CHAPTER 7

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POTTERY
IN OINAM AND NUNGBI (LONGPI) POTTERS

The comparative studies give a better understanding of cultural similarities and differences. It brings a clearer picture in knowing their lifestyle and developments. In dealing with a comparative study of pottery in Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi). We can clearly find out the main differences among these two potter villages. The similarities are they lead a simple life based on agriculture and get all basic needs from their villages and the pots were highly in demand. The pots were used in almost all the rites and rituals. In the past both Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) villages are headhunters and learnt all the art of their lives in the youth dormitories. No caste system is available, every person is equally treated. Both these villages use tools for making pots, which are handmade and require no metal tools. From birth till death pots are used. The placenta of a baby after delivery is put inside a new pot. At marriage no pots are given, but the newly wedded couple is given food cooked in a new pot showing that they are starting a new family. Pots are used for performing rites at all
sicknesses. At death pots are buried along with the corpse. Both the villagers do not fire pot during the rain, as it will not burnt due to wet place and wet branches. Both the villages chief are not potter. Inspite of these similarities there are many differences as every community has its own unique culture. This is one of their cultural identities. The differences are studied as under:

Tools

The tools use in making pot are very similar. Both use no machine. It is purely hand made. Both the potter villages use net wrapped paddle, but the cord for the net in case of the Oinam is thicker than Nungbi (Longpi). Nungbi (Longpi) use a square board with a circular depression in the middle for placing the pot; this board is placed again on a stool. Oinam use no circular board, instead the potter's knee is used to place the pot while shaping with the hand.

Raw materials

The ingredients mixed in making Oinam pots are three types namely: Dongea (black clay) contains more sticky properties, Ngeasou (brown clay) having grits to make the pot strong and not to break during firing, and
Ngeahai (red clay) to smoothen the surface. Nungbi (Longpi), the ingredients are clay and rock. Clay is to stick and rock is to make the pot strong and smooth. The clay of Oinam is collected throughout the year, whereas Nungbi (Longpi) clay is collected only once in a year. Much labour is spent for clay collection, a group of men started digging out the upper covering until the level of suitable clay is reached and they collected the clay for the whole year before the rainy season.

**Technique of preparation and pot making**

The technique of digging, pulverization, mixing, levigations are similar. In order to make the clay qualitatively better for pot making, Oinam mixed the different clays namely: Ngeasou, Dongea, Ngeahai in the ratio of 2:1:1. But in the case of Nungbi (Longpi) the clay is mixed with powdered rock in the ratio of 2:3. After mixing thoroughly in accurate measure it is wetted with water, after which the well-kneaded paste is divided to prepare into balls according to the size of the required pot. Oinam potter sits on the platform by drawing up her lower garment above the knees. On the base surface of the platform at the available space in front of her. The potter then make the roughout of the pot by moulding a thick cubical clay slab into the solid rod (Vu) and beating technique, the
two thigh and both hands are used in shaping the pot. Whereas, the slab rolling technique is adopted by Nungbi (Longpi) potters for the preparation of the pottery roughout, placed it on a wooden square board, which in turn is place on a stool. The potter then moves himself around forward and backward for shaping and forming the pot, only the hands are used, no thigh unlike Oinam.

Variety

Oinam pots are dominated by Jar variety, whereas Nungbi (Longpi) pot are mostly wide open mouth vessel type. The pot varieties are more among the Nungbi (Longpi) i.e. Jar, Bowl, wide open mouth, jug and smoking pipe. Oinam varieties are Jar, bowl, wide open mouth and are ring-footed pot.

