CHAPTER - II

Historical Geography:

The principal elements which make up the geographical scene at any period of time are in addition to the physical environment, the people, the forms and distribution of their settlements, their agriculture, their crafts and industries and their trade. The reconstruction of the face of the Tirap district at the beginning of the historical period must therefore call, not only on sources which are historical in the narrow sense, but also on the researches of the geologist, botanist, meteorologist and archaeologist. This is a task of immense difficulty, and makes demand on too many disciplines ever to be satisfying or complete.

The history of the district emerged from obscurity and dubious traditions in the early part of the

13th century A.D. when the Ahoms came from North Burma through the Pangsau Pass over the Patkai, and made steady advance along the course of the Noa-Dihing in Tirap. Placed between the plains of Brahmaputra on the west and the valley of the Irrawaddy on the east, this area witnessed movement of people from across the Patkai ranges from time immemorial. The Ahoms who ruled in Assam and its eastern regions for six centuries from A.D. 1228-1826, left a series of invaluable historical chronicles known as Buranjia, which throw a flood of light on the late medieval history of Tirap. Scanty information as given in the Ahom and British records is the only source of early history of this area.

The history of the Tirap district as an administrative unit goes back to 1943 when it was called the

Tirap Frontier Tract. The tract was carved out of some areas of the Sadiya Frontier Tract and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. The name of the unit underwent a sequence of changes from the frontier tract to frontier division, and finally in 1965 to the Tirap District. The district lies to the south of the Brahmaputra. It is bounded on the north by the Dibrugarh district of Assam and the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh; on the south by Burma, on the east by Burma and on the west by the Sibsagar and Dibrugarh district of Assam and the Mon district of Nagaland. The district lies between the latitude 26°40'N and 27°40'N and the longitude 95°11'E and 97°10'E.

The Longding sub-division is located in the south-western corner of this district. This sub-division has been divided into four circles for administrative

purposes. They are – Niausa, Kanubari, Wakka and Pangchau⁴.

Generally the area is rugged and mountainous as it lies in the sub-Patkiol region. The vegetation on the whole is tropical evergreen, rain forest type and semi-evergreen according to the variations in altitude and soil conditions. There are a few grasslands in comparative less humid areas⁵. In the lower Wancho belt forest vegetation is found to be rich and varied.

The soil on the hill top is generally deep and it varies from clay to heavy loam. On the slopes it is loamy more developed and of slightly open texture. In the foothills, it has mixed features. The hilltops are more suited for cultivation of fruit trees ranging from sub-tropical to temperate deciduous plants. Cereals and other root crops grow on the slopes; paddy can also be

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5. Ibid, p.3.
cultivate. In the higher altitude the forest is generally temperate. The thick wooded areas are not the virgin area because of the shifting cultivation which has been going on in these areas for a long time.

The climate in this district is largely influenced by the terrain marked by high hills, deep ravines and valleys through which the streams and rivers flow. The climate is cool and highly humid at the lower elevation and in the valley. The rain gauge station report on Longling rainfall in 1975 as 191.10 cm.

The cold season prevailing from the later part of November to February is followed by frequent thunderstorms in the pre-monsoon season from March to May. The monsoon continues from June to about the middle of October. On the whole the climate in the hill areas is moderate and pleasant and the constant breeze make it

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6. Ibid. p.104.
salubrious.

The rivers Tesse, Tising and the Tewai constitute the principal drainage system. Besides these there are swamps, creeks and canals. Wancho area abounds in good land water resources suitable both for capture and culture of fisheries. Resources however remain unutilized for fish development of fisheries. Some of the common indigenous fish species are - Tarputitose, Labeo dero, Balilius danila etc.

In recent times the GSI and the AOC have taken keen interest in the territorytertiary formation of the area for assessing oil and coal resources in the region. Oil shows near Tisse stream south of Kambari area have been reported.

8. Ibid, p.17.
The Wanchos belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group

They lived under their 

(Chieftain) and had a highly stratified society. They have among them almost fifty villages which are divided into two groups - Tangjen and Sangjen, or lower and upper Wanco area. Some of the village in the Lower Wanco area are - Chobnu, Banferra, Wannu, Kanubari, Russa, Zedua, Senua, Niannu, Mintong, Pumao etc. Some of the villages in the Upper Wanco areas are - Longjen, Longkai, Nginu, Kamhua, Khanu, Wakka, Longphong, Bonia etc.

Fish form an important item in the Wanco diet.

It is also interesting to note that the Wanco ladies are kept on a strict diet of fish and rice after delivery.

Fish is needed for rituals as well.

10. Srivastav, L.R.N., Among the Wanchos, p.2.
Population:

In 1961 the population was 23,393 and increased to 28,650 in 1971. In 1981 of the Census record, the total population of the Wanchos was 33,072 (males - 17027 and females - 16055).

History of the Wancho

Wannu is said to be the first Wancho village.

It is situated in the Banferra circle below Longding.

Five migrating Wancho clans first settled here. They were the Ralang, Arang, Pongla, Niyanute and Yanko.

They are regarded as five original clans of the Wanchos. Among them the chief was selected from Ralang family.

Wancho were known both to the Ahoms as well as to the British.

11. see 1981 Census Record.
Relation with the Plain People

It is reported that there were little intercourse between the Wancho living in the hills and people living in the plains of Assam. This is not true. During the Ahom rule, the plains people on one hand and the Wancho were quite friendly. The Ahom king Shiva Sanga married the Banferra Princess Ladoi (there is a fort named after her as Ladoigar). The Wanchos have a custom of their own in disposing their dead and all Wancho would prefer to die in their village so as (to be lucky and get a fitting funeral) to be treated to a Wancho death ritual. When Shiva Shanga married Ladoi, he promised to send the body of his wife back to her village on her death. Accordingly, on her death the Ahom sovereign sent the corpse of his dead queen to her village. On the way up the stench of
the dead body got a little too strong ans so they i.e.
the people carrying the dead body performed the last
rites of the queen in a spot on which a fort was built
later named after her the queen ofas LADOIGARH.

