Chapter V
Values of democratic politics and socio-political institutions of the Angami Nagas

Democracy evolved by the Greeks in the 4th Century B.C., has come to acquire the most widespread ideological legitimacy in the world as a form of government by the end of twentieth century. Democracy came to be applied to a system of representative government after the American and French revolutions. Since then, the main appeal of democracy has been that human affairs should be guided by reason and that the principles of liberty and equality should be integral parts of governance. It is committed to the promotion of individual rights, rule of law and independence of judiciary to ensure the rights and liberties of the individual, and accountability. In spite of its worldwide appeals, the democratizing countries are increasingly facing a crisis in governance. While democracy in most of the developing countries comes as ‘imported ideas,’ countries where democracy is successful are often associated with “prior formation of a nation state, a homogeneous population, an industrial economy, a strong middle class, and shared traditions of civic culture. Democracy remains a contentious term in many countries in spite of an upsurge in the ‘process of democratisation’ in the second half of the twentieth century.228 Democracy once

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established is never static but continuous to evolve. Indeed, sustaining democracy is often as difficult a task as establishing it. This is reflected in the fact that not all democracies introduced in Asia in the past have survived but have had different experiences.

Democratization is the process that leads to democracy. While India have had stable democratic governments since its independence, Myanmar and Pakistan have had repeated authoritarian regimes. Some African societies with strong tribal traditions have also responded differently to the process of democratization. These studies have shown that while some countries such as Tanzania and Zanzibar are making little progress in consolidating democracy, other countries including Madagascar, Mali and Ghana are showing vitality in their democratic institutions. Interestingly, a tendency to revive traditional institutions and values remained strong in most of the African societies, despite the inroads of western values throughout the colonial intervention. Most of the African students who were exposed to western education are taking pride in African traditional values. Thus, seniority in age and other traditional values were the main source of authority in most of the African tribal societies. Therefore, it is natural that the

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imposition of any variety of liberal democracy to these societies has led to tensions and conflicts. This is not a phenomenon limited to African societies. Indeed, different societies including many western countries have experienced almost similar conflicts, though at a different level and in a different context.

There has been an unexpected return to prominence, the re-invention and resurgence of traditional institutions and values associated with them in different parts of the world. Many communities in the Northeastern region of India, who are new to the system of democratic governance, have been demanding constitutional recognition of their traditional institutions. Thus, the prevalence of traditional values and conflict with values of liberal democracy becomes evident. In most of these tribal societies, the traditional institutions continue to operate at different levels alongside the democratic governance. Therefore, in spite of the introduction of democratic constitutionalism, there are many obstacles for consolidating, sustaining and making democracy stronger and viable in Northeast India. As stated by A.K. Baruah, conflicts will be sharper in these societies where traditional institutions acquire both political and legal recognition under the new system of governance. He also states that legal recognition of traditional organisations, institutions, norms and practices in turn, affects traditional values,
thus creating a political reality of a unique nature.\textsuperscript{231} Introduction of democratic values could also ignite conflict among communities where there is no proper demarcation of power or equalization of opportunities. Some ethnic groups may intervene to either resist democratization to protect traditional values or support democratization in order to reverse its marginalization or exclusion from power. In such situations, ethnicity and religion become tools deployed for the acquisition of power.\textsuperscript{232} Further, in most cases the state lack the ability to provide economic and socio-political goods to the mass of the people irrespective of ethnic origins or religious inclinations. This often resulted in giving loyalty to social formations such as the community, or ethnic groups. Significantly, such forms of governance not only have survived the coming of democratic governance but they are also being re-invented in all sorts of hybrid forms in an effort at asserting their identities for political strategies at different levels. The traditional leaders are resisting the attempts to assign them to the archives of the past.

Most of the ethnic identities of the Northeast India are defining their socio-cultural boundaries in opposition to other identities in much more narrower terms than in the past. The distancing of one group from the other has set in motion such unseen dynamics that building modern socio-political institutions on these soils is


a hazardous task. Today, there appears to be a complex relation of competition as well as cooperation and accommodation. Therefore, the question that is often posed is whether there is any possible way of reconciling these re-invented or modernized traditions with the values and goals of liberal democracy adopted by India in 1950. The changing political values of the society remain one of the important factors, which continuously influence the political structures and processes. It is therefore imperative to find out the political values of democracy and the values of the society in which the democratic politics and accompanying institutions are established. In the backdrop of this, an attempt is made in this chapter to analyze the interface of values of democratic politics with Angami traditional institutions and values associated with them in order to find out whether the values of traditional institutions interfere with the democratic system of governance, which profess individual liberty, and the rule of law. The study of values, particularly of the interface of traditional values with modern democratic values will at least partially facilitate the understanding of the process of governance in Nagaland. Values are considered by many to be crucial for understanding cultures and thus, political behavior. By values or the normative principles it is taken here to mean informal rule that circumscribe appropriate behavior in a particular context. Democracy has assumed different meaning

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through its evolution in certain periods, and assumed different meanings under different social, economic and political contexts. The present study concentrates on the values of liberal democracy as adopted and professed in the Constitution of India.

**Values of Democratic politics**

Democratic politics, for all of its variability and problems, is the politics of any good governance. In this context, democratic politics aims at the widest distribution of power among the citizenry. Democratic politics is a means by which all people are included in determining how a society makes choices. The values of democratic politics, which are identified through a review of literature,\(^2\) include elected representatives, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, free media and freedom of association and inclusive citizenship, among others. The Indian democracy is based on the principle of popular sovereignty or popular power and the basis of legitimacy of the government is the consent of the people. Competition for political power marks the essential element of democracy in India. Indian democracy tries to ensure participation of people in the political process by providing basic rights and freedoms to the individual. The

principle that the Indian democracy proclaimed underline the necessity of public
discussion, which assume the existence of different opinion and tolerance towards
the same in the society. It has a firm belief in the principles of liberty, equality and
pluralism. The Indian democracy professes individualism and provides for certain
basic rights and freedoms of the individual. It is also committed to social welfare,
rule of law and independence of judiciary. In the early days of post-independent
period, the most viable political space in India was occupied by forces, which
were friendly to the dominant values of democratic politics, although traditional
political values were very strong in large parts of the country, including Northeast
India.

