CHAPTER III

ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

In any human society, ancient or modern, administration would be based on what matters most for the healthy life and progress of that society and the nation as a whole. Any deviation from the path of justice would bring about corruption. Once corruption takes root, decadence would set in, until it breaks up, giving way to another stronger society or nation. The Naga 'village-states' seem to be an exception to this rule as there is nothing to show in the Naga tradition, legends and stories that in any time the village-states had a downfall.\textsuperscript{130} This would indicate that there was justice in the administration of these tiny village-states of the one time Head hunters.

3.1. Village

Village formed the one exclusive social and political institution which housed a variety of sub-systems of social justice within it.

"For the tribals their village means everything - their country, their nation, their tribe, indeed, their whole world. It is in their village that the tribals live out their economic, political, religious and family life. It is here that they have their altar, and their place of government, their court of justice; in a word, everything."\textsuperscript{131}

A village may consist of just ten households or as many as over one thousand.\textsuperscript{132} The Maram village, however small, is an independent unit. It was recognized as a single community for all religious purposes, festivals and social functions.

\textsuperscript{130} n. 5, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{131} P. Kullu, (1994) "Tribal Religion and Culture," \textit{Jeevadhara} (Bangalore), vol. 24, no. 140, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{132} n. 23, pp. 9-10.
It was only in recent years, that people began to form new communities of villages, based on conversion to a new religion, access to modern amenities of life, proximity to government offices and cultivable fields, individual conveniences and preferences.

In olden times, lineages or sub-clans joined to form new villages. Villages were perched on hill tops, both for reasons of security and for a clear view of the surrounding valleys. They had their own village gates, dormitories (Morungs or youth chambers)\(^{133}\), sufficient forest wealth and land. Land was owned both by households and by community. The community land could be owned by a Sadung, Khel or the village.

The village is usually divided into three or more Khels depending upon the number of Sadungs, its size and population. Usually a Khel appears to be nothing more than the convenient division of a village in which more than one Sadung live. In the early days, a Naga village was defensively situated as well as fortified with stone walls, bamboo spikes, wooden gates and, in some cases, a trench skirting the village to slow down sudden and surprise head-hunting raids.\(^{134}\)

The real political unit of the tribe is the village, while for most purposes the social unit is the Khel or division of the village which is based on clanship.\(^{135}\) According to Hodson, a Naga village consists of at least two exogamous clans. In rare cases there are as many as ten clans.\(^{136}\)

Every village is an independent unit in the tribe. In the past, villagers were constantly at war with each other, each village was ruled by a chief assisted by an informal council of elders, usually old men of influence. They were the village elders

\(^{133}\) n. 25, p. 64.


\(^{136}\) n. 50, p. 73.
representing each clan in the village. The village elders were responsible for the maintenance of law and order and dispensation of justice.

For the Nagas, the ancestral village is something to be preserved and cherished. Hence, shifting from village to village is seldom done. In fact, their attachment to their native village is considerable.\(^{137}\)

3.1.1. Selection of site for the Village

A Naga village, as a general rule, is an irregularly disposed collection of houses in which the dwellings of the Saching which compose the village are often huddled together. In Maram there is an interesting regulation which required that the houses should at least not face the west because that is the direction in which the spirits of the dead go to their resting place.\(^{138}\) Great skill is often shown in the selection of a site.\(^{139}\) The following are kept in mind when a new village is to be established:

3.1.1.1. One of the most important pre requisite for establishing a new village is the people themselves. Those desiring to found a new village form a group and secretly look out for a strategic location to establish the village.

3.1.1.2. Earlier the land belonged to the village, Khel, Saching, or to individuals. Now-a-days certain land belong to the tribe or to the Circle Board. Once the land is identified, the group need to get permission from the owner of the land. If the land belongs to a particular Saching, only that Saching can settle in the land by right. Others need to get permission from the Saching.

\(^{137}\) n. 23, p. 10.

\(^{138}\) n. 50, p. 43.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., p. 44.
3.1.1.3. Locating the possible site for a village is to be done during the month of Lamsangkii (August), after the celebration of Na-mpamra festival which is a day of prayer for the children. A new village can only be established after celebrating Na-mpamra.

3.1.1.4. The people need to acquire sufficient land for cultivation. They also need sufficient forest area for providing firewood and other amenities of daily life. Each village possesses a well-defined area of territory, not only of cultivated and terraced land, but of jhum and waste lands as well. People look for natural boundaries like rivers, streams, hills and roads. They mark the boundaries by tying the bushes along the boundaries. On top of these they place a small piece of wood cut from the tree called Samitting. Samitting remains white for a long time and people can see the boundaries clearly from far.

3.1.1.5. Without a perennial water source for the daily needs of the village, life will be a very hard one. Therefore, closeness to water source is a criteria that people do not miss while selecting a site for the village.

3.1.1.6. A hill side with a clear view and direct sunshine is preferred. It is advantageous from the point of health and security. The concerns of security and village defence of olden days has given way to easy accessibility to various modern amenities like communication, transport, education, trade and health.

3.1.1.7. In olden days, there were some places where the spirits lived. If a village is established in that land, there would be sickness and death. Therefore, the final decision of moving to the site would depend on the favourable dreams. Good dreams indicate that the place would be good for human habitation. If not, they would withdraw their plan even if

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140 n. 50, p. 73.
other requirements are there. The folklore of Tingkii Marapii⁴¹ bears ample testimony for this. However, due to the influence of Christianity and modernization, all do not attach much importance to dreams.

3.1.1.8. Once the site is identified the men would have rice beer in folded leaves. Once every one received one’s share, they would pour a small amount of wine from their leaf and a piece of ginger as an offering to gods. This ritual is called Kaaktak.

