Chapter IV

THE NAGA VILLAGE COUNCILS

Section 'A'

THE VILLAGE COUNCIL IN SUNGRATSU VILLAGE: A PICTURE OF THE AO NAGAS

Village Organizations

The village is the basic social and political unit and the village council is its political organization which still exists and continues to function till today. Community life in such a self-governing unit was regulated by an institution called the Putu Menden (village council) with its customary laws, and the political will of the
village was expressed through it. Thus the village council in Sungratsu function effectively hence tradition till today. This village is an average sized village of the Ao-Naga tribals, and its social and other organizations are discussed below.

The formation of this village was simultaneous with the organization of its Putu Menden (village council) to provide rule and administration. Initially, the Chongli and Mongsen dialect group and its constituent clans were grouped under one Putu Menden (village council). However, at a later period the members of Mongsen group increased manifold, many of whom became charismatic and also chauvinistic. Because of these advantages, the Mongsen group formed a parallel council of their own within the village. In this way, the Mongsen council separated itself from the Chongli group and thus started the process of creating two village councils within the village, one for Mongsen Khel and the other for the Chongli Khel respectively. In a village council generally, the leader of a respective council is known as the Onger or Tsunger. The other members of the council are known as Tazung or Samen, who are served by other functionaries for all practical purposes known as Chidangodang or Tsatangodang. The Putu Menden or Village Council in their own way share much resemblances with the structure of a modern parliament divided into Ministers and Parliamentarians.
In terms of village organizations, the above is followed by the peer-group division of its village population called Yanga Lemsa or Ofu. One Ofu (category) consists of a conglomeration of members born under different but consecutive years clubbed into one. This village at all times has eight Ofu (peer-groups), who are responsible for all types of village communal works, including martial services during inter-village and tribal wars. Females also have their peer-group divisions known for its role of providing socialization processes and important source of labour during cultivation and harvest in a corporate way.

Every three years, a new group of boys born within three consecutive years (i.e.in fact one peer-group) enters the Morung (bachelors hall) which constitutes one of the most significant village institution of socialization and native education, where a male learns the traditions and customs, arts and crafts, warfare and discipline. The eight peer-group divisions, identified and qualified through entry into the Morung are constituted as follows:

**Category-A**

1) Sungpur  
   (16-18 years)

2) Tenapang  
   (19-21 years)

3) Sangemmmeyin  
   (22-24 years)

4) Ḥumpoksa tanubo (junior)  
   (25-27 years)

5) Ḥumpoksa tambo (senior)  
   (28-30 years)
These constitute the busiest supporting staff to their elders. In vernacular, they are called Sungpu which in literal translation means servants, although it does not carry the same connotation as in other societies.

Category-B

1) Sungjilep tanubo (junior) (31-33 years)
2) Sungjilep tambo (senior) (34-36 years)

These are village guards, the strongest age-groups. Leaders, commanders who are distinguished by their merit and achievement come under these groups.

Category-C

1) Jumpoklup (37 years and above)

Members of this group are worthy to become village council members called Aiet.

According to tradition, a person usually retired from his Morung/Nruju life when he married and began to settle down, but he remains a member of his original peer-group where his membership continues till he dies. After his time in the Morung a person by virtue of his worthiness and capabilities may even be selected to be a councillor to the village council. Under such circumstances, after his term of office is over, he very likely becomes a priest for life.
The category A-1 is the youngest who performs certain supporting duties to various elder groups, till in three years time a new peer group replaces them which in consequence elevates them to the consequent higher level in stages. The category B is the strongest peer-group whose duty is to perform as a defence-offense personnel, particularly so in traditional olden days. Category C is the last and the eldest peer-group which play a prominent part who contributes as a member to the organization of village council. Four to five or more peer-groups would accumulate under this category who are entitled to become councillors if they are meritorious to the village council, through representation of their respective clans.

Theoretically, the system of peer-group divisions and its main principle still exists in this village even today. Still, when a communal work is to be performed by the village, the peer-groups division come to the fore on such particular occasions. However, the practice of living in the Morung with different peer-group rankings on seniority basis to perform specific functions accordingly has today more or less disappeared, which are now rather ased by Local Students' Union, various voluntary club organisations, etc. in a sense of revivalism. The mere fact is that, these modern organizations today perform certain menial duties which were the duties to be performed by the peer-group divisions traditionally. However, the images and
sense of peer-groups are still inculcated into the minds of the villagers, which reflects the customs and tradition of the village. To illustrate further in support, a bundle of dry firewood is given to the village council (in place of the Morung) for use in any village common purposes which signifies a person as being a member of a peer-group and thus continues till he enters the status of a senior kumpoksia (i.e. Category A-5). Thus the peer-group divisions determine a firm basis of village social organization hence tradition where the village council (Puttu Menden) is the apex authority to maintain and regulate all these organizations.

Besides the peer-group divisions, in the traditional days, i.e. before Christian proselytisation and colonial administration, there were six Morung/Aruju (bachelors hall) for each clan respectively, and one Senden Ruju (general conference hall) in general where all the village council meetings were held. An Aruju is a traditional institution where all the male adults possibly from 14-16 years till the time of their marriage undergo training under the senior boys who are experienced. It then functioned as a miniature university where they lived, learned and worked, though the boys ate with their parents in their respective houses. This sort of training was imparted in many subjects of learning knowledge and to acquire experience. Thus the knowledge and experience obtained were useful for boys in
their practical life. Hence a person ceased to be a member in the Morung/Aruju, i.e. by marriage, they would continue to remain as ex-officio members of the Morung/Aruju and henceforth they were entitled to hold office in the village council by virtue of their experience and integrity on the basis of representing their respective clan concerned in the ultimate sense for their selection. Thus the Morung/Aruju served as an integral unit of village society as well as training ground. The Aruju system was in existence till 1940's in this village.

However, the Christianization and modern education in collaboration with the British colonial administration was of great impact upon the activities of the Morung/Aruju system as well as the minds of general public at large in this village life as in all other Naga tribal villages in general. Subsequently, the Aruju system was replaced by the "Room system" whose function based on modern education, does not exactly replicate the Aruju teachings. The American Baptist Missionary Society (ABMC) led by Dr. Clark and his wife established at Impur, the headquarters of the Baptist Mission, on 4th October 1894 for proselytizing the heathen tribals into the Christian faith (Yunuo, 1984:116). Since the Morung/Aruju represented their old religion with heathen rites, it was forbidden to function as an institution citing that it was contrary to the teachings of Christianity. They built churches along with educational and medical services
for civilizing the villagers and the Nagas in general at the cost of replacing the Morung/Arju establishment. But the methods of proselytisation had come modified as the years passed, and later-day missionaries sensibly tried to preserve all that was good in old traditions. Thus the teachings of Christianity along with British administration took a leading part in bringing the converted Christian Nagas to abandon many aspects of their culture and practices and henceforth that is how the Morung/Arju system disappeared among the Ao Naga tribe.

The Morung/Arju system was replaced by a modified form of institution called "Room system" based on the principles of modern education and Christian ethics as a point of socialization for the villagers. The room system was first established at a place called Alungchen Compound around 1950 which was easily accessible from Sungratsu village. Added to it the government also established a school and it was found that not only people from this village but people from other villages came and lived in the rooms to learn and be educated.

The tenets of Morung/Arju system was based on certain rites and experiences passed down from seniors to juniors and contrary to Christian teachings. On the other, the "room system" (physically, a bungalow run like a hostel) aimed at education along with Christian teachings. In the "room system" all the males and females were initiated into
the respective rooms on reaching Class III and lived till they passed out at Class VI. And like in the Morung/Arju, the seniors of the "room" by virtue of their higher class passed down their knowledge and experience to the juniors. There were written rules and guidelines to maintain order guided by a Warden (mainly a school teacher). The "room system" was divided into three functional levels, namely the Juniors, the Half-rules, and the Seniors. The juniors looked after the kitchen works and served the seniors, while at the same time pursued their academic objectives. The half-rules who were exempt from kitchen works as well as certain menial duties were entitled to exercise room rules in the absence of senior members within the room jurisdiction. The seniors guided by a Warden exercised the ultimate authority in all aspects of room affairs. However, in extreme cases, any dispute which could not be settled within the room jurisdiction were brought up before the village council for settlement. Thus a youth learned education along with Christian teachings imparted through prayer meetings, morning assemblies and other related social activities during his room life, over which the village council exercised the ultimate authority in all room activities including construction of rooms, maintenance of room and school buildings and settlement of undecided disputes within the room.
Like the Morung/Aruju system, the "room system" slowly disappeared hence 1970's owing to proliferation of more schools with hostel followed by growth of many religious organizations aimed at imparting religious teachings to the youth. What today remains in the villages are the empty dilapidated buildings that served as rooms then for boys and girls. In comparison, the Morung/Aruju and later the "room system" appropriately resembles the Komsomol of the Soviet Russia in many respects (Horam, 1975:70). Today, it is no longer considered necessary to built and maintain Morung/Aruju and the 'rooms' for the same reasons that villages need not be guarded against enemy villages and tribes.

Functions and Power of Village Council in Sungratsu Village

Legally, the Putu Menden (village council) has power to maintain all administrative affairs in the village and to try both civil and criminal cases. In respect to criminal cases, the Putu Menden (village council) can impose a fine up to a maximum of rupees five hundred or a live domesticated pig, in lieu of money. In case of civil disputes, it has the power to settle a dispute without any limit as to its value. In practice, however, the Putu Menden (village council) decides even a murder case imposing fines up to 10 Mithuns (a semi domesticated animal), i.e. 'Rs.20,000/-' worth as is today's value. Thus, the
settlement of disputes by means of arbitration by the village council in this village play an important role in the life of the village citizens.

