CHAPTER - III

SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF TANGKHUL NAGA

The Tangkhul Naga lived in villages. These villages were mostly located in the hill tops which provided a commanding view over the surrounding areas. The choice for hill-tops was a strategic one and it was a necessity of that time as they had to keep constant vigil over the invading enemies. Moreover, the Nagas in general once settled in a place were almost glued to it and rarely moved out to a new place. They were very much inter-related to their neighbouring villages and maintained family ties with the blood relations. The first settlers of each village had carved out enough land which enabled them to become self-sufficient. As they were given to a simple life, all they required was the basic necessities of life only¹.

Naga society as found in each villages was a compact and well-knit society where rigid customs and discipline were observed. The Tangkhul Village consisted of irregularly dispersed collection of houses in which people of one clan which compose the village huddled together.

¹. Sanajaoba Naorem, Manipur past & present Vol. 3 1995 Mittal publication p. 314
The roads were mere foot paths to link up one village to another which gets over grown with jungle, except in the neighborhood of their villages where it is kept open by clearing the overgrowth.

According to 1991 census, there were as many as 240 villages in the present Ukhrul district the main homeland of the Tangkhuls. The size of the village varies from village to village. Some are small and some are big. Some of the big villages of Tangkhul are Hunphun, Hundung, Chingjaroi, Tuinem, Phadang, Tolloi, Somdal, etc, consisting of some 500 to 800 house holds each, the smallest villages are such as Shimphungrim, Mapao Khullen, Kongkan, Sorde etc, with about 10 to 40 households. Each village has a number of wards called 'Tang' which is also called 'Khel' in Assamese. The number of 'Tang' differ from village to village. The aspect of 'Tang' is, it is the basic for division of community work in many respects.

ANCIENT POLITICAL SYSTEM

Every Tangkhul is a socially politically organised unit, ruled by a headman called 'Awunga'. The administration of the village was carried on in general
by the village chief which is also called headman. In the olden days, Longshim or dormitory was the key institution in the 'Tangkhul village to sustain social solidarity and social order. The Headman / Awunga is the administrative head of the village. The institution of the headship appears to have grown out of the collective needs of group life. It is rather difficult to trace out the past history of this institution when and how it came into being. But it is believed that it came into existence at an early stage of their social life. "The selection of the Chief evolved series of religious rites and worship to their gods. The Chieftainship become hereditary once someone has become the Chief. After his death, his eldest son will succeed him, the rest of the members of the family becoming ordinary citizens.

In the Tangkhul village, the Chief or headman had complete control over the people along with his councillors called Hangva. The village Chief or headman had to look after every affair of the villagers. His main concern was to help his people (Praja) when they are in great need, difficulties and not only helping
them but also the village headman had a dual function as the religious and secular head of the village. As the religious head, the chief is the first man to sow seeds, the first to harvest. Although the actual religious worship and sacrifices etc. were performed by the village priest, yet his presence in any religious ceremony was predominant. He presided over all religious festivals. At the time of head hunting, his primary concern was for the defence of village. As the head of the administration, his duty was to summon and preside over the meetings of the village councillors. In the day to day administration of the village, the Chief was assisted by the councillors. In case of dispute, the Chief’s house served as the court except when the councillors with his approval wanted to hold the hearings in the open space. The village chief was, therefore, the religious head, the Chief judge the Chief administrator and also the Chief commander at the time of war and head hunting 2.

The Judiciary Administration Set Up Among The Tangkhul:

In the Tangkhul village, Chief or headman had complete control over the people along with his councillors called Hangva.

2. Ibid p 320
In the olden days, they did not have written law but they had their strict social norms and conventions which was binding on the villagers. The headman and the councillors never tried to compromise on the prevailing law and customs but adhered strictly to them.

Among the Tangkhuls, the unwritten constitution known as Riyan consisting of five kinds of laws was popular:

1. Shaiyan (Laws of collection of tributes)
   a) Raishai (War tribute)
   b) Chinaoshai (Brother tribute)
   c) Wungnaoshai (Chief tribute)
   d) Lamshai (Land tribute)
   e) Shimkan (Helping share tribute)
   f) Ringshan (Village tribute)

2. Khayan (The village administrative law)
   a) Hangvanshim (Village court)
   b) Hangva (Village councillors)
c) Zunphun (Village unity control)
d) Raikan (Volunteer force)
e) Mewun (Agricultural works and water supply)
f) Shimlui khayor (Law on properties)
g) Seihomphung (Law relating to landscapes)
h) Shimsak (Law relating to house construction and labour)
i) Ramshak (Laws of forest of merit)
j) Ngavei (Laws relating to the village gate and fencing)
k) Veishunsaa (Laws relating to gate duty)
l) Chanrei (Laws on social work regarding paths to their paddy fields)
m) Kha khangakham (Laws on village taboo)
n) Kha khangaleng (Laws of ex-communication and expulsion)
o) Shungashai (tribute)
p) Phanit (Laws of festivals)