3.1.1.9. To establish a new village, permission from their village chief is sought. Olden days people moved out of the village without permission as no king wanted to give permission for the people to leave.

3.1.1.10. In earlier days, at least one family of the Haoma clan had to move along with the new settlers. It is the Haoma who will have to perform all the religious rituals especially for the dead. They can be from Maram or from some other places. In recent times, due to the influence of Christianity, the importance of Houmai has been immensely reduced.

3.1.1.11. After all due formalities are completed in selecting the site, a healthy black unblemished bull is killed and its dung, taken from the stomach, is scattered around the boundary of the selected land (pongakki). This rite ensures purification of land, safety from wild animals, good crops and good health. The sacrificed animal would be kept for three days so that all the rituals would be completed. This is called Sagongkadi kaatkii ki kanai (all rituals are completed). Literally it means, ‘a big

⁴¹See appendix 1.
king ritual is done\textsuperscript{142}. During this time, the carcass of the animal shouldn't be eaten by the rat. If the sacrificed animal is eaten by rats, another bull without blemish has to be sacrificed.

3.1.2. Office Bearers for the New village

The leader who initiated the movement of people to the new village would automatically become the chief. People recognise him as the chief of the new village. After this he would initiate the process of selecting the elders from various Sadhungs. The post of the Sagong from then on becomes hereditary on the basis of 'primogeniture'.

Elders from each Sadhung are elected to the Village Council, keeping in mind the qualities of sincerity and honesty. The elected elders hold the post all through their life but it is not hereditary. One can also be removed from his post if he does not fulfil his duties.

3.1.3. Help from the Old Village

Those who move out of the village, would not get any help from the old village, as the mother village feels that they are running away. However, the relatives and friends always come to their rescue as need arises.

3.1.4. Moving to the New Village

The new Sagong would fast for a month, taking only N’bamzhou - one type of rice beer prepared without the yeast. The Sagong who is unable to fast for one complete month would not be worthy to become a king, in which case they will select another person who is talented and has leadership qualities.

Often houses are constructed once the people move into the new village. But

\textsuperscript{142}\textit{Interview with Apao Truba, Headman of Maram Centre. He is considered an expert on Maram Customary Laws, administrative practices and folklores.}
in certain cases some shift after the houses are constructed. A simple house should be made within three days. But the house of a wealthy man (Akazali ki) should be made within five days. Once the five days of making of the house is over, no one should go on the top of the roof of the house for three years. Every house should have a kind of a low ceiling above the fire barn. This custom started from the time of Apou Tingfii Marapii who went and settled at the cave of the spirits. The spirits tried to kill him. Since he had made a low ceiling with the help of his walking stick, the stick of the spirits fell on the ceiling and he was unhurt. Due to this, the houses of the Marams usually have low ceiling above the fireplace.

Once the house is made they would carry a shield (Kokrii) a spear (Angii) and a cock in the left hand and lighted torch made of dry grass in the right hand. As they move towards the houses they would murmur to the spirits, 'I am coming to the house to bring wealth and population, so you come out of the house'.

3.1.5. Construction of the House of Sagong

The construction of the house of Sagong has to be done according to an elaborate ritual. In the head-hunting days, a human sacrifice was necessary in order to begin the house building ritual. Usually a head was obtained from an enemy village. The more heads, the better. If all the efforts failed at getting a head, at least some human hair from an unfriendly village had to be brought. Now-a-days animal’s head is sufficient for the purpose. The king reserves certain plot of land to collect thatch for his house. There are certain rules as to what type of wood should be used. For instance the Chingdi or the main pillar of the house should be of a wood called tiziitling. The Batangiting wood should never be used for construction of his house. If the Sagong required wood from any individual land or from community land, people are obliged to give him. Hodson writes:

“Among the Nagas of Mao and Maram, the houses of the village chiefs are distinguished by the curved and carved beams crossed in front, a style of distinction which we find in Manipur in the Kangla. The description given in the Gazetteer of Upper Burma, Vol. I, part 1., pp. 499-510, of a Wa village would apply, with a few and unimportant modifications, to a naga village. It is
notable that down to the detail of the curved beams on the chief's house the likeness is exact.\textsuperscript{143}

On the day when \textit{Chingdi} and \textit{Semjang}\textsuperscript{144} are erected the \textit{Sagong} would kill three cows and distribute the meat to every household in the village. The cows should be entirely black without any spot or injury. The right hind leg of the cow is offered to the deity. The youth of the village help him to build and repair his house with intense devotion and respect.

Until the house is completed, the people are not allowed to go to the field. The people are not allowed to make houses during or immediately after the construction of the house of \textit{Sagong}. The house of the \textit{Sagong} should be completed by the 5\textsuperscript{th} day. On the day of \textit{Sagongki n'tu} (Building up the house of the king)\textsuperscript{145} all the families would come with a bundle of thatch and give to the king. The \textit{Sagong} would receive the thatch and bless the people in return.

On the completion of the house of the king the people gathered in front of the house of the \textit{Sagong} to receive blessing. They open up the shawls while the \textit{Sagong} prays. They then close the shawls and returned home. On reaching home they would open their shawls so that the blessing of the \textit{Sagong} be showered on their houses. It is on this day that the \textit{Sagong} abolishes certain customs that ceased to be relevant for the people, and proclaim new customs that would be good for the people.