Many disputes were and are even today settled by a payment of live cow or pig or in exceptional cases money. Transgressors of conventional rules land ownership and boundary disputes and water dispute, clan dispute in matters relating to decent, divorce, marriages, thefts, etc. are some major cases common since tradition, upon which the village council's arbitrates. However, any dispute of a minor intensity within the clan jurisdiction were and are settled by the clan elders themselves, for instance, like adultery, incest, theft and divorce. Most generally, verdicts or decision on any issue arrived at by the village elders were and are final and binding upon the individuals and parties in question. In fact, settlement of all cases within the village were and are controlled by men of knowledge based on customs and practices. In this respect, as J.B. Lowell confirms, "man is part of an interacting social system of power holders, within which he is a central figure, he has guidelines for this interaction, and it is the knowledge of these rules of use that constitutes the principal means by which man acquires, keeps, and utilizes power (Fogelson and Adams, 1977:119)". Thus the rules of conduct within which the village councillors function and
act are prerogatives of enforcing the law independently of which the individuals and parties are thus obliged to obey.

Generally, cases were and are settled at the Onger's or Tsunger's (leader of the council) house. In some matters, cases were and are also settled at the eldest Taung's or Samen's (steering member of the councillors) house. The Tatar or Tetar (village councillors in general) were and are called Shilang Menden or Salang Menchen (seat of meat eaters). As regards to dispute between councillors themselves, the disputants would be treated as litigants unless the case is settled between them. Under such circumstances, the accused/guilty person would be terminated from the post of councillors after being fined a live pig and lost his entitlement to become a councillor in future.

Most disputes were and are settled by means of oath taking (Azungashitep) in the context of litigations. The swearing of oath by the parties was and is performed in presence of the judges (i.e. village elders/councillors). Every village has its fixed procedure for ordinary oaths. In Sungratsu village, each litigant pulls six leaves of a certain plant and then cuts three thin bamboos from a small clump preserved exclusively for oath taking. The winner is he who pulls and cuts the cleanest bamboo. Swearing of oaths on tigers' or leopards' teeth, biting on human skulls picked up from the wreckage of some corpse-platform were some of the different forms, but these are very rarely
resorted to and believed to be fatal to the swearers particularly if guilty. Cutting of a fowl's head was another symbol of oath taking in this village. Thus in support of the legal norms which pilot our lives, F.B. Roy stated that "there is no law so strong as custom (Oswalt, 1972:225)". In fact, in the absence of written laws and formal courts the validity of conventions and customs from traditions serves as firm legal base.

The most common way of settling disputes under oath was and is land disputes. In land dispute, the disputants by custom eat soil from the land in question and prays that he may swell up and die if he is speaking falsely. Six days are waited upon to test the fortune of the parties in dispute according to tradition, in the belief that the guilty would be revealed by natural circumstances.

In this regard, an oath is a solemn calling upon the supernatural to witness that truth prevails or to curse the one bearing false claim as punishment. Thus it is believed that the supernatural reveals the truth and justice restored identified in the actions of men; that is in this case the village council in particular. Traditionally, there used to be conceptualization of supernaturally evoked evidence, sharply distinguished from natural secular evidence. However, all Naga villages, in the absence of codified laws, from tradition resorts to supernatural evidence and thus all actions and consequences thereof
considered divine. In this way, Naga customary law as practiced by the village councils hence tradition is seemingly given an appearance of being supernaturally sanctioned and therefore the understood moral demand that evil and crime must not go unpunished. In fact, the demand is that harm and transgressions must be returned equally in degree if not in kind. This forms the spiritual basis of all Naga customary law, wherein it is guided and steered by specific customs, conventions and practices depending upon the nature of case under trial and the specific penalty pronounced thereof, which were both punitive and retributive.

In Sungratsu village, there are the Chongli and Mongsen dialect groups with their respective councils, which are different from the other in certain functional dimensions. Of these, what was then traditionally established in Sungratsu village still operates today.

The Chongli System of Village Council

The system of village council and its governance that was and is even now followed by Chongli council in Sungratsu were run by a body of men called Tatar (chosen leader or elders). They remain in the seat for a Putu (one generation i.e. 30 years). In the Putu Menden (village council), the Tatar represented the ruling generation of men and were composed of the following tiers of organization.
viz. Onger Menden (leader of the councillors to the council, meaning all the council members). The Tazung Menden (steering or leading members of the council) and Chidangodang (general functionaries to the superior village councillors). The procedure of representation from the various clans in the Putu Menden (village council) today by comparison reflects a federal system of parliamentary democracy.

(a) The Onger Menden (Leader of the Party, i.e. of all the Councillors)

Traditionally, the Onger was the formal head of the executive government of the village through the council. He is normally selected from the Ozulum clan. All meetings of Putu Menden (village council) were held at the house of the Onger. However, meetings of the village council in connection with the village communal works and certain memorial proceedings were and are held at the house of the eldest member of the Tazung. The Onger was and is even now entitled to get the head of all animals slaughtered by the councillors in his court-yard. As with another Naga tribe, the word Onger is synonymous to the word ‘Wong’ of the Phom tribe, who share similar function, although the latter often is mistaken to be a chief in its literal sense of omnipotence.
The Onger in case of a crisis within the council and thereby its inability to function, by virtue of resident power, can summon an emergency Mongdang (conference) of the total village citizens for a referendum and even of impeachment of any member if the occasion so demands. In case, if any member being found guilty, the erring party was and is punished by imposition of fines and for serious offences, the member was and is expelled or recalled from the council by the clan concerned.

(b) The Tazung (Steering or Leading Members of the Council)

The four Tazung selected from each clan i.e. two from Jami clan and one each from Ozukum and Lemtur clan, which constitutes a quorum, of higher ranked clans by virtue of age and experience enjoy respect and reward, who are traditionally entitled to the biggest share of meat. In practice, they formed the steering force of the Putu Menden. They exercised both executive and judicial functions and possessed the prerogative of deciding for the whole village (i.e. the Chongli group only) and its administration. They also exercised the power to prepare estimates for expenditure and collection of village resources in terms of kind and cash contemporarily.

They were and are still considered as the real village administrators. They hear and settle all cases that
require judgment. Public meetings and assemblies were and are summoned by them and the seniormost among themselves (i.e. Jamir Tazung) presides over the assemblies. They were and are still entitled to a share of two hind legs, including the buttock of all animals slaughtered as salary for their services in the absence of regular pay. The rest of the meat will be cut into varying sizes and distributed among the other lower members of the council, according to seniority in age, directed by convention.

(c) The Chidangodang (General Functionaries to the Superior Councillors)

The four Chidangodang selected from each clan (i.e. two from Jami clan and one each only from Ozukum and Lemtur as tradition says), by actual function may be described as the virtual kitchen committee, who ensure that a good meal is cooked in all the council meetings and also on festive occasions. Besides cooking, they are also responsible for procuring all necessary items of food and drink. They also perform certain menial duties for the other councillors. They were and are even now, not entitled to any meat share, but they partake in all meals prepared. In case of death of Tazung, the Chidangodang is entitled to prematurely succeed the seat of the deceased of the same clan.
The Mongsen System of Village Council

In the Mongsen system, the council is run by chosen representatives called Tatar (councillors) and the council formed by Tatar (councillors) was and is called Tatar Menchen (councillors representing the various clans), consisting of the following tiers, namely the Tsunger (literally meaning chief, though not in the omnipotent sense), the Samen (steering or leading members of the council), and the Mapangtsar (general functionaries to superior councillors).

(a) The Tsunger (Chief/Leader of the Council)

The Tsunger, in the Mongsen council were generally selected from two clans, where the first preference was given to Longchar clan and the second preference to the Aier/Imchen clan. This kind of preferential practice of alternating between the two clans are still practiced in this village hence tradition. In the Tsunger (leader of the council) a comparison is found with that of the Katikiro, sometimes translated as "Prime Minister" among the Baganda’s of village Nupe (Burling, 1974:41).

On a comparative note, in the Chongli system, the Onger occupies a seemingly more dignified position, in the sense that he enjoys executive powers, which is not exactly the case in the Mongsen system with the Tsunger, although the latter equally enjoys the rewards of meat like the
former counterpart. As a distinctive departure from the Onger, the Tsunger of the Mongsen clan was not vested with prerogative powers of making independent decisions; he was and is always subject to the purview and consent of other councillors. An advantage he enjoys is that he is exempt from all community works, which he in his official capacity had announced of.

(b) The Samen (Steering or Leading Members of the Council)

They constitute the inner circle of the Mongsen council formed by representatives of the village founder clans, who were considered the rulers or as it were, masters of the village. Each clan was and is entitled to represent one Samen to the Mongsen Council. The powers and functions of the Samen like Tazung of the Chongli system consisted of formulating the general policy and function of the village government. They also exercised the executive and judicial powers and other prerogatives of decision in emergent matters. They had the power to prepare estimates for expenditure and raise funds through the means of citizens' collection from the inhabitants of the village. They execute the functions of general administration and adjudication in the village. They summon and preside over the sittings of the council meeting within the Mongsen group.
(c) **The Tsadangodang** (General Functionaries to the other Councillors)

They performed the menial works such as the operation and serving of food and drinks during the sittings of the council and also as porters whenever the councillors leave the village on journeys. The food prepared by them were and are not even now touched or distributed by any person other than them. They were, as a difference from the Chongli system, entitled to a share of meat, constituted by the stomach portion of the animal slaughtered, mainly of the entrails and other organs. They are also entitled to succeed, like Chidangodang of the Chongli system to the post of Samen in case of death.

Aside from their distinctive features, there were and are also another body of council called Yolji, who are also called Aišet generally designated as members of the parliament. Their numbers are not limited as is other councillors. Unless they are selected in the council as steering or functionaries, no particular powers and functions are vested upon them. Now after the retirement from the councillorship, a person may have no status to the village council and treated as a priest (Putir), who are also exempt from all the village communal works and traditionally, viewed as a widower.
Membership in Sungratsu Village Council

Members of the village councils are constituted by clan (khel) representatives. They are expected to use their discretion while considering any matter placed before them. The principle is that they have an over-riding obligation to the community and in the execution of their function, are expected to be impartial to all. They are professionals and their advice is likely to be become a law on the basis of village customs and convention.

