CHAPTER - III

Material Culture:

The land of the Wancho is surrounded on all sides by high hills, the area is not fertile except for the foothills the rest of the land is not suitable for good cultivation. It is indeed a sad thing that the Wanchos hardly get paid anything inspite of their hard labour. Here jhum is practised. The Wanchos call jhum fields Haram. Ninetyfive percent of the people work in the fields. Although appreciable progress has been registered in the field of economy due to mainly to various development schemes initiated by the Administration it will still be true to say that the economic activities of the people of Arunachal Pradesh continue to be largely of a subsistence nature based on agriculture. Agriculture
is mostly of a supplementary nature to other activities such as hunting, food gathering, trapping, fishing, rearing of animals and trade (T.G. p.101).  

There existed inter village trade as well as trade with the neighbouring people of Assam and Nagaland. Inhabitants of Banferra, Rusa and other villages close to the plains use to come down to the markets of Sepekhati and Borhat for purchasing coloured clothes, beads, iron for making dao and salt. The Wanchos living near the Patkoi hills did not however, come down because those markets were distant to them. Traditional trade in indigenous products of however limited scope is no doubt still carried on, some local people own shops and do brisk business.

1. see Pravastav's Among the Wanchos, p.3.
"In jhuming the people cut the trees and plants on the hill sides during the dry season and burn them along with the organic deposits accumulated through many years of leaf-fall, before the rains set in. They use a jhum clearing for two years and then abandon it after a period of years which varies according to the pressure of population and availability of land. The Wanchos cultivate millet, paddy, maize, arum, tapioca and pulses, gourd, brinjal, potato, garlic are grown by them. They have 11 varieties of paddy and rice and 4 varieties of arum. Poppy is grown on a very limited scale. Millet and paddy are cultivated in turns. Harvest by hand-picking is a common method among the tribes in the district. Wet cultivation is limited."

2. Elwin, V., A Philosophy for NEFA, pp. 80-81.
3. Tirap District Gazetteer, p.106.
Jhum cultivation has three stages: (i) cutting of all shrubs, weeds and trees at the fields chosen for Haram is left to dry (ii) after about 2-3 months these are burnt, and (iii) the ash is then spread out evenly and the seed sown. Implements used by the Wanchos are very few. Daoos to cut the trees and shrubs, sticks used to dig holes, a wooden stick with metal tip called Rohun is used for clearing the land and at the time of harvesting. People go to the Priest and he predicts the future and profits of that particular Haram by cracking eggs and observing omens therein. Only if the egg show perfect yolk which fortell a good harvest the farmers will go to cultivate, if not another Haram will be chosen. Due to this, some spots are cultivated more often than other spots. The implements were good in the old days for limited agriculture
A Wancho Chief
but they are inadequate for large scale farming. Ploughs are used for wet cultivation. In the Wancho area we find individual ownership of land. The Wangham (chief) own much of the land. No hasty change from jhuming to permanent cultivation is possible in this mountainous terrain. But, by all means, attempts at introduction of permanent cultivation wherever possible side by side with improved jhum cultivation are being made. Although the jhum land Regulation of 1947 has given the people customary rights over the jhum land, they have been showing willingness to adopt the new methods and techniques of sedentary cultivation. The agricultural shows, exhibition and demonstrations on the modern system of cultivation have stimulated in the people a curiosity and enthusiasm. The development.

4. Ibid. p.110
of communications and the establishment of administrative centres in different parts of the district have opened new horizons for social and economic progress of the people, and this is apparent in the field of agriculture. A project sponsored by the Regional Research Laboratory, Jorhat has been undertaken at Senna village near Longding for cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants with involvement of the villagers. A plot of land adjacent to the Soil Conservation Training-cum-Demonstration Centre at Senna has been brought under cultivation of *Solanum khasianum* to provide planting material for commercial cultivation by the villagers. Side by side with cultivation, animals are domesticated by the people for food and sacrifice, trade and payment of bride price. They are also means of barter in the tribal economy. Compensations are realized in terms of animals. Pigs, long-haired goats, mithuns and hens are

5. Ibid, p.110
reared.

The geographical remoteness of the area combined with its lack of communication and transport facilities and the low standard of living of the people in the pre-Independence days are responsible for the economic and commercial under-development of the district even though it is rich in forest minerals and other resources. In the absence of money as a medium of exchange, the whole system of trade and commerce was based mainly on barter or exchange of commodities according to the needs of individuals, families or villagers.

