkhul Naga women in some villages especially the villages that lies in *Raphei* region (north). But tattoo is totally absent on other regions (see regional division in Chapter 2).