3. Long Yan (The entire constitution)

a) Raiyan (Laws of war)
b) Raikanyan (War zone, peace zone)
c) Shimyan (inter village law)
d) Lahon (Divorce law)
4. Luiyan (Area wise division of power)

(a) Kasomkong luiyan for western area.
(b) Shongva luiyan for north and east and
(c) Vara luiyan for south. The above areas are again sub-divided as below :-

(i) Ngalei khamor - No man’s land area
(ii) Dhari - Natural boundaries.
(iii) Kachika - permission or passport.

5. Shiyan chikan (Criminal law)

(a) Law relating to theft case
(b) Shimkai - Law relating to house breaking
(c) Luiyan - Law relating to theft in paddy fields.
(d) Luikai - Law relating to irrigation channels.
(e) Phokapha - Law relating with adultery.
(f) Latuk - Law relating to Molestation.
(g) Lahem - Law relating to divorce.
(h) Lapang - Law relating to normal divorce
(i) Miyum - Law relating to murder.
(j) Yomkan - Law relating with maltreatment of the weaker ones.
(k) Tuihat—Law dealing with dishonesty.
(l) Preizai—Law for beating weaker sex.
(m) Shukeiyan—Law dealing with crimes on domestic animals.
(n) Seiyum—Law relating to secret killing of Buffalo / Cow.
(o) Shokhala—Law relating to incest.
(p) Pangkat—Law of criminals and punishment.
(q) Nao singkata—Law relating to abortion.
(r) Hamkasang—Law of withdrawal
(s) Khangami—Law of compromise
(t) Shimyor / Luiyor—Law of selling properties.
(u) Thingyum—Law relating to crimes of theft of trees.
(v) Sakui phit—Law relating to the heads of animals given to the Chief as tribute/duty.

HEAD HUNTING

War and head hunting was a customary practice of the past of the Tangkul. The Nagas in general were known to the outside world for their head-hunts. Though this practice is no more in the Tangkhul society the philosophy of life nucleated around this institution still works in the mind of the people. In

the days of yore, all the disputes were settled by the clan elders or by the village council. If the settlement or judgement was not acceptable to either party, matter was decided by show of force. It was their belief that the virtuous alone should attain victory and the vanquished was treated as an outcast from the social norm. Moreover, for them, making war or taking head was nothing but giving a retributive punishment to the wrong doer. 

Nagas in general had their own beliefs about the value of human heads. Not that they wanted more land, nor a colony, nor an empire but they did value human heads, that the Nagas fought many a war and chopped off human heads, for they have their own logic and their own laws quite different from those of other people.

If anyone (outsider) kill a co-villager, they take it as an insult to all the villagers and killing a clan or relative they take it as an insult. This kind of

4. Ruivah Khashim; Social Change Among the Nagas(Tangkhul) 1993 Cosmo publication, New Delhi p. 179.

mentality united them to take revenge on anyone who belonged to the enemy party. In other case whenever there is dispute between two villages due to encroachment on land and other acts like theft, immorality etc., formerly such cases were first decided by the respective village councils and decision was made known to the concerned villages. If the decision was not accepted, the two villages might declare war, followed by head-hunting expeditions. Challenge once declared, generally lasted for seven years, if it did not end earlier through special agreement.

They waged their war relentlessly and had even classified their war into the following categories:

1. General War/Declared war (Phar-rei)
2. Secret War/undeclared War (Ngathirai)
3. War of Challenges (Ngasungtuk).

In order to maintain justice and balance of power, the Nagas in the days of head-hunting, used force as a

means. In the midst of constant feud and head-hunting, the ones who could take revenge and protect life and interest of the people were regarded as the most able and highly respected, for the survival of the people in the midst of blood and feud depend only on them. The prestigious position and respect attained through the medium of bravery and sacrificing spirit, attracted the enterprising young men to follow the footprint of the brave warrior in the society.

**LONGSHIM (DORMITORY)**

The institution called 'Longshim,' which is known as Morung or dormitory, occupied a central position in the village organisation and administration, as an institutionalised mechanism of social control and socialised education.

Longshim or dormitory played an important role in shaping the life of young people in the Naga society. The word "Long" means group and 'Shim' means house. Therefore, longshim is a group-house where every boy and girl has to sleep from the time they get admitted to that institution.