Trade with Burma:

Trade relation between the people of this district and those of Upper Burma had been in existence for centuries.

Bhano⁶ a great trading centre of the Irrawaddy river.

⁶ Ibid, p.133.
attracted a large number of traders from this district, who
carried their merchandise for exchange or sale through the
passes across the Patkoi ranges which they used as trade
routes. In exchange of handloom products, tea leaves, salt,
beads etc the people of this area imported from Burma daos,
iron implements, fishing nets, spears, Burmese garments. One
of the principal items of trade was opium. With the extension
of administration in Tirap with the result of the
clandestine movement across the border for trade has been
stopped.

Trade with the plains of Assam:

From time immemorial, the people of Tirap led
regular trade relations with the people of the plains of
Assam. But no detailed account of the early trade is
available. Some of the Ahom Buranjis refer to the people
by the present Tirap district trading with the Assamese.

As a matter of fact, Tirap was one of the important sources of salt for the people of Assam the Brahmaputra valley before it was regularly supplied by the merchant of the Company through Bengal. Moreover there are some references in the Buranjis to the supply of raw coal and crude kerosene oil to the people of the plains by the Wanchos which they dug out from the pits in the hills.

In the past, the articles disposal and exchange were brought to the market in the plains of Assam. Now the tribal people sell their articles instead of bartering them for other commodities buy their necessities from the plains markets.

7. Ibid, p.133.
The chart gives an account of the merchandise exchanged between the people of Assam and the Wanchos in the old days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the tribe</th>
<th>Articles produced and sold in the plains Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanchos</td>
<td>Cottage Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bamboo mat, cane and bamboo, wooden images,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The articles that the Wanchos generally purchase from the plain markets are: mill-made clothes, beads, tea leaves, tobacco, bidi, household utensils etc.

Before independence, the area was initially isolated and there was no trade centre but a chain of markets have

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sprung up along the border. The Wanchos go to Berhat, Namrup and Sonari.

**Inter-tribal trade among the local communities:**

A regular trade was current among the tribes themselves within the district and with those of the neighbouring district of Lohit. The articles of trade consisted of the daily necessities like salt, opium, cattle, hand-woven clothes and articles brought from the plains of Assam.

**Banking:**

There is no indigenous banking system in the district. There was a custom among some of the people to bury the money in the house for security reasons. In order to stop this practice and in the interest of the local people, the Government have been encouraging the people to
make saving. A number of local post offices with saving account facilities have been opened. The SBI at Longding gives out loans to the people.

Handicrafts:

The tribal arts and crafts are unique in many ways and for their development there are craft centres with training and production wings. The Wancho communities are engaged in weaving. In the Wancho society, weaving is done by women belonging to the Royal Families. Their women woven bags have a combination of deep red, yellow, black and green colours against a white background. "These zigzag designs," observes Dr. Elwin "are popular on the sashes used by the Konyaks and Wancho to carry their baskets and are common on the Wancho bags". 

He further mentioned of a having bone design and diamond pattern on the Wancho bags.

Weight and Measure:

In recent times method of measurements have brought a change in the Wancho traditional system of measurement. Till recently and though rare cases even now they had the barter system. The conical cane basket Kiase (cylindrical basket) and Phackjack measured from the finger tips of the other hand also stretched out (spreading of hands and arms) were used as units of measurement. Four baskets full would be 1 tham, 5 phaok of a normal structured man would be as long as a house.

Metric System:

In order to implement the metric system of weights and measures introduced throughout the country
under the Standard of Weights and Measures Act, 1956, a government organisation of weights and measures has been functioning in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964. This has simplified the business transactions.

**Household Implements:**

People make their household articles like pot of clay and used even for rituals. Bamboo pots to carry and store water. Mats made of bamboo strips, vessel of wood, furniture both of wood and cane, they make their own. Thanup (grain grinder) out of a long log of hard wood.

**Weaving:**

The Wancho word for weaving is Ngintsong. In the olden days, this art was restricted only to the ladies of royal family. Weaving was done on loin looms - bags blankets, sashes and loincloth were made of cheap cotton, sometimes silks. Now the Wancho ladies of all classes have started

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10. Ibid., p.137.
weaving. Loin looms are still being used in the houses. 

Government weaving centres have introduced the fly-shiftle looms. In the lower Wancho areas sericulture has also been started. Wancho woven goods are in great demand. Their bags with bearing bone and diamond horizontal stripe in orange, red, yellow, and green are beautiful.