In the past, the members of the Putu Menden (village council) were drawn from each clan whose selection were on the basis of consensus. Each clan would select their representative to the village council called Tazung or Samen, which are still in continuity. Even today, each clan is entitled to represent one member for which reason there are eight chosen representatives to the village council who generally administer the village, i.e. four Tazung and four Chidangodang respectively. The Chongli council in particular have three major clans, for which reasons the Jamir clan represents two member for each tier. Beside, another body of council is that, the Chongli council select their Onger from Jamir clan and for the Mongsen, Tsunger would be selected either from Longchar or Aier clan who are considered as the leader of the party or councillors. Thus, with the selection over, the villagers by convention fixes a particular date to publicly announce the names of the
selected village councillors and also other members of the village council.

Such a form of village government based on custom and tradition that is orally transmitted from generation to generation is unique. Thus, in Sungratsu village, as in all Ao tribal villages, the organization of Putu Menden (village council) is constituted by chosen representatives headed by a chief (Onger), though not in the omnipotent sense. This has similarities with the Cherokee Indian political organization where the tradition Cherokee society is headed by a peace chief (i.e. akin to Onger in Sungratsu village) encompassing a rooster of subordinate officials (possibly equivalent to the status of tawung and tatars) and a council of elders (clan representatives), whose decisions on any council meeting are also arrived at by consensus (similar to the decision making process of the Ao Putu Menden village council). 

"Fogelson and Adams, 1977:190". The Putu Menden is further divided into clan units considered as a pivotal political sub-unit to the village council. Thus the clan representative to the village council may be treated like clan chief within the clan's jurisdiction, who are assisted by a body of village men. The unitary form of village council in this village may be further equated with the Navahoe Tribal Council, who are accustomed to a single chief (i.e. clan chief) assisted by headmen (Cusagrande, 1960:440). Similarity is also found among the Ashante
social organization where its corporate affairs are managed by a male head (leader of the party akin to Onger) called "Abusua-panin" assisted by a committee of elders called "abusua-mpaninfo", i.e. clan elders (Friedman and Rowland, 1977:523).

The Chongli System of Succession to Putu Menden (Village Council)

According to tradition, the succession to Putu Menden (village council) of the Chongli group runs as such. The most striking feature with the Chongli council were that the new incumbents would preside over the meeting where they would announce publicly the policies and procedures, relating to matters of all activities to be undertaken for the whole subsequent years. This meeting would be held at the Onger's (leader of the party) house. At the time, a ceremonial function is involved, where they would purchase cows or pigs and present it to each of the old incumbents, a traditional practice to reflect respect and also a reward for their valuable services rendered during their tenure of office.

Tradition states that when the time comes to vacate office, the old incumbents are reluctant to relinquish their power and shares of meat and as a result, quarrels often occurred. On such occasions, the old men argue that their time is not up yet. Recently, such type of a quarrel
occurred and was branded as a stigma to the persons involved in Sungratsu village, during the Peyongsanger (war-life generation) Putu Menden (village council) succession to power replacing the kosasanger (swaggering generation) Putu Menden (village council). It must have been that in the past, the old men to be retiring were able to put up a stout fight and prolong their period of office, or that the young men have been able to oust their elders before their time was up. However, the procedure as tradition says, for succession can be done on or after passage of 30 years only (i.e. normally the 29th or 31st year) depending upon the negotiations between the outgoing and incoming generations.

Beside being presented with domesticated animals, there were also other forms of presents such as one basket-full of dry meat called Shiangdol presented by four Tazung (steering members of the council) which signified traditionally, "a changing of the guards" of the Putu Menden. These were followed by other ceremonial functions like throwing spears, which signified the revision of old rules. Tradition says that only on this occasion, the procedures of meat share among the councillors were decided.

The Mongsen System of Succession to Putu Menchen (Village Council)

Traditionally, the succession to Putu Menchen (village council) among the Mongsen runs as such. At the
house of Tsunger (leader of the council), both the parties would assemble together and sit till sunset. The four selected Samen (steering members of the council) from the younger generation, would purchase a cow and a pig and present it to the outgoing incumbents after completion of 30 years. The animals are slaughtered at the house of Tsunger (leader of the party in the council), where the real procedure of meat shares among the new councillors are decided through consensus under the incharge of the Tt-adangodang who, as a rule, divides the meat. The Tsunger is entitled to get the head and the eldest Samen gets the biggest share as a measure of his age hence tradition. It is then followed by a discussion on matters concerning the Putu Menchen (village council) of the Mongsen group.

Qualifications of the Village Councillors

As regards to qualifications of a village councillor varies on the basis of village customs and tradition. At first, he must be from a founding clan who is also by age, a clan elder. He must be an influential and experienced elderly orator in the village. He must be a noted member for his knowledge of customary laws and with experience and proven ability to apply it. He must have possess the qualities of being well verse in matters relating to village tradition and customs. As a result of all these, he must enjoy high public esteem to finally qualify him.
Wealth plays an important role in gaining influence, its efficacy mainly being in giving grand feasts in public and private occasions. However, it could never lead to selection to the council and thus a wealthy person stood no chance of rising above general village members. Similarly, the role of heredity in gaining recognition to be a councillor was also limited. In this way, the members of the village council are people recognized for their ability proved through years of tests. They are neither elected nor appointed on hereditary basis. They are selected and accepted and it is for them to work their way up in public esteem and to be recognized.

Procedure of Meat Share in Sungratsu Village Council

Tradition says that after the Putu Menden (village council) had been formed, the procedure of meat shares among the village councillors were decided by a general consensus among the councillors under the charge of Chidangodang or Tsadangodang (general functionaries to the superior councillors). Here, for general understanding, a meat share to a village council member signifies a reward in the absence of regular pay. Further as a mark of respect to the councillors, on any occasions or meetings of the council, animals are slaughtered to feed them, as well as to reward them with a cut of the carcass. Such cuts varied in sizes,
corresponding to the age of the recipient council member. In fact, a man's status in the body of councillors was clearly determined (even contemporarily) on what his share of meat was or would be. Of the animals slaughtered, Panger Imchen states that "it is not a mere feast but every portion of the animal that are divided has significant meanings originated while in Chongliyimti the ancient Ao village (1993:73)".

The organization of village council in this village is closely bound up with the complicated system of shares of meat as is found with all other Ao tribal villages as well as Nagas in general in most of cases. This meat consists of pigs penalized as fines, animals sacrificed on various occasions and animals of which part has been given away as a present to some distinguished persons or visitors or a present of pork during a treaty with other villages are some of the sources of meat share as is still found in Sungratsu village occasionally. These meat would be divided among the councillors on the basis of clan ranking which determines a man's status in the body of councillors. In some cases, when some scheming character finds that by his status he can only get a small share of meat, he attempts to split off and found a new council where his share will be bigger. Such a case occurred between the Aier clan of Mongsen vs. Walling clan of Sungratsu village in 1931 (see Appendix-III, Illustration No.2). This case exemplifies a dispute about
the division of ceremonial meat share. The general functionaries to the superior councillors, as a duty keeps an account how much meat is spent throughout the year. This expenditure is recouped from clan subscriptions when they are collected following the next harvest or recouped from village house tax called Saru or Putisu. Such a complicated but systematically arranged procedure of meat share on the basis of customs and tradition even today still persist in this village, strongly enhancing the status of the village council.

_Senso Senden_ (General Village Citizens Conference) in Sungratsu Village

Beside the village council, there was and is also another body of council called _Senso Senden_ (general village citizens conference). It exercises the ultimate power within the village. In extreme cases of having incurred the dissatisfaction of the whole village, the duration of the Putu Menden or Samen Menchen may be cut short and call for another by this general conference. This citizens conference represents all the Chongli and Mongsen clans and reflects ultimate village solidarity and power. In fact, the general village citizens conference on a comparative view can be equated with the electorate/parliament and the village council as the council of ministers/cabinet. This
conference is usually held once in a year generally and more when required.

The village citizens conference was and is held on an open ground. All the male adults were and are entitled to participate in this conference. The assembly was and is presided over by the seniormost member of the village councillors (now elected Chairman and his Secretary). Items of agenda to be discussed were and are introduced and the conference attendants were and are requested to speak and present their views. In cases, when the conference business are not concluded in the same sitting, adjournment to subsequent sittings are made. In adopting decisions, laws and regulations, the consensus of all the clans are drawn-forth. If any citizen transgresses normal etiquette or misuses official power during normal time or during the conference, such cases are discussed at length and appropriate retributive measures are imposed (see Appendix-III, Illustration No.3). In the case of council members or of whole council, heavy fines or even removal from the office are the measures. In case of the loss of confidence on the village council, the Senso Senden (general village citizens conference), may, if necessary, cut short the tenure of the whole council by dissolution. All kinds of enforcement of law and orders including the functional actions undertaken by the council are presented in the conference for the endorsement of the total village
citizens. Thus, the village council draws their authority and prestige from the general village citizens conference, right from traditional days, which is till in practice to a large extent even today.

Land Ownership Pattern in Sungratsu Village

The land ownership pattern in this village has its origin at the founding of the village. Clans and families who took part in building the village have lands which were taken into possession by them at the time of the village foundation. There are four types of land ownership pattern in Sungratsu village similar with all other Ao tribal villagers namely, common village lands, clan lands, phratry lands and family lands. It was and is customary law for an Ao not to sell any clan, village or phratry land to another party even within his own village, for which reason, his clan members and phratries may undergo shortage of land for domestic and other purposes of agriculture and plantation. However, in some cases, existence of individual land which is of a recent phenomenon have emerged following monetisation of the economy in the early part of the 20th Century. As described by Panger Imchen that according to customary law, no land can be sold to a non-Naga within Nagaland and this is a traditional law which the Nagas love and hold to in order to prevent loss of their own property which is also similarly observed in the present day.
Sungratsu village in particular (1993:122-23). Problem of landless labourer are not in existence in Ao society hence tradition and Sungratsu village in particular. Thus, land is the major sources for their livelihood and every villager, though illiterate, knows how to manage their own land effectively even sometime beyond his scope. However, the village council is the ultimate authority to maintain peace and order over all affairs of land disputes.