8. Ruivah Khashim 1993 p. 200
Every village had one more Longshim or dormitory according to the size of the village. Some big villages had 4 to 5 dormitories for both boys and girls. Young boys and girls as soon as they reached a certain stage between 10 to 15 years were compulsarily sent to the Longshim. They slept there in groups and spent their time there when they were not engaged in private activities. They have to sleep there till they were married. Sometimes even after the marriage, some boys retained their membership of the dormitory.

There was separate dormitories for both boys and girls in most of the cases which followed strict discipline. In fact, the young people were educated socially, culturally, and in religion, from this place. Therefore, Shimray rightly calls it the Naga school. 9

But in some exceptional case, they had combined dormitory for both boys and girls. Generally, Longshim was a strict institution. The boys longshim was out of bounds for women folk. If women folk entered in their dormitories, they believed that ill luck might befall

them. But in the case of girls dormitory, boys freely entered & sat till late night in group wooing the girls.10

However, it is through this 'Longshim' or dormitory they learnt the meaning of co-operation and responsibility. In a way, it is an admirable institution. Bower states, "I have known and employed men trained by both methods, the Morung and the home and where choice existed, I would choose the Morung graduates every time".11

The senior boys and girls generally carried on the administration of Longshim with the help of village elders. The juniors were trained to obey the seniors by performing various duties such as drawing water, carrying firewood from jungle etc. Among the senior also, functions were divided. Some were made in charge of discipline, some of war and vigil, some of social function and some of distribution of work for day to day affairs. There was no class distinction, the rich and the poor were treated equally in the dormitory. The

10. Interview with Rungsaila Valui Tuinem, 9-12-1997.
difficult boys were dealt with severely. They were given public beating and heavy punishment. Not only discipline but various arts training from basket making and wood carving to war tactics were taught. Longshim or dormitory produced many fine sportsman and tough wrestlers. With the coming of Christianity, this system came to an end replaced with the modern education.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is one such institution which had been known even to the earliest man. Most of the marriage of the Tangkhul Naga is not arranged marriage but out of free choice. The main reasons of love marriage, due to the free mixing of boys and girls inscribed into the society through the Longshim, too much unrestricted freedom of boys and girls to mingle freely. In the olden days, before the coming of Christianity, this dormitory system maintained moral decency. Anyone who indulged in any immoral action was looked down and frowned upon by the society and that particular man and especially woman did not have any place in the Society. In those early days, woman who lost her chastity in her youth did not have any future in her life. There was no prospect for her to get married again.
Wooing and courting is the first step for the lovers. When the lovers agreed to get married, they approached the parents (Usually the boys will initiate the proposal). If the parents agree, then, they are engaged but in some cases the proposal is turned down. Because in those days too, there were somewhat class distinction, that is the rich and the poor. The rich parents won't allow their children to marry the poor girls or boys.

Usually, engagement is done at the residence of the girl. The father of the boy along with some elders of the clan usually go in the night to the residence of the girl where both the parties finalised the decision for marriage ceremony. Once it is finalised, the marriage will take place in traditional way of marriage (in full traditional dress with costly ornaments called 'Khongsang' it is necklace made of beads).

Once the girl is married, she goes to join the family of the husband. The Tangkhuls follow the patriarchal system. Father is the head of the family. Nevertheless, the mother is the centre and the heart of the family where she plays a very important role.
There was another type of marriage called consanguinal marriage which is mostly of the arranged type among the bothers and sisters children. This practice is still prevalent but not very common.

Today, though the traditional way of marriage is replaced by the Christian way of marriage, still it is deeply of the Naga community rooted in free mixing of boys and girls & too much of socialised environment has led boys and girls to live immoral life. When Christianity was first introduced, people maintained sanctity of marriage to a great extent. Eloping was very rare even in the olden days. But, today, moral value has gone down to a great extent due to excessive freedom exercised by the young people and the inability of the parents to train them up in the proper socially acceptable way. The result of this unrestrained life has led to frequent divorces and has endangered the society, and contributed to the alarming rise in delinquency because children grow up without any discipline and in broken homes, the children are left high and dry & made to fend for themselves. The underground 'Army' gun culture and easy money through extortion have offered these derelicts of society the most attractive out let for their bleak future.
THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION SET UP OF THE DISTRICT

In the Ukhrul District, there are five Revenue Sub-Divisions, and development Blocks they are: Ukhrul sub-division, Phungyar sub-division, Kamjong sub-division, Chingai sub-division, and Kasom Khullen sub-division. These sub-divisions are controlled by sub-divisional officers under the Deputy Commissioner, Ukhrul. The sub-divisional officers are senior Block Development Officers, also at work of development matters. There are four S.D.C. Administrative units also namely Jessami, Sanakeithel, Sahanbung and Lungjong Meiphai.