\textsuperscript{143} n. 50, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{A house will have five front pillars wooden posts of which the middle one would be the tallest. This pillar is called Chingdi. Next to Chingdi on either side are called chingdi chingpa. Next to chingpa is kiibiching. Behind chingdi will be Siimtung which is the rehangki room pillar. Next to that is kiilung chingdi which is the living room and the last pillar is Kami Chingdi. This room is mainly the kitchen}\textit{. Semjang} is the beam that goes over the pillars. There should be 5 front pillars for ordinary house. For \textit{Akajaliki}, there should be 7 - 9 pillars.

\textsuperscript{145} n. 142.
The villagers who were defeated by the Sagong would come to pay taxes along with a shawl as a gift and respect. This is done even during the death of the king and the queen. After the completion of the house few boys who are active and talented will go to the enemy village and try to pull out the hair with a drop of blood. This will be brought and kept inside the house of the king as a sign of victory and purification of the house.

3.2. The Village Chief

Each village has a chief who is the patriarch of the village. He is normally assisted by the village councillors who are the representatives of the village drawn from the various Sadungs. The title may differ from tribe to tribe and the term of office may also vary. He may be popularly elected or hold office by heredity. Most of the tribes like the Semas, the Konyaks, the Maos, the Marams have hereditary chieftainship. The Aos follow the republican model in which the Council of elders are elected from every clan of the village. The Angamis have neither the village chiefs nor the village councils but only an elected spokesman. They form an ultrarepublican village polity in which the whole village gathered in case of any dispute. McCulloch, quoting Lieutenant Stewart says:

"The Angamees have no recognized head or chief although they elect a spokes-man who, to all intents and purposes, is powerless and irresponsible; hence the great difficulty we have had in dealing with this tribe, the arrangements made with the spokes-man being set at naught by the villagers."

In areas where kingship / chieftainship prevailed, one just could not become a village chief however influential he might be. In normal course the leader of the first settlement would become the chief. However the chief was required to get the

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147 n. 23, p. 11.

148 n. 6, pp. 70-71.

149 n. 77, p. 71.
sanction of the gods to his kinship, otherwise nobody would obey him. He had to perform certain rituals and pass the tests which would show that he had the sanction of the gods.\textsuperscript{150}

The Maram society is a patrilineal society. The principle of primogeniture is strictly followed.\textsuperscript{151} The village is ruled by the Sagong who is vested with a great deal of authority. The office of the Sagong is hereditary, passing on to the eldest surviving son after the death of his father.

Major William McCulloch observed that the Marams are confined to one large village of perhaps 900 houses. He says:

"In this single village of Maram, there are two chiefs. For this singularity the people refer to a former chief who had two sons. The younger was a greater warrior and wanted to usurp the place of his brother. He urged his father to give him the chief-ship. The old chief afraid of his youngest son, and unable to give up the birth-right of the eldest, determined on a stratagem. He told his eldest son to go and secretly to bring home the head of an enemy. This having been done the old chief summoned his sons, and giving each a packet of provisions desired them to proceed in such directions as they chose in search of enemies, for he who brought in first the head of an enemy should be the king. The brothers took their leave, the youngest proceeding where he thought he would soon procure a head, the eldest bending his steps to where he had concealed the one already taken. This he brought out of its concealment, and proceeded with it in triumph through the village. Nor was the youngest long in returning with a head, but having been preceded by his brother, the chief-ship was declared to be the right of the eldest. This however did not satisfy the younger son, he persisted in being called chief, and the matter was compromised by both being allowed to remain one as the great, the other as the little chief."\textsuperscript{152}

Besides the Sagong, the Marams have also a Sagong Gongdi who lives in Maram Khullen. Maram Khullen was the first village of Marams and it had in olden times as many as 70 clans. Each Khel in Maram Khullen has its own Sagong. This necessitated a central unity under a Sagong Gongdi. Therefore, all the people obeyed

\textsuperscript{150}n. 5, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{151}n. 25, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{152}n. 77, pp. 69-70.
the *Sagong* of Lamkhana in matters of cult. Thus the *Sagong* of Lamkhana was referred to as the ‘Great Chief’\(^{53}\).

### 3.2.1 Powers and functions of *Sagong Gongdi*

According to the Maram folklore, the generation of the king started from the time of *Hangking Sasat* (the eight brothers), when the father blessed his last son Kadi to be the king and hereafter his generation too, to be the kings. Since then the institution of king started in Maram. The *Sagong Gongdi* stays in Maram Khullen. Even the new villages will have a king but he is under the king of Maram Khullen, in matters of cult.

*Sagong Gongdi* cannot travel out of Maram. He cannot eat food from any other house, however, he can take rice beer. He does not even go to war. The king of Maram Khullen has a special chair *Bamrak* made out of the tree called *Tambiting*. This tree has sharp thorns. This chair indicates the power of the chief and the enemies would get hurt by the thorns of this tree. No one else can sit on the chair of the king.

The system of the *Sagong Gongdi* is hereditary. If he dies, and the queen is still alive, she will continue to reign. Only after the death of the queen would the son reign as king. If the son is a minor, and the queen too died, the agent of the king, *Gongpa*, would exercise the power and instruct the prince in the ways of kingship. If no natural heir, the person who inherits the forefather’s properties (*sara kakat*) would become the king. The last *Sagong Gongdi*, Rangkarang, died in 1966. At that time, the prince Kangnamba was a minor and had gone for education. Since then the queen is reigning at Maram Khullen.

The following persons carry out the various duties of the *Sagong Gongdi* on his behalf. *N’iapui* is the one who performs the rituals of cultivation after the

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completion of which the people are allowed to cultivate the field. She also collects paddy tax.

Gongpa is the ambassador of Sagong Gongdi. Gonpa would travel to other villages and tribes in the place of the king and carry his messages.

Haomai is a priest who acts as the mouth piece of the Sagong Gongdi, who speaks and blesses the people.

