Conclusion: The Changing Scene

I have discussed in the foregoing chapters about the Wanchos through history, history here meaning time. The formidable problem that we had to reckon with is the extremely meagre extent of the conventional historical data.

This indeed posed a formidable problem. Moreover whatever earlier references we get about the Wancho are by the people who were a part of the colonial rule. They had a vested interest in the area and they were prejudiced in their views. For them the people living in remote areas should not be anything but primitive. This is the ethnocentric Western view. Empirical data indicates that no human group
however primitive it may be in terms of technology, can
survive having an integrate view of their own society
and that of the whole cosmos. One of the important tasks
of the scholars working on groups like Wancho is to bring
this feature of their society so that we have a better
understanding of their ways of life. Realising this there
was no other way but to collect the data from the people.
Since it was not possible to go in for a full scale
ethnographic research, I collected their folklore, folksongs
and such materials which are in circulation in their day
to day life. How far the information contained in these
materials is historically valid is indeed difficult to say,
at this stage of research but they do indicate about their
belief systems. The belief system is not isolated. It is
related to history, ecology, culture and experience of a population and therefore to that extent relevant in understanding the Wancho way of life. Any picture that we get is only partial.

The Wancho like other population in this region were in interaction with the people in the plains region. One can safely assume that this interaction was neither of one type nor stable but certainly persisted overtime. At times they were friendly relations and other times hostility prevailed. Nonetheless both needed each other for a variety of reasons. Roy Burman has indicated that such communities played the role of bridge and buffer between regions. Exchange of various products was another reason. In the process however, mutual cultural borrowing took place.
The Wancho practised jhum cultivation using simple hoes. It was perhaps not simply a tribal mode of economy, but it was a way of life. They developed cottage industry, art and handicraft depending on the availability of raw materials and skill. The limited trade on barter system was conducted with the neighbouring communities.

The influence of Christianity from Nagaland and the foothills of Assam have compelled many a Wancho to adopt the Christian faith. Although small in number the Wancho youth are generally attracted to modern way of life. Though the tribal life continues some educated citizens have thought that changes are necessary for the Wancho to modernize their way of life. The Wancho traditional society is in a state of transition with government backing and support of the educated Wancho youth the following are some of the changes that can be pinpointed.
1. The Wancho Youth Association: It was formed in 1972 by a group of inspired, educated and far seeing Wancho boys. The aim of the association is to bring about radical changes in the Wancho society. It is working for the society's reformation. The association is trying to stop polygamy, stop the practice of taboo, prevent the people from being superstitious and to dress decently. The association has been doing good work, and people are aware of the weaknesses of the society and are grateful for the association's guidance. It has imposed fines and successfully brought the practice of tattoo to a stop. Besides the Wancho society has been suffering problems arising out of opium consumption. Every man especially of the older generation is addicted to opium. The association is trying to eradicate this practice. There
is a case of punishing an opium smoker by banishment. The Wancho boys and girls are becoming interested in education. Graduates are not many but most of them have completed their high schools. The first Wancho girl to have matriculated was in the year 1986.

2. Education:

Spread of modern education started in the area with the starting of schools set up by the Government. One Higher Secondary School at Longding. One High School each at Khannu, Panchau, Senua, Chopnu and Wakka have been started. Primary schools have been started in most villages. Number of boys always exceeds more than girls. Girls are not sent to school for they have to act as surrogate mothers look after the house and younger children while the mothers are out in the fields. Mr. H. Ponglam is the first graduate
from the Longding area. Other graduates now among the Wancho are Wangjen Wancho, Wangnam Wancho. In Longson village there are about eight matriculates. Lower Wancho have had more education opportunities than the Upper. In 1986 the

3. Improved methods in agriculture:

Implementations of various Welfare schemes for socio-economic development of the people since Independence have brought about remarkable changes in the life of the people.

Some Wancho still practise shifting cultivation. According to the Jhum Regulation 1947, the members of a village or a community have a customary right to cultivate jhum land by shifting method. Jhum cycles have reduced greatly and the cycle in this area varies now from four to six years. Previously it was eight years. Government is trying to improve the practice of agriculture. Efforts is
to provide improve seeds, fertilizers and agriculture tools. Effort is also control the determination of the quality of land.