When the village is formed as tradition says, the leader divided the land as per customary tradition, where such clan and phratry is allotted plots of land for house building called Yinlium-li (village foundation site) which is not transferable or sold under any circumstances. The clan land is under the guardianship of the oldest of the clan while the Tatar Menden (village councillors) take care of the common village lands. If any individual is penalized by customary law such as in murder, incest, theft, etc. and is unable to pay the fine, the village council can confiscate his own land, otherwise, in absence of his own land, the village council can claim certain portion of his clan land as per custom, which in consequence dispossesses him of his share of clan land. On the other hand, custom does not permit any member of the family to dispose of joint family property against the interest of other members, nor can it be mortgaged for other liability of any member without the consent of co-owners (Ao, 1980:172). It is in such land one
The village gate of Chimonjar.

A panoramic view of Chimonjar village.
A typical thatch house at Chimonger village.

A commemoration of Morung in Chimonger village.
The village Yangpumji (village council) Hall at Chimonger village.

A dance party for Mongmong Festival in Chimonger village.
Two representatives from Akok Kael in ceremonial dress at Unimonj village.

A group of young women in Huilan Dance (i.e., for Mongmonj festival) at Unimonj village.
can plant permanent plantations. If an individual possesses a plot of land, it can be handed down to his offspring. Thus, under such structural processes, no one suffers from want of cultivation lands. To compare the land ownership pattern and its types among the Ao-Nagas, a similarity is found with that of the Nanching of Chinese, where collective land includes clan land, common village land for different purposes, temple land etc., and the private land mainly used for agriculture and farming purposes, where a man's status among the Nanching village is determined by his possession of land similar to that found in Sungratsu village (Yang, 1959:40-43).

Section 'B'

THE VILLAGE COUNCIL IN CHIMONGER VILLAGE : A PICTURE OF THE SANGTAM NAGAS

Village Organisation

The most striking feature of the Sangtam village society is its highly organized political institution represented by the village council called Yangpumji. It exercises a centralized authority over every important matter, affecting the life of the community at large and the individual in particular. Every village has a council of elders called Lakhimru among which the eldest presides over the council meeting. The council comprises several
officials with specified functions. The number of council members varies from village to village with a variation in designations of the functionaries in some respect.

Tradition says that construction of Singkongwil Morung (bachelors hall) was the foremost task in founding Chimonger village, where they discussed the matter of Yangpumji (village council) for village administration and other village common policies and objectives to be pursued. The Yangpumji (village council) was organised by representatives of six clans called Lahimru which corresponds to division of six Ahels respectively. Thus the Yangpumji (village council) in Chimonger village was organised by chosen representatives of elders from each clan who are neither elected nor appointed. Unlike the Aos and the Lothas, the Chimonger village of the Sangtam tribe have no particular functional divisions among the Lahimru (councillors) through which a plane of consensus and a high degree of equality is achieved. The basic constituting unit of the council in this village was the clan and Ahel (locality/ward) as is found even today. In comparison, such type of representation may be equated with the southern Mesopotamia City-States where the city was divided into wards as a basic political unit responsible for administrative affairs in which the council of elders was composed by representatives of these wards (Friedman and Rowland, 1977:253). Only the chosen representatives
(Lakhimru) with no ranking system or status among themselves organized the complicated divisions of ad-hoc function in relation to a particular matter through consensus; however, a slight distinction was that of seniority, which was revered and for which reason, senior councillors were accorded a special deference in address and reference, though not as institutionalized rule but more as an exception in social interaction.

Another feature of village social organisation is the institution of Shang (peer-group divisions) which was the primary social institution for youths till he attained adulthood which also served as a qualifying point to become a Lakhimru (village councillors). The Shang (peer-groups) in this village are different from the peer group divisions of the Aos in particular with respect to their supporting duties to be performed. This Shang (peer-group) rather finds equation with that of the Sema aluzhi (i.e. cultivation labour groups) as reported by Hutton (1968, Rept.1153). They are, in fact, not closely linked with the Jinglongwi (bachelors hall) activities as is acknowledged by peer-group divisions among the Aos. However, the peer-groups serves as an important base of social organisation in this village. A man who have not enrolled in his peer-group is debarred from any social status in the village and considered usually not worthy of being recognized by others. In some occasions, the opposite serials of different peer-
groups gather together to perform certain duties in the village in general and of its thel in particular under the command of senior groups which are still in practice today. Thus, a person, as with all other Nagas, remains in his peer-groups for life.

There were and are six Shang in this village namely: 1) Rose Shang (10-25 years); 2) Amilup Shang (26-40 years); 3) Rozi Shang (41-55 years); 4) Rathrong Shang (56-70 years); 5) Thsulo Shang (71-85 years); 6) Repu Shang (86 and above). This institution still exists as a continuity of tradition even today. Normally at the age of ten years a person enters his/her Shang which continues for the rest of his life. A boy remains in his original peer-group for a period of 15 years and a new group of boys enters the same peer-group. Thus the organization of the village is from the past based on three main principles, that is, the whole village is divided into Shangs (peer-groups), the control of village affairs lies with a council organized by clan representatives called Yangpumja, and finally, each thel is organized around a Singkongwi (bachelors hall) in which all the unmarried adult males sleep till marriage.

Institution of Singkongwi/Morung (bachelors hall) plays an important role in the social life of this village which are also common to all the Naga tribes as well. Thus as cited by J.P. Mills, "Decaying Morungs mean a decaying village, and well used, well-kept Morungs a vigorous
community. It is in the Murung that the old men tell of the great deeds of the past, and the coming generation is taught to carry on the old traditions in the future (1982. Rept.:47)". At the age of ten years one enters the Singlongwi (bachelors hall) as a member, that particular peer-group and above constituting the Rose Shang (youngest peer-group), who were treated as page-boys to their senior peer-groups. Tradition says that, once a person gets married he is required to relinquish his residence and the activities of the Singlongwi. Selection for Lakhimru (village councillors) were also selected from Rothrong and Thsuloi Shang (intra-clan peer-groups). Most of the village communal works were and are performed by these peer-group divisions on the orders of the Yangpumji (village council) who would allocate the nature and site of village community works. By function, these peer-groupings practically serve as an extension of the village council.

Each Khel had a Singlongwi (bachelors hall) which was inhabited exclusively by one clan only. The Singlongwi usually occupies a geographical central location in the village, commanding an unobstructed view over different approaches to it. The Singlongwi was not only the meeting place for the youths of a village, but is also used for deliberations of the Yangpumji (village council). Girls also had separate Singlongwis in each Khel, although, it did not play an important part in the village social life. In
the Singlongwi, the males learned manners, discipline, the arts, stories, songs, war tactics, diplomacy, religious and customary rites and other ceremonies. It served as an academy for the young to learn the art of livelihood, responsibility and co-operation before they came in contact with the process of modern education today. However, in the contemporary situation, the Singlongwi have become merely a house structure to symbolize and commemorate the old days and ways. Today, there is only one Singlongwi located at the centre of this village which the villagers use as a symbol and occasionally to celebrate the old customs and tradition. This does not mean that it is abandoned, for it is still addressed as a reference point of tradition. The institution of Singlongwi is now replaced by educational institutions of schools. Yet, it is able to reflect and maintain their social and cultural entity even today.

Functions and Power of Village Council in Chimonger Village

The most important and the most elaborate function of the Yangpumji (village council) is the administration and jural function in the village. All disputes arising in the village is adjudicated upon by the Yangpumji (village council) according to set procedures of customary practices. The cases decided may be theft, assault, murder, adultery, divorce, encroachment of land in particular, transgression
of taboos like incest, neglect of customs and so forth. It also deals with all political problems of the village including war. In the olden days, according to tradition, the Yangpumji (village council) conducted war with other villages whenever necessary and organised the villagers in case of a threat to the village. Now-a-days it maintains cooperation among the neighbouring villages and represents the village in all forums outside the village. The will and the opinion of the village in all issues are expressed by the Yangpumji (village council).

In the context of its administration and judicial function, from tradition, incest is hardly known and the crime of adultery treated with the utmost cruelty. In case of a clan endogamy which amounts to incest, the couple are expelled from the village permanently as well as permanent dissociation from the general public. An offender is brought before the Yangpumji (village council), assembled to investigate the offence and if it is proved, the verdict pronounced by the Yangpumji were final and binding upon the defaulter. However, in some case, like adultery and divorce, arbitration by the clan elders was and is even now considered as the primary court of case litigation and very rarely brought before the Yangpumji court. As tradition says, question of either accidental or deliberate homicide has never occurred in this village. All kinds of dispute were settled by a body of chosen Lakshimru (village
councillors) in consensus according to customary laws and usages.

Contemporarily, a domesticated live cattle or pig was paid in settling disputes relating to fighting among youngsters, thefts, accidental injuries and other scandalous activities, etc., which were very frequent and common in this village. In matters of clan dispute, families stick together in litigation. All kinds of disputes were settled at the house of the oldest Lalhimru. Now-a-days such cases are brought to the village court (Yangpumji Hall) where the Yangtso Aziba (speaker/leader of the council) presides over the meeting and the decisions for settlement are arrived at through consensus. Thus obeisance towards the Yangpumji is not merely symbolic, but admission of respect and reverence for one's tradition and thus of self-respect.

The Yangpumji (village council) is regarded as the highest authority endorsed with sweeping powers to be executed by the councillors in consensus to maintain peace and harmony within the village and dispense justice. It also decides the land and areas of cultivation. It is responsible for making friendship treaties with other neighbouring villagers as well as organized matters in times of war.