3.2.1.1 The duties and responsibilities of Sagong Gongdi

Sagong Gongdi is the one who divines the appropriate dates for cultivation and harvesting. He appoints N'tapui who would remain in a hut in front of the king's house for 8 days to perform the rituals. She would be the first one to begin the cultivation and the harvesting on behalf of the Sagong Gongdi. This is an indication to the people that the appropriate time has come for a particular work. If N'tapui dies during this time, her body will be kept there until the 8 days are over. She also collects taxes from the people on behalf of the Sagong Gongdi. McCulloch observes that “Formerly no one was allowed to plant his rice until the great chief allowed it or had finished his planting.”

During the building of the house of Sagong Gongdi, it is customary for the great chief to bless the people with wishes of prosperity and good health. He also abrogates certain unwanted customs during this occasion. For instance, in olden days, it was considered a bad omen if a woman died in the house while in child-birth. Therefore, in difficult deliveries, when the people saw that the woman is on the verge of death, she would be taken out of the house by breaking the wall of the room where she is and would be left at the back of the house to die. Due to this custom many women died. The Sagong Gongdi stopped this custom of the people. The king also would take this opportunity to introduce good customs for the benefit of the people. The blessing words would be uttered by the Haomai.

\[154\] n. 77, p. 70.
He would give his blessing to the people who went to wage war. However, he could not go to the battlefield.

It is the duty of the Sagong Gongdi to declare Tingnei, the day of the spirit, in the event of death. That day would be a genna for all the people and all would have to stay in the village.

When the king drinks wine from his cup made of bull horn, he would cover it with a piece of bamboo. It is believed that this would, besides preventing dirt to fall, avert all foreign sicknesses from affecting the people of Maram.

When there is Haijou Katou and pulling of stone of the living, when all are ready, the Sagong Gongdi would carry his spear and Haomai would accompany him with a bottle of rice beer. The owner of the house offers him the traditional chair. Wine will be exchanged and the Sagong would be given a leg of the cow.

Before the starting of Kanghi festival, there is a day called Malem where all the male of the villages would go and catch wild birds with their bare hands. All the birds caught on that day would be tied to a split bamboo and would be carried by Sagong Gongdi and placed in front of his house. In his absence, the eldest of the Sagong Gongdi family would do this work.

When the king or queen dies, or even during the construction of the house, they have to get Ateii. They go to an enemy’s place and take hair along with a drop of blood.

When there is a fight in front of the Sagong Gongdi’s house, if the Sagong Gongdi or the queen come out and ask them to stop the fight, they should stop the fight immediately.

The Sagong Gongdi is also the Sagong of Lamkhana. So all the powers and functions of a Sagong is also enjoyed by the Sagong Gongdi.
3.3. Powers and functions of Sagong.

The Sagong was the de facto and de jure head of the village before the village authorities Act of 1956 came into force. All religious ceremonies had to have the sanction of the Sagong. In all matters that the Sagong decide, he would be helped by a special group of people called Haomai. Whenever the Sagong made a tour of the village, the Haomai would accompany. He was the right arm of the King.\textsuperscript{155} The Sagong has to be a very kind and gentle father. Even if he loses his temper, he is not supposed to express his anger or beat the people. The people too cannot touch the person of the Sagong, even if they are angry with him. Sagongki Hangna played an advisory role to the Sagong. It is they who performed all that is needed on behalf of the Sagong. He played a dual function as religious and secular head of the village.

3.3.1. Religious Functions

The Sagong presides over all religious festivals. The religious functions are usually shared by the chief and the priest. Although the actual sacrifice or ritual was performed by the priest (Haomai), yet his presence in any religious ceremony was prominent.\textsuperscript{156} He is also expected to make the initial sacrifices and offer the first prayer to ward off an ill fate which might otherwise befall the village.\textsuperscript{157}

In the month of Kapokmataikii (May) Malla (sacrifice with chicken) is observed at the first sighting of the moon. From the ninth to eleventh day there is a celebration called Rangtaiba-powtingbanai. The whole Maram village do not work on these three days as a mark of respect for Rangtaiba and Powtingba. on the third day, the Sagong (chief) would offer the rice beer to the deity in order to get timely rain.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155}n. 25, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{156}n. 5, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{157}n. 4, pp.82-83.
\textsuperscript{158}n. 25, p. 83.
There is also another rain ceremony performed by the Ságong or by the elders of the village. They descend to the Barak river and fill their vessels (bamboo 
chunga) with water. This they empty it over their fields and pray for rain.

The Ságong plays a leading part on all occasions when a village genna requires the whole community. Every genna day is announced by the king on the
previous night or early in the morning of the same day to the villagers. They are to abstain from all sorts of work on that day.\textsuperscript{159}

There are many prohibitions imposed on the chief in regard to the consumption of food, and 'the Marams say the chief's post must be a very uncomfortable one.'\textsuperscript{160} The chief is forbidden to eat pork. The 'religiosity' of the chief is such that it is dangerous to come into contact with any substance that is a taboo.

During the festival of 
Ni\textit{di} in the month of 
Kanghi kii (in December), the 
Ságong would feed all the boys of his dormitory with rice beer and dog meat.

During the cleansing festival of 
Marumanai, the boys are required to take bath, wash their old clothes, the spears and the knives. They are required to bring water to wash their beds in order to wash away the sins of the people. At this time the king would fast and would take only rice beer. The boys are required to take wine in leaf. However, they can consume rice as well. The boys, after having their food, would go for hunting, and until they catch a game and bring to the king, the king would continue having only rice beer. This is done so that the spirit may take the life of wild animals and not of human beings.