In some Wancho villages, farmers have started minor irrigation canals and have taken up to permanent cultivation namely, Khanubari, Ojakhu chattang, Namphang and Zedue villages. In the ancient times land was held collectively by clans. But gradually now individual ownership has come into existence. During the periods when the land is kept the fence are removed for animal grazing. Wanchos grow eleven types of millet. Maize, yams, sweet potato, topioca, varieties of arum. rice, tobacco, betel leaf, varieties of lemon, acres are grown. Tobacco and betel leaf are sold in the plains. Earlier opium trade with China and Burma had brought the Wanchos a great deal of money. With Government's
constant effort to stop illicit trade and addiction of the drug, cultivation of opium has gone down considerably and illicit trade has almost stopped. New crops and fruits have been introduced like pepper, mustard, ginger, turmeric, potato, sugar cane, garlic, pears etc.

4. Animal husbandry:

Wancho rears mithuns, pigs, and fowls. Farmers' training are conducted to educate people in agriculture, veterinary and animal husbandry by the concerned department of the Government. Under proper and scientific methods piggery, poultry, duckery and rearing of bees, goats and milch cows have started.

5. Scientific pisciculture:

Fish occupies an important place in the Wancho tradition in social and religious life. People are
predominantly non-vegetarian and had a particular aptitude to fish and relish its consumption. Fish is a must for Wangsu people on various occasions. The Wancho go out to fish in big and small groups. Community fishing is usually done during the harvest festival, birth of a new chief and chief's marriage. Fish is needed or used at the birth of a baby, naming ceremony of the child and for performing death rituals also. Under IRDP small as well as medium fisheries development programmes have been undertaken. Production ponds have come up. Fisheries have taken momentum in the area. The fish species that have been introduced are the common grass and sehurst carp, rohu, mrigal and catla.

6. Banking:

There is a branch of the SBI functioning at Longding, the sub-divisional HQ of the Wancho area.
The following are the co-operatives societies in Wancho sub-division:

(i) Wancho Consumer General Societies Ltd., Longding.

(ii) Wancho Dairy Co-operative Society Ltd. Longding.

(iii) Upper Wancho CGS Ltd., Wakka.

(iv) Kanubari CGS Ltd., Kanubari.

(v) Malla Fishery Co-op. Society Ltd., Mopekhet.

There are 2 CD & IRDP Blocks. They are:

(i) Niausa comprising of Kenubari, Longding and Pumao Circle.

(ii) Panchau and Wakka Administrative Circle.

8. Water Supply:

There is an acute shortage of good drinking water in the villages in spite of the numerous streams and creeks.
A number of water supply schemes have been taken up in these villages by the Government.

9. Health:

Earlier Wanchos treated their sickness through local herbs by incantation of priest. The Wanco word for medicine is Tongkhehoi, Injury - Loijabin; aches - Kamkhe. Besides herbs, pig, chicken, egg shells, dry fish etc were used by the priest to cure and perform the rituals of pacifying the angry God - Ban-rang who is said to be the cause of all disaster. General health of the Wanco is good. Ignorance of hygiene and unhealthy condition of living results in diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea, measles, scabied, and skin diseases. In the lower belt instances of malaria are high. There is one PHC in Longding. Sub-health centres at Pongcheu, Wakka, Kennubari, Benferra and Chopkin. Under ICDS programme
Angawadi centres are functioning in most of the villages to cater to the need of mother and child care. Goitre is a common ailment. Leprosy cases are considerably high in Upper Wancho area and also surrounding villages at Longding, viz., Senua and Zedua. There is a Leprosy Sanatorium which is functioning at Senua under the auspices of Sankar Mission, Assam. Rehabilitation centre is also there at Sanyoa for the patients who have been cured. Enough is yet to be done for the rehabilitation.

10. Social Welfare Organisation:

Welfare extension project centre in Nianu is staffed by Gram Sevak who is in charge of the Balwadi-Pre basic school; adult education, crafts; child care, nutrition and sanitation and recreational and cultural activities.
11. Road communication:

There is an all-weather BRTF from Tissa to Pongchau in Longding and Tissa to Wakka. The other route connects Longding to Sepheketi via Bimlapur, thus linking Assam to the Wancho area. Inter-village tracks of the ancient times are made and have been improved. The road development has helped the Wancho area to prosper economically, trade with the traders of Assam and tourists from the plains have added to their prosperity and exposure to the Indian mainstream.