Traditionally, the meeting of the Yangpumji (village council) were usually held in front of the Ashimu Khong Singhlongji (general conference hall) where all the
councillors would sit on an open ground. The meeting of the village council never followed a scheduled timing and was held whenever necessary according to issues and events concerning common village objectives. Tradition says that, all the council meetings were presided over by the Yangt'wa Aziba (speaker/leader of the councillors). He was then and is now responsible for summoning any meeting and assemblies of the councillors. Beside, Shezokru (selected members for each meal for doing kitchen works) were the functionaries who would besides cooking, serve the drinks and dishes throughout the length of the meetings. The expenditure incurred on such occasions or meeting were recovered through collections from the general public of the village.

With matters related to litigation, if the evidences brought before the Yangpumji (village council) is inadequate and the Yangpumji is unable to decide conclusively, it may conduct oath litigation in order to ascertain the guilt or otherwise. Under such circumstances, when an individual consistently denies that he is guilty or when others doubts his guilt, he might challenge the accuser in the context of oath-taking litigation. In such cases, through a go-between, whose duty it is to bring about a peaceful settlement. The go-between carefully listens to the testimony of each side besides presenting the view to both sides. He makes every effort to bring about an amicable settlement so that he also would receive a sizable reward
and reputation as a successful mediator. If one of the parties refuses to listen to the reasoning of the mediator, the mediators (possibly the village elders or Gaonburas) would initiate the oath taking ceremony as tradition demands. Such type of disputes particularly arises in matters relating to land encroachment trespass and of inheritance.

This law, corresponding to the Yangpumji (village council) was and is very heavy and drastic. The oaths are administered by the Yangpumji elders and keep themselves informed of any happening to the parties within a specified period of thirty days. If any adverse sign develops on the person of the accused or the complainant within the specified period, the elders or mediators are invited to see, whether the sickness conforms to the term of the oath administered. If confirmed by the members in the positive, the person is held guilty and the case dealt away with. Under such circumstances, physical punishments are unknown. However, the punishments imposed are always a fine of live animals and adequate compensation made to damages done. In some cases, failure to comply with this law is strongly believed would mean death for the man. Hence, no man has the courage to break this law for fear of inviting the wrath of both god and man.

Once the verdict is pronounced by the village elders, the parties accept it and normally there is no
appeal against it, though legally one can appeal against the
decision of the Yangpumji. In support to this conformity as
stated by Llewellyn and Hoebel (1971) "an authority may well
express his opinion or decision about a custom which carries
no provision of punishment for its breach (Pospisil, 1971:95)". Thus rules and regulation may be so enacted by
the Yangpumji on its own discretion based on customs, to
enable the Yangpumji to function effectively for the well
being of the public. It may also cut short the tenure of
any Laihimru (village councillors) if any unhealthy behavior
is found associated with a member which may disturb the
feelings of the general public at large. Thus the Yangpumji
make laws and is executed by the Laihimru aimed at the
general well being of the village society. Thus, the centre
of power most definitely is located with this body of
council, which in itself is a conglomerate political
organisation. It administers and adjudicates with
conformity to its native law, custom and tradition. In this
regards, the Yangpumji provides a model where everything
functions through a conventional set of rules rather than by
written law, which is a binding force in reality.

In short, it is vested with legislative, executive,
and judicial powers. Unless the matter is of great
significance when the entire village is consulted, the
Yangpumji by itself can amend, change, take decisions or
give up any customary legal or social practice if it is not
found to be functional for the society. At the same time it is the highest financial authority which can collect funds, goods or services and then disburse these for the welfare of the community.

Membership in Village Council in Chimonger Village

The procedure for the selection of Lakhimru (village councillors) to the Yangpumji (village council) for village administration constitutes a vital village activity. All Lakhimru (village councillors) were and are treated as equal in position and thus no ranking system divides them. For this reason no particular status or privileges were accorded to the Lakhimru members, except in some cases, a slight distinction being reflected upon members owing to their seniority in age. Unlike the Aos and the Lothas, no division of functions are found among the councillors. Clan representation to the council was a priori requirement, which in their own fashion, short of calling it democracy as is now, was a measure of distributive justice and power. Similar types of clan representation to Yangpumji may also be found among the Baganda Kingdom in the village Nupe, where the clan headships are drawn from linemen through consensus which finally constitutes the Nupe village council (Burling, 1974:40).
Succession to Yangpumji (village council) in Chimonger Village

Following the selection within the clan, succession would follow as a new event, guided by their customs and local practices. A ceremonial function is involved where the new incumbents would purchase cattle or pigs and present it to each of the old incumbents, signifying it as a reward for their valuable services rendered during their tenure of office. According to tradition, when the meat would be presented to the outgoing members, at that time, the procedure of meat share among the new incumbents are decided. Such presentations, although not as a rule, certified the process of succession; of demoting and of assumption. Such succession signified a generation (i.e. 30 years). At the time of succession the old incumbents bestow their blessings and share their experiences with the new incumbents.

Besides the routine succession to new generation seat of the village council, there was and is also succession of Lakhimru (village councillors) in case of death or disqualification. In case of death of a Lakhimru (village councillor) before completion of his tenure of office, one capable person would be sounded out in advance to replace the deceased from his own khel or clan. However, once the Lakhimru is appointed, question of incapability do not arise as per the traditional practice. He would be
selected through and by the head concerned in consultation with clan members and approved by the village council. However, disqualification were also the penalty of the day if the Lakhimru during his tenure committed any disgraceful act or incurred stigma of any sort. Tradition says, the outgoing members were and are not even now permitted to be selected again to the village council. The new generation takes over complete administration and the outgoing councillors, though respected for their age, experience and wisdom were and are never allowed to interfere with the work of the new generation.

**Procedure of Meat Share in Chimonger Village**

After the succession is over, it is followed by the procedures of meat sharing among the councillors. However, in the case of the Sangtam tribals, the procedure of meat share among the Lakhimru (village councillors) as begun in this village was based on age seniority and not on the basis of clan ranking as is in the case of Ao Naga tribe as represented by Sungratsu village in this study. Thus the procedure of meat sharing as rewards was decided by the Lakhimru through consensus. According to tradition, the Roziba (council chairman or speaker) who usually presides over the meeting was entitled to get the biggest share by virtue of his chair on any occasion. This was followed by
the practice that an animal slaughtered for any occasion, its head would go to the representative of a khele, if the animal was brought from there. However, on any occasion the animals would be slaughtered at the house of Roziba (council chairman or speaker) according to tradition. Thus the meat share among the councillors served a dual function of reward or salary for their service to the village. It is said that owing to the absence of ranking among the councillors, a healthy degree of consensus were always achieved adding to the efficacy of the village council.

Qualification of Lakhimru (village council) in Chimonger Village

The qualification as regard to selection of the Lakhimru (village councillors) were based on custom and convention. To become a Lakhimru as tradition says, he must be a village citizen as well as a descendent of the founding member or clan during the formation of the village. He must be from a well-to-do family and must have performed at least a feast of merit and achievement by sacrificing much mithuns (a semi domesticated animal) particularly in the traditional days. He must be married person as well. He must also be a knowledgeable person as regards to village customs and tradition. He must have no social stigma to his reputation like being associated with adultery, divorce, theft, etc. Besides, other qualifications for selection to Lakhimru
(village councillors) are a good physique, impressive personality, the gift of speech, courage and kindness, leadership and lucidity of ideas.

Suru Ashimukhong (general village citizens conference)

Beside the village council there was and is also another body of council called Suru Ashimukhong (general village citizens conference). This conference meets once every three years on an open ground. In this citizens' conference, exclusively all the male adults were and are entitled to participate. If necessary, this conference reviews matters relating to village general administration. It is a public meeting to which anyone may come and air his opinion. This conference further produces order and makes statement about the nature of social order in the village and who transgresses these rules are severely punished. In the old days, the conference were presided over by the village elders or chosen representatives (Lakhimru) or most probably the eldest among the Lakhimru. The spirit of this conference is village solidarity and its re-affirmation.

Contemporarily, this conference is presided over by a chairman and his secretary. In his introductory speech he gives a short historical background of the meeting. Following this, time is opened where anyone can speak on a given subject or express his grievance. If business in the
The village council chairman with his colleagues of Wokha village.

A side view of Wokha village.
The oldest man in Woxha village, who is 85 years old.

Young Lothas ready for war dance.
Young men and women in traditional attire celebrating the Lotha Toknu among.

A presentation of cultural programme during the visit of Swedish Missionaries, Rev. Benjt Johnson & friends at Wokha village.
same sitting is not completed, adjournment is made to subsequent sittings. This conference may also criticize and direct the Yangpumji (village council) besides adopting new decisions and regulations. Thus the Suru Ashimukhong (general village citizens conference) plays an important role and is considered as supreme law making body in this village.

Section ‘C’

THE VILLAGE COUNCIL IN WOKHA VILLAGE: A PICTURE OF THE LOTAHA NAGAS

Village Organizations

Every village among the Lota tribes is viewed as an independent unit. The village is a social unit in which people feel personally and collectively involved, with a high degree of participation and continuity with ways that are embodiments of custom and tradition. This attitude is said saw intensification during the last century when they were brought into real contact with the outside world by several agencies, the most prominent being British rule and Christianity. With the Lota tribe, the village is the formal unit of its own granted government ruled by a body of councillors under the prescription of custom and tradition. Thus under normal circumstances, the village government has always been free from overt external intervention and
internal instability so long as the local authorities performed satisfactorily the tasks expected of them.