\textsuperscript{159} n. 23, pp. 22-23.

\textsuperscript{160} n. 77, p.70.
The Sagong of a particular Khel can also call for Marumanai in the following cases: if any one makes shawl in the forbidden months\textsuperscript{161}. If the people carry pork to the forbidden places like the house and courtyard of the Sagong, and other sacred places, or if there is any epidemic. All these are considered as sources of impurities and people need to undergo the cleansing ritual.

3.3.2. The secular duties

The primary concern of the chief was for the defence of the village. In the early days of constant animosity among villages and the practice of head-hunting, the question of village defence was of great importance. Peace and prosperity of a village depended on the ability of the villagers in keeping their enemies at bay. The village gate and the fence around the village needed constant repair and maintenance. As the head of the administration, his duty was to summon and preside over the meetings of the village councillors who were by tradition the representatives of the various Sadungs.\textsuperscript{162}

Visitors to a village had to report to the chief and make known the purpose and duration of their visit, and pay him their respect. The chief, in return, would welcome the visitors, provide accommodation and guarantee their safety during their stay. In his house all the villagers, even strangers, always found hospitality and help.\textsuperscript{163} The chief also would get in touch with the Morning and arrange for their entertainment. Naga hospitality is well known and a visitor was generously provided with food, drinks and merriment.

\textsuperscript{161} The forbidden months are Pokjingkii (June), Mataikii (October) and Kanghikii (December).

\textsuperscript{162} n. 5, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{163} R. Ruivah (1993), Social Change Among the Nagas (Tangkhuls), New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, p. 148.
In the early days, the village chief had emergency powers and warfare duties. The chief beside being the priest, judge and leader of his people was also the commander in the battlefield. Indeed, his physical prowess was more in demand than his sagacity or other qualities of the head and heart.

His house became a place of refuge for those who commit or are accused of committing crimes like murder. The people are forbidden to harm anyone in his house. This proscription gave sufficient time to bring about justice. If unable to reach there, he can also run to the Morung or to any other house for safety.

It is his duty to provide a dormitory for the Sagongki Hangna. The bed of the Sagongki Hangna should be made out of a single tree. The bed (azii hungpxii) should have neither pillars nor joints. The outsiders are not allowed to sit on the bed. The ladies, especially those who carry their baskets, cannot enter this dormitory.

The village watchman on sighting an approaching enemy would rush to inform the chief who in turn would issue a proclamation ordering immediate closure of the village gates. He would summon the warriors to get ready and if necessary, to assemble without delay to meet the danger. On the advise of Sagongki Hangna, the Sagong would declare war.

It is also the chief’s duty to send and receive message to and from friendly or hostile village and to disclose the nature of the message to the village councillors and to the village at large. In the days of head-hunting whenever the attackers were fair enough to have a declared warfare, all challenges for a proposed attack were sent to the chief who was supposed to return suitable answers and confirm a date for the actual combat.

At the village gatherings for sports, dance and songs, the chief presides over. He is the pivot around whom all the social functions and festivals have to revolve. In fact, he is the custodian of the village agricultural calendar. As the headman and the first man in the village, he opens the village festivals, he is the first to sow seeds, the
first to plant and the first to harvest. He is responsible for the defence of the village. The chief is the ambassador to other villages and government officials.\textsuperscript{164}

The chief however did not exercise unlimited powers, as he was bound by the various tribal customs and unwritten laws which were rigidly followed. In any dispute he has hardly any choice as he has to bow down to the precedent cases, the customs and the practice of the society. Since most of the customs and laws were based on religious practice and faith, the chief had discretionary powers only in those cases where religious customs and traditions were not clear. In the day-to-day administration of the village, the chief was assisted by the councillors. There is a Naga saying that "No cock hurts the chicken and no king speaks roughly". Hence gentleness was a great quality of the village chief.\textsuperscript{165}

3.3.3. Privileges

3.3.3.1. His house should be constructed by the villagers in 5 days

3.3.3.2. The king would be allotted plots of lands for the field and construction of house. He also would be given a forest land for collection of firewood. This will be considered as land belonging to the Sagong and will be passed on from generation to generation.

3.3.3.3. In certain feasts like Akajaliki, Haijon, Arakatiiki, pulling of the stone, and certain hunting, the Sagong is presented with a leg of a bull.

3.3.3.4. At the beginning of every social function he would taste rice beer and meat and offer a small portion to the gods.

3.3.3.5. His death would be observed as genna for a day.

\textsuperscript{164}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{165}n. 5, p. 53.
3.3.4. Duties

3.3.4.1. On the day of taboo, he should not ever go to the field. He is not allowed to go to any village or even roam around the village.

3.3.4.2. On certain days the Sagong has to perform various rites and rituals. Such duties will be performed by his agents on his behalf.

3.3.4.3. He should not take bath on the day which is taboo.

3.3.4.4. He should not climb the roof of the house.

3.3.4.5. He should not sleep with his wife on important days observed for gema.

3.3.4.6. He should not use as fuel firewood from the tree that died a natural death.

3.3.4.7. He should be particular about diet. He is not permitted to have pork at all times and food from other houses. However, he is allowed to take wine.