**Cane and bamboo work:**

All the tribes adapted in cane and bamboo work. The Wanchoos are likewise good craftsmen. Their bamboo mats are in great demand in the plains market. The necklaces made out of grass by the Wancho women depicts their finer craftsmanship. Their baskets made of *lajai* and *radang* bamboos are valuable.

**Wood carving:**

Some of the finest and best wood-carving in the entire area of Arunachal Pradesh are found among the
Wanchos of the Tirap district. The central motif in wood-carving is a human head. Dolls, plates, tobacco pipes, statuettes and forms such as frogs, tigers etc. Verier Elwin remarked that "Here the wood-carving in the past has been very largely associated with head-hunting and the human head dominates almost everything that is made. Thus there are tobacco pipes with the bowl carved in the shape of a head; drinking mugs with warriors carrying off heads in triumph; small wooden heads and little human figures, often done with astonishing realism and which again celebrate a successful raid." The Wanchos are good at carving.

Wancho smoking pipe

Wancho smoking pipe

Wancho hair ornament

Grave effigy
Smithery:

The Wanchos earlier made their own barrel for muzzle loading guns to hunt and protect their field. Though the Government has ordered to stop of such gun manufacture clandestine cases can still be found.

Ornamentation:

The bulk of ornaments used is made up of beads brought from the plains. Their bead necklaces, silver, grass, cane and wood jewellery are worth admiring. To quote Verrier Elwin, \(^{12}\) "the Wanchos are not fond of clothes, but make up for this by the use of splendid ornaments of ivory, bone, horn, shell and beads, while the more ephemeral grace of feathers and flowers distinguishes their ears and hair". "The designs and colour combination are superb. One Wanco fgirl received President's award for
A Wancho Run (House)
master craftwoman this year for excellent bead works.

Besides bead works the Wanchoes also make ornament from glass beads, wild seeds, cane, bamboo reeds.\(^13\)

House site and houses:

The Wancho villages are extremely well placed, occupying the highest points of the ridges on which they stand and commanding all the approaches to them. In the olden days bamboo and cane stockades were built. "The scenery was magnificent; a high darkly-wooded range behind Ninu descend abruptly for about 1,500 feet, when it suddenly changes its prewipes for beautiful open undulation country, well watered by a succession of clear, babbling streams at the cool waters of which in the deep shade of clumps of trees, dotted along their banks, magnificent methna (mithun) quench their thirst; across

the Dili, into which these streams all flow, rise other lofty hills wooded along the ridges, but cultivated below on the more gentle slopes, over which the cloud-shadows are lazily moving, and on which numerous village glitter brightly. To our left the high peaks of the Patkai range lose their outline in the hot and lazy atmosphere; it is a beautiful country and today basking in the still sunlight all is so calm and peaceful before us, it would seem almost impossible that treachery and murder could find a place here; but the black cloud already darkening the sky changing the blue of the air to a marky brown the roar of the flames and crashing of timbers behind us, and the thought of the scene of the massacre, which is still before us, remind us of the eternal truth that even the Earth's fairest spots the fiercest passions of man may make their home.14.

The house site does not belong to the village commonland. Whenever a new village is established, plot of land are allotted to the individuals. The individual constructs his house on a suitable site within the limits of the land allotted to him by the community. The individual exercises full and heritable right of ownership over the land allotted to him. No ceremonies are observed either during the selection of site or at the time of construction of a house.

The Wancho generally build their houses at the ground level, the eaves almost touching the ground on two sides. The rear portion of the house is however, raised on piles depending on the slant of hills. The framework is built of solid logs and beams. The front portion of the house is used as a common room. Behind

15. Ibid, p.76.
the common room there are compartment and cubicles on both sides or on one side of the house with a wide passage running all along the house. The number of such compartments depends on the number of the families. Each compartment has a hearth in the centre. In the rear there are rooms for the unmarried girls.

We can divided a house into three classes. They are:

(1) The Wangham (chief) house, (2) The Commoners house, and (3) Morungs and granaries. The Wangham's house is the longest and built on the most level site in the village. It is sometimes 200 feet long and 50 feet broad. Haimendorf has observed that the chief's possess better houses and richer furnitures. The chief's house

consists of two huge halls at either end, both sides of the central corridor are stone rooms or bedrooms. The bedroom of his wives have separate hearths, their own door of exit and a verandah. Near the entrance stand the logdrum and some distant away stands the log grounder. The hall behind is used as reception, and conference centre. It is raised, has a diamond design mat floor. There are bedrooms for the unmarried girls of the village in the chief's house. The pillars are carved and the grain grounder has only two holes.