The Wolha village in particular, as with all other Lotha tribal villages, have two distinct village governmental organisations based on more or less the same principles. Tradition says that in the olden days the village was ruled by a chief assisted by an informal council of elders called Tongti. The chieftainship was hereditary in the family of the man who originally founded the village, but did not at all necessarily pass from father to son (Mills, 1980, Rept.:96). This type of rule was nearly equated with monarchical system of government. Tradition says that, when the village was formed, a selection of Puuti (priest) was drawn first, who was functionally both religious and administrative head. Such type of representation to cite an example, may be equated with that of the monastic representatives among the Bhutanese village council particularly for religious performances and rites (Mehra, 1974:106). The selection of Puuti (priest) were drawn from each khel. Above all, a chief priest called Eshemo was also drawn on the basis of seniority. Under him a number of subordinate priests known as Esao and Haham were also selected on descending order of seniority. The Puuti traditionally erected stones in front of his house signifying prestige, dignity and high status. Functionally, the high priest was mainly concerned with religious matter,
where all the leading part of the ceremonies were observed only at the presence of the Pwutij.

It was stated that the present Wokha village is managed by an informal council of men of influence called Tangti. The Tangti was and is still the highest authority, whose duty is to maintain law and order in the village, which finds similar analogy with the Ao Tazung and Sangtam Lakhimaru (steering members of the village councillors). These village elders are appropriately called Sotsi (meat eaters) who are further divided into two classes called Tangti (the upper division) and Chochang (the lower division or assistant to Tangti) similar with the Ao Tazung and Chidangadang. Besides these, there is also another body of council called Pangli (general members) whose functions are not well defined. The selection of village councillors in general are drawn from each khel determined by the size of the khel, in which case representation is not proportionate in number. Thus, khel and clan representation to the council was and is according to the size and number of population in this village.

**Yengaten (peer-group) in Wokha Village**

Unlike the Aos as in Sungratsu village, the Yengaten (peer-group) system is far simpler in this village and will probably be with all other Lotha tribal villages. According to Mills, the Lotha system of Yengaten (working companies,
I.e. peer-groups) are composed of the children of neighbours, drawn from groups of playmates (Ibid:97). Thus a vague dimensions of peer-group/working company divisions with their chronology of age grades are given below:

1) Nonguri Yenga (12-15 years)
2) Chongri Yenga (16-19 years)
3) Chali Yenga (20-23 years), and
4) Eramo Yenga (40 years and above).

In this village, boys and girls have ample opportunity to know one another through their peer-group relationship with the opposite sexes. From a young age at about 12 years, they become partners in working gangs in the Yengaten. Each gang or playmates born in between a period of three years works in turn in the fields of its neighbouring families, particularly during the busy time of sowing, weeding and harvesting. If a villager needs help, he can hire a Yengaten for a day or two. In return for their assistance, each member is given a midday meal in the fields and a small wage. With this money, which is deposited in a common fund, the young labourers as is practiced even today, purchases a pig at festival times and holds a feast. From the eldest strata of these peer groupings amounting to about 40 years and above called Eramo Yenga, certain members are prematurely proposed out in advance to be selected as Tongtji (chief) by virtue of his meritorious performance amongst peer-group. However, the
village council may extend its authority in selecting him through clan and khel consent.

**Champu (bachelors Hall)**

In the olden days, as per tradition, every khel had a separate Champu/Morung (bachelors hall) where every male (possibly at the age of 12-15 years) used to sleep. According to custom, girls were prohibited to set their foot in this hall. It was a place where raids for war were planned and discussed at length and as such, all heads collected in battle were first brought to Champu. A boy remains in his Champu until he marries. This rule being only relaxed in the case of boys who are allowed to remain at home and nurse an ailing and widowed mother, or when Champu falls into such a state of despair that it is no longer habitable. The Champu usually stands at the down end of the village street. Though not to be compared with the huge Arui/Morungs of the Aos and Konyaks, it is the best architectural effort of which the Lothas are capable of as is evident in Wokha village. According to tradition, a Champu is rebuilt every nine years. Almost invariably it falls into ruins before the time is up, but on no account must it be rebuilt till the due period has elapsed.

Tradition says that, the Pui (religious head) has to perform some specific religious function. The Pui...
formally begins the breaking down of the old Champu, by pulling a piece of thatch off the roof and throwing it into the ground. When the rebuilding of Champu then begins, the Piuti initiates it by a formal act of digging a little hole with the butt of his spear at the places where the three carved posts are to be set up into which he spits a little rice wine. After the Champu is rebuilt, animals are slaughtered where the Piuti receives as his share a half of the head of the cattle killed, split longitudinally. It was also stated that every Champu in the village kills a small dog as a sacrifice to the gods on the second day of it being rebuilt.

Today the originality of Champu life and its activities have completely disappeared in this village. Champu has become a mere physical symbol which only commemorates the spirit of the old days. Yet a Lotha talks of his happy Champu days most probably much as an Englishman talks of his school days. In the olden days, one of the Champu leaders was generally the son of a village chief or a descendant of the founder of the village (possibly the Piuti). Contemporarily, the Champu leaders or elders seek advice from the village councillors in any matter of importance as a measure of equation in the perception of power.
Powers and Function of Village Council in Wokha Village

The largest corporate social unit is the village. Most villages were and are generally divided into several hrELS (ward/locality) each centered on a Champu (bachelors hall) from which the word derives its name. The ward was and is a more closely knit social unit than the village as a whole which comprises a number of clans, and these are in turn further split into lineages as is even now found in this village. In Wokha village, every hrEL had a separate council consisting of the chiefs called Tongli represented by four Champu (bachelors hall) respectively in the olden days, which was also further headed by two Putsis (priest) in general for religious purposes. Contemporarily, there is only one village council which administers and adjudicates disputes and punishes offenders. The fines imposed on offenders consists usually of pigs and rice. All fines were and are shared between the members of the village council on the basis of seniority in rank.

Functional Divisions of Village Councillors

(a) The Putsi (Priest)

The village priest takes the leading part in all ceremonies concerned with the welfare of the whole community. In the past, every village had two Putsis, the head performing the ceremonial acts, while his partner acted
as his assistant who repeated the prayers after him. Contemporarily in many places there is only one Pvuti, as is also in Wokha village, the reason being that few men were eager to accept the post, which is a risky one, for the belief was that verbal mistakes in the ceremonies may call down divine displeasure on the incumbent. Traditionally, of the two, the junior Pvuti would automatically succeed the senior one on the death of the latter thus avoiding an awkward interregnum, for in the absence of a Pvuti, public ceremonies could not be performed. Tolho Emeng (prayer for the seeds to grow well), Rong-Syu (prayer for blessings), Rhyvei Tolho (prayer for sowing seeds) etc. were some important Emung ceremonies performed by Pvuti in Wokha village. The word Emeng which corresponds exactly to the Ao term Amung, mean literally "gathered together", where no one may go down to the fields to work or go farther than the village (Mills, 1980, Rept.126). He was also responsible to give information to rebuild the Champa (bachelors hall) where he is bound to perform certain ceremonies thus in a way, performing a socio-political role besides religious. So present a comparative note, the Pvuti as regards to his function may be equated with Zuni theocracy, where the political authority was traditionally in the hands of a council or priests who were associated with different roles and functions besides religion (Fogelson and Adams, 1977:198-99). Thus the Pvutis role was manifold, covering
a dual rule, i.e., religious and administrative, which are not held in importance today.

(b) The Tongti (chiefs)

The powers and function of the Puuti (priest) is followed by the Tongti (chiefs). The office of the Tongti, however, must be functionally distinguished carefully from that of Puuti who was the religious head of the village and holds office for life. The Tongti on the other hand, is a secular post. The Tongti were and are the highest authority who sanctioned and enforced power in all aspects of village administration. He is the speaker in all sittings of the village council meetings. The Tongti generally are asked to fill this position of honour on the basis of his erstwhile gallantry and prowess in war besides other endowments mentioned earlier. Thus according to tradition, only a capable man can control and administer the village as well as command love and respect of the village, and hence he is given this position in good measure. But there were and are also provisions according to village customs and convention for the removal of a Tongti from office for reasons such as dishonesty, lapse of duty, despotism, and general inefficiency. Under such circumstances, it is assumed that the Tongti's are not autocratic rulers for which reason they are assisted by a body of Chochang and Pangti.
(c) The Chochang (assistants)

The Tongti is further followed by the Chochang who were and are equivalent to advisors or assistants to the Tongti in matters relating to all village administrative affairs. According to Lotha tradition, the Chochangs are in actual description designated as messengers. In some other villages other than Wokha, they are known as Elyievong, but they are a contemporary contrivance. Thus today, in comparison, Chochangs and Elyievong are treated under the same status, although, not as a rule. The Chochangs are also entitled to succeed the seat of Tongti in case of death.

(d) The Pangi (general members)

They are not as distinguished and are general functionaries to the senior councillors. They have not been so far vested with particular powers and function but they are also entitled to succeed to the post of Chochang on the basis of seniority and the quorum of the village council is thus incomplete without their presence.

Besides the functional division of the village councillors, the status of late entrants to be inhabitants of the village lies in the hands of village council. Tradition states that during the British colonial administration the Hlon clan came in quest of citizenship to this village for which reason, the present day Wokha
village is constituted by five *hels* from its traditional four. After qualifying some conditions set upon them, lands usufruct have been granted to them by the villagers, which is a measure of the grant of village citizenship. As a result, they are entitled to all kind of shares e.g. land (it can be used as long as required, but never to be transferred or sold), leadership, meat shares, etc. as with other original founding clans. Only, they are not accorded that particular pride of status of having founded the village, meaning that they are lower in perceived rank. This is a form of social stratification among Naga tribes on the basis of status. Thus the village council exercises penultimate power to induct even the late comers into the village society.

**Patterns of Land Ownership in Wokha Village**

Land is a spiritual and economic heritage to the Lotha tribals. It was stated that the land not only provides economic security, but is a powerful link with their ancestors. In Wokha village, the land is classified under three categories, that is the land owned by private individuals comprises practically all of cultivated land, irrigated rice fields, fields for dry crops, garden plots for *waite*, millet, vegetables and fruit trees, groves of bamboo, pines, and other useful trees, as well as sites for houses and granaries. Land owned by the clan consists of meadow land near the village used as pasture and burial
ground besides cultivation and the plantation, sometimes at a very great distance from the village. Finally, common village land is confined to one or two usually not extensive stretches of pasture, and to forest tracts on the periphery of Wolla village.