CULTURE

Gillin and Gillin define culture as "Each group had set of behaviours pattern which are more or less common to the members which are passed down from generation to generation and taught to children and which are constantly liable to change. Those common factors we call the culture." 13.

Every society of men possesses its own distinctive culture. Culture includes customs, social language, social institutions, religion, dances and festivals. Polity is one of the main factors of culture. Nagas are rich in culture though Nagas have no written documents and history, their traditional and cultural life are pregnant with rich traditional oral history which are handed down from father to son, and from generation to generation. This oral history was honoured and respected till the British invasion to Naga country.

Through the study of culture, one can understand the very life of a particular tribe or nation. According to Tangkhul Nagas culture, it was linked with the total life of a man in his social religious and daily life that it became a total life style. The Tangkul people are free from all sorts of oppression. There is no class distinction, they are freedom loving race, self-sufficient. They lacked nothing in the olden days. Their product was sufficient for the whole family. Generally, everything was performed collectively such as house construction, cultivation, harvest and ritualistic functions.

RELIGION

In premitive days, the Tankhul had their own religion. Tangkhul Nagas, like many other indigenous peoples of the world, worshiped an "unknown" God and various spirits, specially the malevolent ones. In fact, though they believed that there was the supreme being (Reisang chonne) who created everything, he was mistakenly believed to stay aloof from all the human struggles of life, and thus they were pre-occupied with sacrifices of rice beer to appease the spirits especially the malevolent ones. Apart from this, they had various kinds of festivals related to religious functions such as marriage ceremony, death, worshipping the spirits in all these occasions, the whole village will be involved to perform the functions along with various ritualistic formalities which also cost so much to the concerned family. But all these are a must and unavoidable.

When the Tangkhuls were living in such practices, Rev. William Pettigrew and his wife Mrs. Alice Pettigrew came with the light of the gospel. The

15. Thumra Jonathan; Impact of Christianity on the socio-cultural ethos of Tangkhul Naga, souvenir TBL centenary '96 p. 44. 
Tangkhul Nagas accepted the new faith that is Christianity. With the coming of Christianity, their beliefs, superstitions, and religious practices were completely transformed. People started having a new outlook with a new hope in life, now the Tangkhuls are centpercent Christians.

FESTIVALS, SONGS AND DANCES

Nagas do not have any written records of the past. But their traditions, songs, dances and festivals, etc. were narrated and handed down by the elders from generation to generation. Singing was one of the most important parts in their lives. Singing or songs were also used as means of communication as well as entertainments. Singing was maintained as one of the means of expressing sorrows, happiness, victory and defeat in the war and other important social events.

There are various kinds of songs, each song is used for particular occasions, for example there are for cultivation, farming, plantation, weeding and harvesting. And there are songs to sing while carrying paddy at home. They enjoyed so much working together in group accompanied with songs and eating and drinking.
Eating and drinking (Merry making) was one of the main social habits. They had various kinds of festivals and religious functions. Their festival was marked with dancing and singing with boys and girls in their full traditional dress. They enjoyed to their fullest with drinking of alcoholic beverages and eating meat. "Maran Kasa" was an occasion when a rich man threw a lavish ceremonial feast with a number of buffaloes, mithun, pigs and a huge collection of old and strog wine and rice to feed the public. Such celebrations followed the erection of commemorative stones and wood called "Tarung". This was beautiful though expensive. A number of sacrifices were made to different gods of fields, house, the stones, the woods, and other places. This 'Maran Kasa' was done by the rich people only. This was counted as the highest glory and pride of life.

ECONOMY

From time inmemorial, the Nagas practised agricultural activities. The economy of Tagkhul Nagas depended mainly on primitive farming, even today, there is not much change in the agricultural technology. Agriculture is practised wether by 'Jhum' or 'Terrace' cultivation. Baga economy is barely sufficient for their daily subsistance.

The system of land use technique adopted since olden days has been condemned on all hands as destructive rather than productive. But till today, no alternative has been found. In the olden days, the Tangkhul people were known for their hard work. They were self sufficient since they lived very simple life. But quite country to that, today, the Tangkhul or the Nagas in general have not developed their dignity of labour. They are ashamed of doing man manual works. Instead most of them are running after easy money. They are after an easy going life style.

There is no industry worth mentioning though there are some small cottage industries purely for domestic consumption. Weaving, crude carpentry and black-smith are the main cottage industries. Weaving is also not produced in large scale, it is only for domestic consumption. In fact, the Tangkhuls have no economic back-bone. The entire need depends much on the supply from other states like Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, etc.