The Wancho commoner's house is much smaller than the Chief's. The design is almost the same except for the floor. It has a cross design unlike the diamond design in the Chief's house.

The roof of the houses is thatched, the thong
(post) project through the roof. These protuding post are also covered with palm leaves so that no rain seeps into the house. This system of using extra long post is to enable the owner to use the same post in cases the bottom of the post gets rotten. The decayed portion can be cut off and the post lowered.

The Wancho house is generally having five thongs posts). This post are given different names:

1st pillar - HUMKHANG THONG
2nd pillar - THOOGNU
3rd pillar - WATAK THONG
4th pillar - REMRING THONG
5th pillar - KHUATHO THONG

The second pillar THOOGNU is significant in every Wancho house. The Wancho bride on entering her husband's house for the first time has to circle around this pillar three times. The fourth pillar - REMRING THONG is
used for rituals and all rituals are performed near this pillar.

The Wancho hun (house have a chang (platform) along with some rooms on the ground level. The men stay on the chang portion and noi (female room) are on the ground floor level. The houses are pitch dark and its a wonder that the Wancho can see inside it. The hearth are a common feature. Salpira (stool) with short legs and tables are seen carved out of one piece of wood. Beds too are carved out of a single piece of wood. Changes are coming into the Wancho house. Modern furniture are to be seen.

Granaries:

These are large substantial buildings raised four feet from the ground and situated in the midst of
the village. Morungs are long structures with beds on either sides, it looks like a military barrack. The pillar of this building is usually carved. The raised verandah is sometimes at the rear of the house or from the side of the house. There is a hearth in the middle and contains a big log drum.

Generally houses are built by the local people on cooperative and reciprocal basis. The building materials are collected locally from the nearby forests by those who wants to construct a house and the labour is supplied freely by the villagers. The owner of the house feeds those who help. The unique feature of most Wancho house is the open bamboo platform, generally rectangular in shape, extends outwards from the main house on one side in the front. This serves the purpose of a courtyard as well as for drying of foodstuffs. 17

17. Choudhury, S.D., Tirap district gazetteer, p.73.
Dress (Man):

Men shave the hair round the crown and temple and grow hair only the top of their heads. They then tie back this bunch of long hair at the back of the head with a comb called Khalet. They wear a cap called Khawcoup. Upper portion of their body is bare, and they wear a loin cloth Khalet, which is a piece of cloth of about 22 inches long and 6 inches deep. It overlaps the front and back and hangs down like a skirt down to the knees. They love to wear a lot of ornaments of ivory, bead and glass. Sometimes string of monkey skulls and metal pendants are also worn round their necks. The necklaces are called Jik. The men wear a cloured arm band. They have holes in their years and often wear the strangest of earplugs, sometimes it is bamboo pieces, glass or plastic plug, broken bottle necks and safety pins. Only the Wangham

18. Ibid..p.78.
wear a strip of blue beads round his calf. Their dang or dao is inseperable, they carry it round everywhere. Most of these men have tattoo marks on their face, neck, arm chest and back. Their belt is called Zapak. Hats predict social structure status. A specially made fillet for their hair is used by the chiefs. Hairpins of cane and bone are also used. The warriors who has taken skulls wears are wooden hands carved out like hairpins. On the arms the Wancho men wears chaklit (armlet). The Wancho men carries a weapon. Besides, chang (dao), pah (spear) with small heads and decorated with goats hair is also popular.

Dress (Woman):

The girls run around bare till they age given a loin cloth. The woman wear a piece of cloth round her hips called the kihuthau which is about 28 inches long
and 6 inches wide. The upper portion of the body is left bare. The Chong Wangsa the chief Queen Wangchasie and Wangchasie wear countless numbers of necklaces while the Wanpah women do not wear much. The Royal ladies keep long hair which they tie with palm leaves (tockou) so that the hair is covered and remains stiff and straight.

The Wancho men and women are very fond of head-dresses and ornaments. Head-dresses of various designs made of cane strips decorated with beads and stones. An ordinary head-dress is called khupong and the costly one liklikhasan, which is decorated with beads, furs and tusks of wild boars. 19

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19. Ibid. p. 78.