There are very rarely, definite boundaries between the lands of different villages. There is first the area, established by old tradition and agreement with neighbouring villages, which is regarded as belonging to the village as a whole; all the inhabitants are concerned to preserve the integrity of its boundaries, which are identified by streams, hills or great groves/trees. When new clans or population are given permission by the village council to settle in the village, they are also allowed the area of land and tracts of forest which has never been used or has fallen into disuse, or they may be allowed to borrow land from a family, clan, or possibly from common village land. Where land is borrowed, however, and particularly when the new settler is not of the founder-clan, he is entitled only to use the land so long as he resides on the spot; otherwise, he cannot transfer his holding even to his own descendants without the permission of the village council; and should he go elsewhere his land reverts to the village as a whole. Thus, Furer-Heimendorf's (1944) views clearly supports that "Land is the source of wealth and all other and less permanent possessions are merely valued as a means
of acquiring more land (Verrier, 1964, Rept.165). A Lotha’s personal influence and social status depends largely on his land holdings; but this is regulated by the village council which legitimately exercises the ultimate power to ensure proper ownership as well as to check over concentration of land in a few.

Settlement of Disputes

The character of the village council reflects the social polity and psychology of the villagers. Any dispute were and are first brought to the clan court for litigation; thereafter in the absence of a resolution to the village council. When a quarrel arises between two villages, messengers (possibly the Cho強angs) are sent to fix a day, and if both sides so agree, the elders of the respective villages meet on the path half-way between the two villages and settle the matter, exchanging drinks of Mao'hu (rice wine) and food according to tradition, particularly so in the olden days. Cases of such nature are now-a-days often dealt with in the Dobashi's (government's interpreters) court or District Administrative Court.

Within the village, the council in its day to day normal functions tends to the following issues: For adultery, the guilty person has to hand over to the husband's or a wife's family members all his/her clothes and
personal ornaments and a cow or a large pig as fine. For a husband, he cannot possess any article of such fines in the case of his wife's immorality. A clear distinction is drawn between adultery by a man of the husband's clan and adultery by a man of another clan. The former offence is often condoned on the promise of not repeating it, but a fine is invariably demanded for the latter offence. In thefts, the guilty has to return the goods in full, or their equivalent, to the owner, and pay a large pig or cow as fine. Failure or inability to do end up in he being sold as a slave. In case of clan endogamy or marriage between siblings which in all incestuous acts, a Linyim (a Mithun horn of five inches length) is demanded as penalty and the couple excommunicated from the village. Deliberate homicide have never occurred in this village according to tradition, except some accidental injuries where no fine or punishment was enacted. Divorce, inheritance and the control of public behaviour to ensure social order are other routine matters of function of the village council.

Oaths

The oath taking is held in high regard among the Wolsa villagers as well as other Lothas at large. A man who is accused of an offence on suspicion may exonerate himself by taking an oath. The commonest form was for a man to bite a tiger's or leopard's tooth swearing that if he had
committed such a crime, a tiger or leopard may kill him instantly in the traditional days. The disputes and litigation associated with oath taking was and is frequent in the case of people who are suspected of evil doing but without any definite evidence or witnesses. In case of land dispute, an oath is invariably sworn upon a little soil from the land in question and whichever party succeeds the oath, gets the land. Here, a few hairs from the swearer’s head, with a little soil, are often bitten upon demanding that if the swearer is wrong, he may be struck dead. In cases, where the accusation is of stealing, the article of theft claimed by one side to be stolen and the other claiming it to be his own, a bit or slice of the article is mixed with the hair and some soil. Six days time is allowed to elapse for the village elders to see if any adverse sign develops on either of the parties within the specified period, either by sickness or death, or any unusual happenings. If any sign is confirmed by the elders, the person is held guilty and penalty, meted out. An ancient oath, which is only remembered by old men, was taken on the huge boulder known as Deolung. Each party of litigants would hold an egg and swear by Deolung that their story is true. Whoever went mad first lost. The custom was abandoned, it is said, because the outcome was too severe.

The action of supernatural forces were believed in and accepted in any eventuality where oath taking was
involved. In fact, the authority of the village council was believed and accepted as the expression of the will and power of the whole people. And in tandem, the public will and power as the manifestation of the supernatural. The ultimate faith with the people was that all human action and events were the will of the gods. And, therefore, just as the gods blesses, so does the gods curse and punish.

The village council had and have judicial as well as administrative and developmental functions, though the latter are more elaborate than the others. The authority and power of the village council depends largely on the personal qualities of the Sotsos (village elders) or Tongts (chiefs/councillors). There are spheres of jurisdiction for all normal disputes, but when there is any matter of unusual difficulty or where the parties cannot come to an agreement, they go to any powerful chief or councillor who is generally regarded as having the greatest wisdom, experience and influence. In the past, penalties and verdicts were often ferocious punishments which, after all, only reflected the time and life they were living at. However, they have shown in recent years that they are capable of humane, restitutive penalties which are reflections and examples of changing times.

Membership in the Wolha village council is based on khel divisions or units, and each khel has a representative to the village council and the number of khel
representatives are dependent upon the size of population of
the khel. They are neither elected nor appointed but
accepted through consensus. In the olden days, every
village had a Puuti (priest) for the village in general by
virtue of he being a capable and traditionally accepted
person, who may be equated with a theocratic ruler.
Selection for other subordinate Puuti's were drawn from each
khel. Succession was on the basis of seniority. However,
in contemporary time, the function of the Puuti have
disappeared mainly as a result of the older religion
represented by the Puuti have been replaced by Christianity.

The selection for Tongti-Chachang were drawn from
each khel on the basis of seniority. Their membership is
based on clan unit for which reason, every khel is inhabited
by almost all the five clans presented in this village.
This system of government is more or less akin to a
monarchical system of government where Tongti (chief) are
the kings and Chochangs (assistants) a body of advisors, to
the king, although in practice they are not autocratic.

Beside being Tongti-Chochang, a chairman and
secretary to the village council are appointed who usually
presides over the village council meeting. This is of a
recent innovation, prompted by the need to maintain written
records backed by state legislation. Their tenure is five
years according to the Nagaland Village Council Act, Article
16(6) of 1982, which also states that "No Government servant
is entitled to become a council member either Garik or Gombura". However, the Tungti-Chochang and Pangli becomes members of the village council by traditional mode of selection.

Procedure for Selection to Echungren (generation seat)

The succession to Echungren (generation seat) marks the end and beginning of another new generation. As such in such a case, the present incumbent of the village council demits office paving the say for the new incumbent, who represents a new generation and continuity.

When the date is fixed for succession, a ceremonial function is solemnly observed where both the parties (i.e. outgoing and incoming councillors) sit together in front of the eldest priest's house and exchange rice wine, which signifies fare-well. This is followed by a discussion in matters relating to village customs and tradition. The outgoing members bestow blessing upon the new incumbents for the whole ensuing tenure which would constitute a generation, i.e. 30 years. As a mark of reward for services rendered during their tenure of office, the old incumbents are presented with much amount of meat in varying sizes from the new incumbents, whereby in turn, the procedure for meat share among the new incumbents are also decided. This function in practice is same with the traditional practice.
Tradition further points out that when a councillor retires from the seat, he relinquishes all status and would be treated only as a mere priest. All the sittings of the village council were held in front of the Pruti's house (today of the council hall), where the oldest Tongi (chief) presides over the meeting (today by the village council chairman). The Pruti was responsible to summon all public meetings and assemblies of the councillors. According to Lotha tradition, a group of women would perform the kitchen works temporarily at any sittings of the council meeting.

Qualifications

The cardinal qualifications of the priest and chief is that he should be the eldest surviving male of the clan or 'hel in question. He must be a person belonging to the founding member or clan of the village and from a well-to-do family. Priests/Chiefs must be married persons provided the wife is also entitled to participate in the selection process. He must possess dedication of struggle against all that is associated with anti-social activities and well versed with village customs and tradition. Beside fulfilling these main conditions the person in question must possess other qualities such as leadership and integrity. On the other, a person to be selected chief, must possess other fetching qualities like good physique, dominating
personality, eloquence in speech, bravery in the battle field and kindness of heart as prime requisites.

Procedure for Meat Share

The procedure for meat share among the councillors were and are decided by the Tongti (chiefs) on the basis of seniority by consensus. In the olden days, the Piut (priest) was entitled to get the head of all animals slaughtered on any occasion during meat sharing processes among the councillors. On certain occasions like the Tokhu ceremony after the harvesting season, the Piut spears a pig whose stomach is eaten there by himself and company, the rest of the meat being divided up and distributed among the councillors on seniority basis. Of the chiefs/councillors, the eldest Tongti is entitled to get the biggest share and following him, the first four Eraño Tongti (seniormost chiefs) are entitled to get the legs of all animals. Beside, there was and is also another person called Emha (eldest person in the village in general) entitled to get the tail of all animals signifying his age-old status as well as a mark of respect. No one opposes this arrangement, as he knows that he too will have similar privileges in his old age.

Thus the social value of meat sharing among the village councillors have great significance. The varying sizes of meat shares among the councillors or any part of it
may carry a symbolic meaning, and reflect as status ranking. Further, a meat share to a council member signifies his pay reward for tenure of services rendered in office and as a mark of respect and reward in the absence of regular pay. A person's status in the society is determined by what size his share of meat is. Animals sacrificed for friendship treaties with other neighbouring villagers, infliction of fines, animals for ceremonial sacrifice etc. are some major sources of meat sharings among the village councillors in Wolha village added to the occasion of succession to Echungren (generation seat).