Thus we see the Sagong is a very prominent personality at all social and religious gatherings and festivals of the village. Maram folk songs and stories tell of how a particular chief was looked upon as father because of his many physical prowess and revered by all because of his many abilities and qualities. The Sagong commanded respect and were respected, obeyed and loved. During discussion on important issues involving the community, the Sagong would listen to various issues before him and then gave his decision. For the people the word of the Sagong was the word of the deity. He was specially appointed by the deity to rule over their

166 n. 4, p. 109.
community. This indeed was the Divine Right of Kingship theory at practice, in a microcosmic way at the village level.\footnote{167}

3.4. Village Council

In every village there is a council and it is the principal governing organ of the village. The members of the council are either elected or appointed. Every Sadung sends one representative each to the council. If the Sadung is large enough to justify a bigger representation, it may send a maximum of three. Normally, the head of the Sadung is the eldest male member who is also the ex-officio member of the council. He holds the position till death, but it is not hereditary. He has to be a married person - marriage being a sign of maturity. He must be able to speak without fear or favour. He continues in office as long as he commands the confidence of his Sadung.

They play a very important role in the village and they are next to the king. In olden days it is said there were around 70 Sadung but at present there are 28 Sadungs in Maram Khullen\footnote{168}. The Sadung representatives are called N’kuna Tamkati.\footnote{169} Whatever be the tenure of office and function, the village council is the principal governing organ of the village.\footnote{170} The council functions as the need arises for settling disputes between individuals or clans, and to punish those guilty of theft, murder, adultery.\footnote{171} The Council has the following functions.

\footnote{167} n. 25, p. 62.

\footnote{168} Appendix 3 shows all the clans and their clan heads as found in the Maram villages in 2007.

\footnote{169} Since the head of the Sadung will be given a piece of meat during the Haijon Katao, pulling stone for living and dead, they have been called so. (n’kuna is a kind of lizard; tam = chutney; katii = eat).

\footnote{170} M. Horam (1992), Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas (The Tangkhul Nagas), Delhi: Low Price Publications, p. 77.

\footnote{171} n. 23, p. 12.
3.4.1. Executive Function

It is the executive body of the village. It is not only responsible for the settlement of disputes, but also ensures the effective implementation of its decision. Every person is expected to be conversant with the traditional laws, customs, and usages. The council is ever watchful that no one breaks any of the accepted laws of the land.

3.4.2. Administrative functions

The Council sees to the construction of new footpaths and bridges across the stream and rivers. Dates of all village festivals are fixed by the council in consultation with the village chief and priest.

Proclamation of religious ceremonies and taboo observations are made by the Council. They also announce the dates for Aramhatu (Community hunting) and Khajol (community fishing).

The village council is the custodian of the village granary. Immediately after the harvest, grain is collected from each household for the common granary. The village council utilises this village pool of rice and uses its discretion for distributing to the needy. This helped to check begging. If the grain was unused during the year, it would be auctioned among the villagers.

In the month of Tiiroukii (September) all the clan heads come together and kill a dog for their meal. Before they take the meal, a piece each of the dog meat is taken and make a promise on behalf of the whole clan that they will neither steal nor tell lies. On account of this ritual, the councillors are also known as Tiiroukakam.

3.4.3. Judicial function

The most important functions of the council is judicial. The councillors with the chief constitute the village court. The village court is the highest court of justice
among the Maram. All the disputes and differences between families belonging to the same Sadung are, as far as possible decided by Sadung elders. Those quarrels which these elders fail to decide satisfactorily are referred to the village court.

It is the village council who will settle all the difficult cases of the people which could not be settled within the Sadung. Even the cases of other tribes or another village will be solved by the council. It is the decision of the council to wage war or not. So they play a very important role in the administrative system of Maram

3.4.4. Other powers and functions

3.4.4.1. During Haijon Katou

During special occasions like Haijon Katou, when a rich man’s house is to be constructed, it is the Sadung that instructs people on how the work must be done. During this occasion, the owner would provide sufficient animals for meat and enough rice beer for the whole village. Two bulls would be released simultaneously from the house and the people are asked to catch them bare handed and subdue them.

For such occasions, the whole village would help the family to harvest the fields, collecting fire-wood and in pounding the rice for making beer. When the family is feeding the whole village the Sadung will have a separate place of honour. After the function, the Sadung will be given a piece of meat each.

It is only during this occasion the king will come to another person’s house and have food from them. As he comes he carries a spear in his hand and he will be followed by Atingba (Haomai) who carries the things of the king. The king would bring a bottle of rice beer and give to the host. In return the host will give a bottle of rice beer along with a leg of the cow to the king in gratitude.
3.4.4.2. **During Stone Pulling ceremony**

During the time of the pulling of the stone either the stone of the living or the stone for the dead, the instructions are given only by the *Sachung*. Even on this occasion the host provides food and drink just like the *Hajou Katou*. If any misfortune or calamity took place during this ceremony, no one will be held accountable.

Thus we see the *Sachung* played a very vital role in the administration of Maram villages. Often the *Sagong* had to listen to the *Sachung* and follow the majority opinion.

3.5. **Sachung (clan)**

The institution of *Sachung* started from time immemorial. A *Sachung* is composed of families which is a group of agnatic kin, it occupies a definite portion of the village and is strictly exogamous.\(^{172}\) The members of a *Sachung* are believed to have descended from a common ancestor by whose name the *Sachung* is called.\(^{173}\) In the tribal life, after family, clan is the most important unit to which the family is very closely related. This is because clan is the extended family. The eldest member of the clan represents it in the village court.\(^{174}\)

Each *Sachung* has its own clan-head and its inheritance is not hereditary. Normally the eldest of the *Sachung* becomes the clan-head of the *Sachung*. The main function of the clan-head is to keep the clan members united and strong. It has also a mini-council where all the matters pertaining to the clan members are decided by the

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\(^{173}\) n. 146, p. 178.

\(^{174}\) n. 23, p. 13.
council. Whatever problems arising within the Sadung, the Sadung head tries to settle the problem within the Sadung itself. If not, it will go to the village council. In the cases that involve other Sadungs or villages, the matter will be taken up within the village council.