Texture/Morphology of the pot

Oinam pot can be easily differentiated from that of Nungbi (Longpi), the former is corded and gray in colour and while the latter is polished and black. Oinam pots are flaring rim, bevelled labial flanged lip where as Nungbi (Longpi) pot has rounded lip, short neck, with smooth surface.
Decoration

The incised decorations are found among Nungbi (Longpi) either of crossed, parallel or herring bone pattern at the shoulder, rim or lug. In the case of Oinam a wavy incised design is found at the footed of the pot. An applique design is the dominant character of Oinam pot either of round, oval or ring appliques with finger nail impression at shoulder. Nungbi (Longpi) applique design of round with incised cross mark is found only in one pot locally known as Kasorham. Circular punctuation mark is found among Nungbi (Longpi). It is absent in the case of Oinam pot.

Pre-firing heating of the pot

The finished shaping pot of both Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) are dried for a few hours in the sun or in the shade and kept on the fire hearth for 3-10 days according to the size of the pot. The dried and well hardened pots are ready for the next step, the pot is heated in the domestic fire place one by one by rotating the pot, after which a burning charcoal is kept inside the pot and placed horizontally on a raised platform near the domestic fire place. This is done in order to prevent the pot from breaking while firing. This pre-firing heating of the pot is absent in the case of Nungbi (Longpi).
Firing

Oinam use open space method of firing, generally in the courtyard of the potter, Nungbi (Longpi) pots firing are done in the forest. The preparation of Oinam fire bed shows different from that of Nungbi (Longpi), fire wood is placed in a square and over it a bed of straw and small branches of tree are made to pile over a layer. Nungbi (Longpi) firstly prepared the platform by heating the ground, and cleared up the platform and the pots are placed horizontally one after another in four or five line according to the number of the pot. The pot mouths are not placed on the wind direction. After this arrangement of pot, the tree branches are placed on the top of the pot, next layer kept the dried branches and leaves which kept on burning for 1:30 minutes. The pot is rotated with the help of long pole. Whereas, Oinam after the preparation of fire bed, the pots are placed horizontally in the middle, a bowl with a burning charcoal is kept, the pot are placed horizontally, the mouth facing each other. On the top straws and twigs are placed and lid at one of the edges. It takes 1-2 hours to get the pot completely baked.
Surface treatment

The surface treatment differs with the materials used. Oinam throw husks of paddy all around the pot while it is still hot whereas Nungbi (Longpi) rub the dried pine leaves over the pot. Then the pots are scrubbed with green leaves of Machini (Quercus species) on both the outer and inner surface of the pot, which gives luster to the pot and the pot is ready for use. But Oinam, after throwing the paddy husk are kept for few hours, when it is cool the pot are scrapped with the bark of poathing which is made into pieces. Then the cut pieces of the poathing Alder (Alnus Nepaleusus) is lightly pounded and put inside the pot by filling with water to the brim and kept for a month, when this is done the pot is ready for use.

Performation of rites and rituals in pot making

Oinam released a cock on that clay spot in getting a spot for clay collection, so that no harm will arise during the collection of clay and making of pot. Nungbi (Longpi) first performed Kapa khayang (bamboo divination) before the collection of clay to see whether god permits them to collect clay for pot making.
If pot breaks during firing, a chicken is released in the next firing on the spot of firing before the firing starts by Oinam. But Nungbi (Longpi) sprinkled the blood of a bird (chakren) on all the tools used by the potters in making pots, in the fire hearth where the pots are dried before firing.