The Wancho were referred to by the Assamese as
'Naga' - this word is derived from the Sanskrit ward
'nagna' or naked. The other names by which the Wanchos
were known to the plains people besides Naga were -
Rangpang, or by their villages as Banferra, Barmithunia
and Harmithunia. The Wanchos came down to the markets
of Barhat and Sepakhati in the Dibrugarh district to
trade. In the olden days, says Elwin "Mothers in plains
of Assam used to subdue naughty children by telling them
that if they did not behave, the Rangpangs would come and
carry them off". (Srivastav, p.4).
These Wancho man appear to be impressive looking and attractive. One day when a Banferra Wancho Chief Khunbao went to the Ahom king Supimpha's palace to pay tribute. One of the royal wives happen to see this impressive looking man. She was impressed and narrated to her husband about Khunbao's physical attributes. Supimpha was angry at his wife's impudence and to teach her a lesson sent her off with Khunbao. This unfortunate queen at that time was expecting. While in exile she gave birth to a boy. The next Ahom King Suhuramun came to know about this boy and granted him the post of Bar Patra Gohain. The boy was named as Kancheng Barpatra and friendly relationship grew between the Banferra Nagas and the Ahoms.
The Nature of Relationship with other Neighbouring tribes:

While their relation with the plain people was mostly commercial, the relationship with the neighbouring tribes was of social nature. The Patkoi, the geographical and political boundary between India and Burma does not prevent the people on both sides from visiting each other or entering into marriage relations. Trade forms another bond between the two.

British attitude towards the Wanchos:

The earlier Officers who visited the Wancho area found them less turbulent than the Noctes. Though they were referred to as "hideously wild", 'uncivilized', and 'dirty' by the British. In 1841-42 Captain Brodie visited many Wancho villages of Banferra, Juboke, Mulung, Jaktong, Tabong and Chongnu. People like the American Baptist missionaries Reverend Clark and his wife tried to
extinguish the Wancho urge for head-hunting. The cult of head-hunting was customary in the old days and it was connected with every aspect of their social activity.

It was not until the last quarter of the 19th century that people, specially the British Officers started visiting the Wancho area and this gave birth to unpleasantness and the government did not relish the idea of their interference. But their outrages - Chophmu Wancho's attack on Banferra, murder committed by Banferra Wanchos in Sibsagar Dodorali, Wancho kidnapping of tea garden labourers made the British apprehensive about this tribe. In February 1875, Lt. Halcombe, the Asst. Commissioner of Sibsagar (Jaipur) accompanied by Capt. W.F. Badgley the Security-in-charge of Assam Infantry and a mixed groups of Engineers, Sentries, survey group and load carriers entered the
Wanchos area. The British had actually gone to survey the area and link a road to Burma. They were escorted by a guide from the Rusa village and they made their way to Nissa village (Srivatav, p.99).

Murder of Lt. Halcombe and his men:

The Wanchos did not like outsiders and anyone who violated the sanctity of his land was not a friend had to be punished. It is said that the soldiers explored the village and on seeing a corpse on a platform they laugh at it and one of the chief of Nginnu who had just died. This raised the alarm that the aliens needed to be punished. A dead body was sacred — how dare they could defile it by touching. The punishment of this crime was not even innovated — for no one had ever broken this law. The confused and angry Wanchos attacked the British sleeping in
their camps with daos and spears. The British caught unawares at a loss. Lt. Halcombe and eighty men were butchered. The injured men escaped with Capt. Badgley to the Chanu village where they implored for help. The Chanu chief "Yatau" refused all help because he was an ally of the Nginnu Chief. Most of the wounded British and others in their party died. A graveyard of these unfortunates is said to be still seen in the outskirts of the Chanu village.

When the report of this tragic incident reached the British in Assam, punitive expedition was immediately sent to avenge the death of their fellowmen and teach the Wanchos a lesson.

**British revenge on the Wanchos:**

A punitive expedition under Brig. Nuthal was sent to the Wacho area in April 1875 and there they stayed on till May. This time the British has taken with
them Nocte interpreter from Bouduria. The Wanchos even today say that their misinterpretation caused more trouble and the Wanchos became bitter enemies of the British. The villages of Nginnu, Nissa, Longkai, Kamhua were burnt down. The Niannu village was partially burnt.

R.G. Woodthrope, the Assistant Superintendent of the Royal Engineers who had come to survey the area says that the Wanchos could do nothing to stop the British. He found an old woman in a hallow of a tree and tried his best to quell her fear by giving her some money. The British gave the Chanu Chief a safari hat as present. It was to show their gratitude for letting the fleeing and injured British party rest in his village. But the proud Chief refused, pointing to his own crown. As the British left, the Chanu chief raised his hand, says Woodthrope,
as a gesture of friendship perhaps.

In 1876 a small force again escorted a survey party to the Wancho hills and again burnt the Nginnu village which refused to surrender some of those connected in the massacre of 1875.

The Nginnu villagers were said to have been so helpless against the British attack that they fled to Lhamnu village. The chief of Lhamnu did not want to get involved and bring the wrath of the British on himself and refused all help. The Nginnu villagers went to the Namsang villages (Noctes), he promised to help on payment the tributes only. The Namsang Chief demanded two goats as annual tribute, which the Nginnu gave in return for their help. Even now the Nginnu villagers send one goat annually to the Nocte village - Namsang. (Srivastav, p.105).