The Sadung relationship was very strong in the olden days and the members of the Sadung shared their crops with families who did not have a good harvest. In times of sickness and misfortunes, other members of the Sadung would come to their solace.

3.6. Dormitory system

The Moring or bachelor's dormitory is an institution common to all the Naga tribes. In the traditional Naga society, boys and girls, after the attainment of puberty, slept in their respective dormitories till they got married. The institution of separate houses emphasises most markedly the division of society by sex and age. It is a large hall where the bachelors can sleep at night. It is like a youth club and the centre of all the village activities of the youth. The detailed management of the dormitories varies from tribe to tribe.

For most Naga tribes, Moring was a useful institution for training young men and women in their social and cultural responsibilities. It was the pride of the village. It was here that the children learnt the advantages of cooperation and

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175 n. 179, p. 68.
176 Ibid., p. 69.
177 n. 23, p. 13.
178 n. 50, pp. 76-77.
179 n. 146, p. 177.
180 n. 134, p. 33.
responsibility, and moulded their lives to fall in line with the Naga way of life.\textsuperscript{181} The age group of the Morung were the natural labour teams for every public work and the rights and obligations of every member of the community were regulated by his/her place in the age-group system.\textsuperscript{182} The existence of exogamy and rigidity of the customs could have made a Naga girl quite happy in the society. She was generally sociable. Here a boy was also trained to become an administrator, a farmer and a warrior of the village.\textsuperscript{183} However the coming of Christianity, the onset of modernisation, and desire for school education have made the practise of Morung system almost non-existent in most of the tribes.

The Morungs of the Marams are not as large and spacious as the Morungs of the Aos and Konyaks but more or less of the same size as that of the Lotha Nagas.\textsuperscript{184} The Maram Morung has a length of about 30 to 40 feet with a breadth of about 10 to 15 feet.\textsuperscript{185} One possible reason for this small sized Morung is the fact that there are many such Morungs in a Maram village, one each for each Sadung.

3.6.1. Rehangki (Boys’ Dormitory)

The Marams call their boys’ dormitory ‘Rehangki’. All the Sadungs will have their own boys’ dormitory. Rehangki is constructed in the house of the eldest person of the Sadung, who normally inherits the properties of the Sadung (Saralaha kakat). The house is made by the boys of the Sadung. The sleeping place is usually a


\textsuperscript{183}n. 7, p. 19.


\textsuperscript{185}n. 25, p. 65.
raised up platform of wood. Large planks are used for making this platform. It is mainly the dormitory of the unmarried men, but even the married can come and sleep here and sometime they even bring their own kids. McCulloch says, “the young men never sleep at home, but at their clubs where they keep their arms always in a state of readiness. Amongst the Murams (Marams), the married men even sleep at the resorts of the bachelors, a custom resulting from their sense of insecurity from attack.”

The dormitory system plays a very important role in the life of an individual, the *Sadung*, and even the whole village. It serves as a recreation club, a centre of education, art and discipline and for ceremonial purposes. It is here that the individual learns all the folk tales and folk songs of the tribe. It acts as a communication link between the individuals, the *Sadung*, and the village. It is here the whole *Sadung* comes to discuss and share information. They also act as guards for the village. Often the boys do not go to fields but practice body building techniques to keep themselves fit for war.

The boys are to fetch fire-wood for the dormitory as they return from their bathing. It is said if someone refuses to collect the firewood, he would be punished by hitting with the pillow made out of wood. Often the shame of such punishments act as sufficient deterrent.

The lady of the house, in whose campus the *Rehangki* is built, is called *Hangsii pui*. She is to be kind to the young men and share their secret talks. The house owner would kill a dog for the boys during the *Kanghi* festival. *Hangsii pui* would always keep a bottle of wine during this feast in the dormitory for the poor boys. One third of the hunting and fishing would be given to the owner of the house and two thirds would go to the *Sadung*.

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186 Ibid.

187 n. 77, p. 69; n. 50, pp. 74-75.

3.6.2. *Raliiki* (Girls' Dormitory)

The girls' dormitory is called *Raliiki*. It is constructed by the boys of the same *Sadung* in a separate plot of land and not attached to any family.\(^{189}\) All the girls of the *Sadung* who attained the age of puberty and are not married are to go to *Raliiki*. Usually a girl stays only for two to three years in a *Raliiki* unless there is a late marriage. The institution of the girls' dormitory also plays an important role for the society. Apart from providing entertainment, the girls learn the folklore and the customs in the dormitory. They too act as guards for the village as they can keep the men awake.

Though the girls are forbidden to go to *Rehangki*, boys and men are allowed to come to *Raliiki* for entertainment. During important festivals the boys visit the *Mornungs* of the girls and sing songs and crack jokes.\(^{190}\) It is customary for the boys to sit on the thighs of the girls. As soon as the boy approaches the girl for a seat, she puts her hands crossed at her bosom as a sign of self protection and then offers her thighs to the boy as the custom demands. Every boy sitting on thighs of each girl joins in the continuous singing and changing of partners as they shift the seat round and round.\(^{191}\)

During the harvesting time, the girls would carry paddy for others so that they can earn enough for the *Hang' ngirca* festival. During this festival of *Kanghi*, the girls would have to feed the boys of the *Sadung* with rice beer. If they are able, they would give rice beer to all the boys of the village. During *Gongsang* festival which takes place in *Kanghi*, the men would give meat to the girls. At times a dog is also given to the girls to celebrate.

\(^{189}\) n. 5, p. 276.

\(^{190}\) n. 25, p. 65.