**Function of pots in ceremonies and rites/Social uses**

Pots played a vital role in the mentioned two villages, no ceremonies, rites and rituals performance is complete without pot, from birth to death, in the life cycle of man pot are used in one way or the other. Among the potters of Oinam to observed for good or bad harvest it is done by cooking in Lakho or Sainan pot. If the gravy spills down in the fire while cooking it predict bad harvest. For sacrifices to god every curry is cooked in a Lakho or Sainan. In the feast of merits or house construction, it is the custom to cook in a new pot. All the old pots are thrown out of the house and replaced by a new pot. At marriage, when the bride is brought home, the first meal is cooked in a new pot to represent a new life, new family and new beginning. All the essential utensils for storing, cooking and so on are presented to the couple when they decide to settle separately. Pottery is also used in the life cycle rituals of Oinam. At childbirth, the first and foremost item needed is the Lakho pot. Because as soon as the mother gives
birth, the placenta of the newly born child is cut off and kept inside this pot and the paddy husk is spread over the placenta and covered with a piece of broken pot. Then the covered pot are tied with a robe and hung behind the house, or tree, or under the pillar to keep out from dogs and other animals. After a year when the placenta is completely decayed, the pot is thrown out. The mother at the childbirth, should not eat along with the family members. Her food is cooked in a new pot (Lakho or Sailani) separately in a different room or kitchen. If a potter dies, the tools used by her in making pots are buried along with her, so that she would used in the next world also.

In the case of Nungbi(Longpi) at the seed sowing festival (Luiraphanit) the blessed food for the family are cooked in Kasorham by the father. The blessed curry including the soup are not to be shared with other people, it only meant for the family member. On the sixth day of the festival the meat for sacrifice to god are cooked in a hampai without salt and chili, three pieces of cooked meat are taken out and sacrificed to god, the purpose of this is one for god, man and animal. When the paddy is about to ripe, every household takes a cock to their field and sacrificed to the god of fields. Chicken intestine is placed on top of a spread out banana leaf to
thank the field god for protection from insects, animals, birds, etc. The chicken is cooked in a hampai pot. Of the cooked meat, three pieces are sacrificed to the field god. One to field god one for man and the other one for animal. The remaining is to be eaten by all the family members. Unfinished meat has to be buried in the ground as it was not allowed to take it back home. At chumpa festival, this is after the harvest, all the male members from 6 years and above are not allowed to stay in the house. Early in the morning the paddy is taken from the granary, pounded and cooked in a new cooking pot (hampai). Chicken is killed below the granary and a sacrifice is done to the god of granary. The children along with mother eat the food. The pot in which food is cooked should be left empty. The menfolk are allowed to come back home after this. In the child birth, the first and foremost item needed is the Hamvum pot, because as soon as the mother gives birth the placenta of the newly born child is cut off and kept inside the pot. The pot is covered with a broken pot and buried behind the house garden. Nungbi (Longpi) like other tribal were head hunter, before going for war, the warrior had food cooked in Raiham pot which is cooked in chief’s house and they set out to war. After the war, the chief kill a pig, cook in hampai, the pot is unwashed as their belief was that if the pot is washed they will not bring heads from the next war. On marriage
engagement, the cock is cooked in a Hampai pot without salt and chili. A portion is taken out for the gods and priest. The family ate the remaining meat. If there is a sick person in a family, a priest is called to perform rituals. The priest kills a cock and it is cooked in a new pot Hampai. During cooking, the gravy should not spill, if it spills the sickness will not be cured, it is cooked behind the house. And offered to god with a plea to heal the sick family member by mentioning the name of the sick person.

A ritual performed by the priest of the village in case of dreadful disease spreads in the neighbouring villages of human beings or animals or if the houses of the neighbouring villages are burnt. Little away from the main entrance gate of the village, the priest kills the cock and its intestine and blood is placed on a banana leaf to prevent from coming to their village and to be carried by wind. It was to be taken away by the evil spirit and not allowed to cross the main village gate. The cock is cooked in a Hampai and sacrificed to the god. Nungbi (Longpi) also believes in the existence of life after death. So goods like hampai and hamvum are buried along with the dead body. These two pots is to cook rice and curry in the next life. After the burial in the grave yard, the deceased family lights a fire in the ham (meaning pot), for 5 days in case of woman and 6 days if it
is a man. In a funeral rites of a chief’s family which is performed after 1 year of the death of a person. A sticky rice is cooked in a new cooking pot (Fouham); the cooked rice is packed with the peeled buffalo skin. The village priest takes this and opens at the village gate to observe whether dead will occur that year. Until the performance of funeral rites the deceased family kept seeds for sowing, a new pot, wooden plate, bowls to be used in the Kazeiram. The stuff is kept until the tasam. After the tasam, it is taken away by the priest. In the festival and construction of home all the rituals performance is done with hampai pot.