Nzontsu (general village citizen conference)

Beside the village council there was and is also an assembly of village citizens called Nzontsu. In this conference, all the male adults from 12 years above are entitled to participate and by rule to attend. It is held normally once in every three years in the month of January. According to tradition, the senior Tongti presides over the assembly. This conference is held on an open ground, possibly in the village court-yard. The Tongti-Chochang (chosen representatives of the councillors) or village elders make statements concerning the activities of the village to be pursued. The attendants are also requested to present agendas for discussion and are open to speak on the subject. However, expression is limited against raising
accusations and personal charges to any individuals on personal grounds. Transgressors of this rule are surely punished. If the session business are not concluded, adjournment was and is also made for the next session.

This conference is mainly concerned with developmental activities for the welfare of the community, like drinking water supply, construction of approach road in between the khels within the village, schematic proposals to be set forth for the whole year etc. Under this conference, working of the Village Level Workers (VLW) such as Rural Development Board (RDB), Village Development Board (VDB), etc. are planned and the village council is responsible for endorsement of functional action to these bodies.

Beside developmental activities, the conference's primary responsibility is the enactment of village ordinances and regulations. The meeting is presided over by a chairman, and minutes are kept by a secretary. They debate, adopt, modify or rescind some village ordinances and regulations; they approve all items in both the ordinary and extraordinary village budgets; they authorize any borrowings of funds; they review and approve the audit of all village expenditures. Most village ordinances and regulations are originally drafted as model legislation by this conference. Thus the laws which regulate their social system are simple but most effective which further enhance the purview of the
Village council and as a measure of local customs and usages.

Section 'D'

The Naga Village Council vis-a-vis Gaonbura-Dobashi Institutions

Village government in Naga society varies considerably from tribe to tribe and village to village in many cases. The village political organisation among the tribal Nagas may be possibly divided into three broad categories with special reference to the Ao, Sangtam and Lotha tribes. Thus, a federal democratic form of village government is identified with that of the village council with Sumpatsu village as a representative. The Sangtam Naga tribes of Chimonger village reflects a dimension of a republican democratic form and with the Lothas, combination of authoritarian-democratic type is discerned. However, the basic structural social and political unit of these three tribes, as with all other Naga tribes, is the clan, the Khel and the village as a whole. All these are closely knit as a co-operative social system, well organised into a system of village government centralized in a council and the people's lives being ordered by a sense of duty and loyalty to the common goal of solidarity. The Naga village councils, although at one time well established, today seem to have lost much of its independence and functions, as a result of larger state administrative control today, read with the
Nagaland Village Council Act, Article 16(6) of 1982 is that the village councils do not have the same traditional authority.

Of the above, how the village councils lost their former status of absolute autonomy can be traced from colonial times of the late 19th century, where the colonial administration, and later followed by the Indian administration after Independence, imposed its superior authority and control over the villages' independent status.

A concrete example is identified with the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945, which provides that criminal justice shall be administered by the Political Officer of the colonial and post-independence administration, followed by the Assistant Political Officer and when required, by the village authorities all of whom were and are recognized as competent administrators of the law (Chaube, S., 1973:147). It provided power to the village councils to try a number of criminal offences such as theft, simple hurt, criminal or house trespass and assault, and to impose fines not exceeding Rs.50/- for them, as well as to award payment in compensation to the extent of the injury sustained. This was a delegation of power and functions by a superior authority over formerly autonomous and independent villages. In this way, sociologically we understand how the village councils lost much of its authority. Further, to dispense justice and maintain law and order, along with the
establishment of the colonial administration from the late 19th century, the two extra institutions of Gaonbura (government agents) and Dobashis (government interpreters) were instituted as representatives of the colonial and later, national (1947) and state government (1963) for over the villages and the people. The functionaries of these institutions were not, in fact, paid anything, but were provided woolen waist coats and by virtue of being government agents accorded a certain amount of authority and prestige. Their appointment changed the organisation of the village councils to some extent, for the reason that they, i.e. the Gaonburas naturally became members of the village council causing in a way the power equation enjoyed by the traditional members of the council to be tilted in favour of the Gaonburas. Thus the two institutions emerged as above the traditional village council since they represented a higher and superior state authority. These two groups of government functionaries were practically the agent between the village and the larger state authority. They were, and are also now, provided responsibilities in certain cases to settle inter-village disputes. Their appearance, i.e. the Gaonburas and the Dobashis as representatives of a larger authority meant that all Naga villagers in general, lost their traditional prestige of being the ultimate authority unto themselves, despite the provisions of Article 371-A of the Constitution and the Nagaland Assembly Acts, 1970, 1982.
and 1985, at a later stage which all recognize and stresses the protection of custom and tradition. As a result, Mann and Mann points out that "those who propounded the new systems (i.e., the state control), and the connected provisions thereof, did not take adequate account of the customary provisions including prohibitions as well as sanctions. Such an approach has shaken the mechanism of social control at many a places (1989:6)." Thus, what they pointed out can be identified with the perceived secondary position of the village councils as against the Gaonburas and the Dobashis, who are by appearance and proximity, more powerful than the village council functionaries.

To illustrate the above, all manner of cases, both civil and criminal, added to other administrative and political aspects were the responsibility of village councils, hence tradition on basis of customary practices, and most satisfactorily of that, to the extent of sustaining relations in the other villages. Contemporarily, other than some routine matters of village administration like cultivation site allocation etc., all serious cases of a criminal nature and of inter-village civil cases are relegated to the larger state machinery administrative decision and judicial process, through the Gaonburas and Dobashis. Theoretically speaking, the policy of the administration through the Gaonburas and Dobashis is merely to reflect state supremacy, but otherwise to strengthen the
village council and its function. Such an avowed objective becomes clear when seen as in the case of the Konyaks, where the general village citizens are given a breathing space of freedom and democracy by associating a number of elders as a council to take down the position of the extremely autocratic chief. Similarly, also in the case of the Lotha, the Sema and the Chang tribes respectively, whose council's authority is weak, as against their village chief.

Any administrator in function in relation going to the village, will first meet the Gaonburas and any orders or work gets done through them. They function with members of the village council, in so far as the village concerned has any matter to do with the state authority. The Gaonburas are chosen by the members of his Khel, but is appointed by the Deputy Commissioner of the district concerned. The office of the Gaonbura is not hereditary but honorary. Every three years, they receive from the government a red woolen shawl and a red waist coat as their insignia of rank and authority, of being a government appointee. Their duties are not of a police, for the reason that they do not arrest and detain people, and they do not take action unless a dispute on an issue turns public, which must be dealt by the whole community, be it by mediation or by the use of force. They may be removed from the office if they lose the confidence of the people. Although the Gaonburas generally are illiterate, however, by function they are expected to be
intelligent and also wealthy, and of high social status. In fact, they are active human agencies in the village framework who being government agents, keep in touch with the outside world on the other hand and thus serve as a link with their own villagers on the other.

The Gaunburas are empowered to collect taxes from the fellow villagers for the government, from which they are exempted. The Gaunburas are permitted to take a certain percentage of the taxes collected as remuneration in the absence of pay. By function and jurisdiction, they carry government orders to the village council and cooperate with it in pursuit of the orders. They give necessary discretion from the government regarding village developmental programmes, information about government visitors etc. as are directed by the district administrative officers. In some cases they are responsible to settle petty cases, though within his Pheel concerned. By state legislation, they automatically become a member of the village council by virtue of being a government agent, where he may also express his opinion and also act in matters related to the state authority. The village council, however, is independent of the Gaunburas when it has to strictly deliberate and act within the strict confines of customs and tradition. The Gaunburas find similarities with the Shoya of the Kamos of Japan, who function as a group/clan representative within his village, whose appointment is to
be approved by the Buralu (community) officials (Ward, Hall and Beardsley, 1959:49 & 356-57). The Shoya's most important function is liaison between the whole village and the Ojava (Ibid:49), equivalent to Naga village councils.

Presumably, the British administrators did not have the time or the inclination to study the native language for communication, for which reason they resorted to employing local talents by virtue of their bilingual capacity and are called Dobashi (government interpreters) for administrative purposes. The Dobashis' duty was to interpret the various Naga dialects into Assamese which the British officers knew, as well as to interpret the local customary laws and customs correctly. This ready recourse to employ government interpreters had given birth to a new class of local staff in the administration. Subsequently, among the other concerns, these Dobashis were given power to decide judicial cases according to local customary laws of the particular tribe concerned which the British administrators concurred with. Seeing their efficacy and also as a matter of convenience, the colonial power established the Dobashi Court in 1935 in all the district and sub-divisional headquarters at Kohima and Moko-chung (Sema, Hokishe, 1986:170). They now are in all district and sub-divisional levels of the State of Nagaland.

The usefulness and the influence of the Dobashi's are significant and necessary. Contemporarily, they are
recruited after careful scrutiny by the district administration in consultation with the respective village council's concerned, and who must possess knowledge of Hindi or Nagamese as extra languages, besides being well versed with the customary law of the tribe concerned. Many disgruntled elements not satisfied with the village council decisions or of inter-village disputes generally end up in the Dobashi Court. For these reasons, it is the perception that the village council is subordinate to the Dobashi Court. However, the fact remains that the Dobashi Court as an institution does not have any power over the village councils to decide about village affairs at large other than the judicial dimension which is not often.

Further, the Dobashis are neither exempt nor as a rule bound to attend any village council meetings, for they are full time government servants. The Gaonburas have power to arbitrate khei discrepancies within the village, but the Dobashis are vested only with the power to settle criminal and inter-village disputes as is directed by the administrative officers in a more or less formalistic way on the basis of Nagad customary laws besides their true function as interpreters.

The existence and function of the Gaonbura and Dobashi institutions and their proximity to the state authority often in the perception of the village folks is to consider the village councils as subordinate and secondary.
It is not reflective of the reality as these institutions are mere reflections of state caused supremacy. On the other hand, constitutional provisions to safeguard the Naga customary laws and tradition are a true testimony to the possible autonomy under present circumstances of the village councils and thus of its unique position.