\(^{191}\) n. 5, p. 276.
The girls are expected to behave properly in the dormitory. Even a blind or a mad person should be treated with respect. Thus we see the girl's dormitory provide social entertainment and acts as a security for the village

3.6.3. Lakshi Meiki (Widow’s Dormitory)

This dormitory was mainly for the widows. They provide only social entertainment. It is said that most of the men prefer to go to the widow’s dormitory as they were more open and entertaining.

3.6.4. Sagongki Hangna (King’s Sadung)

It refers to the boys of the king’s Sadung. Their life is exactly like that of any other Rehangki except that they have some additional responsibilities. It is their duty to be in the house where an elder of the Sagai has died. They also have the duty to verify whether the dead man is a Maram or not.

During the festival of Kanghi, they maintain discipline. If there is any quarrel between various Sadungs, it is their duty to settle the issue and calm the people on behalf of the king.

3.7. Changing position of the chief and his councillors

The arrival of the British, the world wars and the merger of Manipur with India were all major winds of change that brought tremendous and far reaching impact to the region. Marams too, swept by these changes, moved ahead in the tide of development. In its efforts to keep up with the changes and remain rooted in its culture, brought about rapid changes, at times in confused manner, in the way the people began to relate to their tradition, history and culture. The most radical among these influences was the Village authorities in the Hill areas Act of Manipur, 1956. It radically changed the role of chief and the village council.
3.7.1 Village Authorities in the Hill Areas Act of 1956

The village Authorities in Hill Areas Act was passed in 1956 by the Indian Parliament. Section 56 of the Act repeals the Manipur State Hill People's Regulation of 1947, in which the power was vested in the Maharajah of Manipur. We can say that this act of 1956 brought about radical changes in the village administration. The hill areas in general flourished more or less as an independent region till that time.

After the Kuki rebellion of 1917-18, the British decided to have a stronger control of the hill areas and so they established sub-divisional head quarters at Ukrlul, Tamenglong and Churachandpur, but there was very little interference in this village administration. The only certain heinous offences against the state were tried by the British. After independence of India, the administration of Hill Areas was regulated by Manipur Hill People's Regulation Act 1947. But the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union in 1949, the state of Manipur had to be administered by the central government through a Chief Commissioner under the state Merger order of 1950.

The village authorities in Hill Area Act, as passed in 1956, has 58 sections. Section s 3-18 deal with the constitution and function of village authorities. Sections 19-56 deal with the administration of justice by village authorities.

By this Act all the criminal and civil laws in force in Manipur are applicable to tribal people too. The court of the village authorities could try only criminal (minor) and civil cases as laid down in the Act.\(^{192}\)

Manipur Kings abolished the age old village official system and appointed a new person in each conquered village. New names like Khullakpa, Mantri etc., emerged but the Maharajah did not introduce new laws. He empowered the appointed officials to carry out the village administration related to their customary laws as before. Like Sagong (chief) Khullakpa acted as head of a particular village and frequently visited the court of the Manipur king to show his loyalty and to offer hill

\(^{192}\)n. 25, pp. 62-63.
products in addition to house tax every year. Any disputes which could not be settled by the village was brought to the Manipur court and settled by the Manipur Maharajah. Thus the power of the chief was reducing year by year. The transferring of power from the Sagong to the village council can be noticed with certainty in this regard.

After independence and with the introduction of the village authority act of 1956, people got the right to elect their village authorities. It did not attack the age old political system directly, and opened up the way for democracy.

In Maram Khullen, the original village of the Marams and the cradle of Maram culture, the Act of 1956 had a far reaching effect as far as the administration of the village was concerned. Till the act was passed, the Sagong was the executive, legislative and the judicial authority. But this act put a curb on his vast powers.

By this act the Khullakpa became the Ex-officio chairman of the village authority. For the Sagong of Maram Khullen, the office of the Khullakpa was an office of authority below him. It seemed as if the government was directing him to give away most of his powers, which were vested on him since many centuries.

In Willong, the second biggest village of the Marams, there is a Sagong and there is a Khullakpa. Both are different persons. In Willong, at one time, the father was the Sagong while the son became the Khullakpa.

After independence the hill people of Manipur started participating in the political life of the state. There was a representative form of government in Manipur after the introduction of the Constitutional Act of 1947. There was a legislative

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193 Ibid.


195 n. 25, p. 63.
assembly of 53 seats including 18 seats from the hills and council of ministers. However, this came to an end with the integration of Manipur in the Indian Union in Oct 1949. Thus, Manipur took part in the first general elections of 1957. The first Maram to be elected was Ng. Luikang of Maram Bazar as an independent candidate from Tadubi constituency in the year 1980. After the election, he joined the Indian National Congress in forming the government and was inducted as Parliamentary secretary.\footnote{In 1985 he won the election on congress ticket and was inducted as Minister for Education. From 1990 to 1992 he was inducted as Minister, Tribal Welfare and District Council with independent charge.} In the general election of 1992, the hill people of Manipur contested in the election, joining the major Indian political parties. The Marams also started participating in the political life of the state. After Manipur attained the statehood in 1972, the Marams actively started taking part in the new political system which considerably reduced the powers and position of the Sagong.\footnote{Ibid.}

Now the administration of the hill districts is carried out by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and the Sub-Divisional officers (SDO). The Sagong of Maram became a less powerful figure when these hierarchy of offices took certain control over his domain. The present day welfare schemes and governmental projects etc. are handled through the office of the ‘Khullakpa’ and the power and prestige of the Sagong is considerably diminished.

With many other democratic organisations like circle boards, unions and various other apex bodies for promotion of their interests being formed, the role of the Sagong has gone down considerably.