Social taboo on pot making

Among the potters of Oinam, only women are potters. No women from other villages, or even women of Oinam when married into another village cannot make pot. And a woman from another village married to an Oinam man cannot be a potter. The menfolk are not at all potters from the past till the present day. This is the main cause leading to the decline of potters in Oinam. At present there are only 45 potters. In the case of Nungbi (Longpi) males are the potters, Members from different villages can also be potters as long as they know the art of making pot. With the receiving of the national Award by Mr. Machihan Sasa in the year 1988,
many are drawn toward their indigenous pot making. Today there are women potters. Men who marry Nungbi (Longpi) woman also make pot. At present there are two Meitei men married to Nungbi (Longpi) women who have learnt the art of making pots from the villagers. They made pot along with other profession i.e. carpentry work. Mrs. S.R. Rachel originally from Ukhrul married to S.R. Machihan of Nungbi (Longpi) learned the craft of pot making from her father-in-law and she is a potter. Today, there are both men and women potter. Thus unlike Oinam, there is no taboo and anyone can be potter. This is the reason why potters are more in number.

Both the village chief’s families are not potter. Oinam consider chief’s family to be the ruler who will lead them and not to serve them. They have a concept that making pot is a kind of service to the people by supplying pots. Nungbi (Longpi) chief and his family are also non potter, making pot includes the firing, the chief cannot do the firing as he is the person who holds the seed for plantation. If he does the firing, the seed to be planted will be spoilt, for this reason the chief and his family is not potter.

At death, among the potters of Oinam, the tools used by the potter are buried along with the deceased. A pot for cooking food (rice & curry)
is packed in a basket and buried along with the body. In Nungbi (Longpi) making of pot is stopped for five day in case of the death of a female and four days in the case of a male. The Tangkhul believed in the existence of life after death. Therefore pot like Hampai and humvum along with some of the articles used by the deceased during the lifetime are buried along with the corpse. Throughout the year the pots are made: rainy season, winter, summer, autumn, spring. But during the year, before the celebration of Lura phanit (Seed sowing festival) the firing of pots is not allowed. This is because of their belief that by firing all the seeds that are supposed to be planted will be spoilt. So, for this reason the firing is not allowed.

Advancement in pottery making

The advancement of pottery making are shown from the pottery, Oinam potters are all secondary potters their main occupation is farming, whereas as Nungbi (Longpi) has 20 potters whose main occupation is pot making.

Secondly, three potters of Nungbi (Longpi) received National award for pot making in their indigenous handicraft workshop, but there is no such award received till today from Oinam.
Thirdly, there is a great awakening in the field of pottery making after getting the award by Mr. Machihan Sasa the first awardee among the potters of Nungbi (Longpi), they started making different designs, styles following patterns they see in pictures like water filter, cookers, ashtrays, flower vases, decoration pots, etc. where as in Oinam new styles that is seen so far is flower vase, and the traditional cooking pots with lugs for easy in handling.

A comparative study reveals that Nungbi (Longpi) are more advance in pot-making. There are more potters. The pots are not only used in their village. But also used by the near by villages and in Ukhrul, Imphal, and Nagaland, they are widely spread. Where as for Oinam now it is no longer export out of their district. It only circulates within the Poumei tribe and is available only at Senapati District. In the case of Nungbi (Longpi) the pot are in demand by the people. There are special stores set up to sell only the pot of Nungbi (Longpi) at Ukhrul. Machihan Sasa has even got a museum for pot collection, where different varieties are found. With this, it can be said that there is advancement among Nungbi (Longpi) potter though they still use traditional technique of pot making.