The values of democratic politics reject the rule of one person or a few over
others and hold the view that every one being equal deserves a voice in
governance. Public offices are not the property of incumbents but theoretically
belong to the citizens who can reclaim it in an orderly and peaceful way. The logic
of the democratic model, therefore assumes that public officials are responsible
for their conduct and accountable to citizens. The critics of minimalist democracy
want to make democracy more inclusive, not only by drawing more people into
decision-making processes but also by expanding the sites of democratic control
to new spheres of social experience. In brief, the values of democratic politics
include elected representatives, free, fair and frequent elections of these
representatives; freedom of expression, where citizens have rights to express their voice; access to alternative sources of information; a free media and freedom of association; where citizens have right to form and join independent associations for participation in organizing and influencing state policy and practice and inclusive citizenship where no one is excluded or discriminated against. Values of democratic politics is therefore about much more than just having a vote, and is not determined by any specific set of institutions. Rather, it is characterized by agreed rules within society that govern a set of principles such as the rule of law, accountability, fair representation and effective participation and voice and a set of values that recognize individual and collective human rights and freedom. It offers a peaceful way for societies to determine how people live together, how competing interest are accommodated and how available resources are allocated.

**Values of Angami socio-political institutions**

The traditional values associated with the Angami socio-political institutions are identified through an analysis of information available in existing literatures, and unstructured interviews conducted with elders, Youth leaders, Christian and women organisations. The values of the traditional socio-political

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of the Angami was characterized by rule of the male elders, respect for
seniority of age, physical strength, patriarchy and gender inequality in terms of
division of labour, property ownership and decision-making. Before the advent of
the British, Phichü kehou (Informal Council of Elders) ruled the Angami society
according to their customs and practices. The concept of the rule of law was alien
to them. Authority of age and physical strength was greatly respected in their
traditional society. In addition to the Phichü kehou, there were different village
officials, which show that a crude form of social stratification based on the
division of labour existed in the traditional society. Since the Angamis lived
within “clan boundaries” where their ancestors lived, they were related to one
another by agnatic descent. The clans never lost their political functions.
Relationships within the clan were determined by exogamy, ownership of clan-
land, ward-settlement, labor organization, clan courts and councils, etc. Thus, the
traditional Angami society was a close knit one with strong bond of kinship.
Jhuming and constant fight between villages, which involved collective defense
group efforts fostered group solidarity in the Angami society. The new system of
democratic governance professing individual rights, the rule of law, equality
before the law and other democratic values introduced and adopted by the Indian
Constitution in 1950 was foreign to the Angamis who were organized under their
own traditional leaders since the pre-colonial period.
Compatibility or Variance

Patriarchy

The traditional Angami society was socially or gender inclusive in that titles and functions of traditional leaders were by inheritance passed on to male successors. The traditional institutions shunted women to domestic arena rather than involving them in the decision-making process at the family, village and societal forums. This custom has spilled over to the modern system of democratic form of government as men view any demand of women as a threat to their prerogative rights to acquire and retain political power. Similarly, decision-makers and planners view development only in terms of economic growth and infrastructure building thereby ignoring social and cultural aspects. According to Monalisa Changkija,\textsuperscript{236} the system as it exists today is biased, discriminatory, obsolete, and inimical to the welfare, development and progress of Naga women. The State administrative apparatus and the financial institutions catalyses a transition from an egalitarian society to class formation and from a relatively high status of women to growing patriarchy as they give loans only to individual land owning heads of families usually interpreted as men. Thus, the male elites, who took control of all decision-making, interpreted the customary laws in their

\textsuperscript{236} Monalisa Changkija., “Right to Choose One’s Destiny,” Telegraph, 19 March 2004, p. 16.
favour, which strengthened patriarchy. 237 Discrimination against women is visible particularly in the ownership and in the legally enforceable right to benefit from, control or alienate one’s assets. Inheritance or the right to own, use and control property is basic to it. 238 Tribal tradition is one of male control over community resources and society. Even though, the Nagas have the right to follow their customary laws, they have not brought in reforms to introduce gender equity. Instead, the State supports individual property and deals only with the head of the family, usually a male. Additionally, since leadership was reserved for a particular group or clan, other members of the society were excluded from traditional rule. In some cases, leadership was not inherited but was selected by the elders in a society, or the male members themselves could chose or influence the selection of traditional leaders.

In contrast, roles are built on professions and what counts is the individual skill in the modern democratic governance. In principle, all professions are open to both men and women. Individuals are identified as citizens who are presumed to have equal rights and certain duties. Electing governments, obeying laws and paying taxes are not the only aspects of a citizen’s role. Instead, civic culture conceives citizens as individuals that are capable of distinguishing between the

238 Interview with Ms. Suokhrieno Nagi, age 68, Jotsoma village on 22 June 2008.
private sphere and the realm of the public goods, opinion and decision-making. Leadership in Angami society was and is male-dominated at all levels. In modern democratic states, including India, inclusiveness is guaranteed through universal suffrage, where both the adult male and female populations have the right to vote and stand for office. The main criticism levelled against the traditional leaders is the exclusion of members belonging to other clans or communities living in the same space. This indeed clashes with the basic values of constitutional democracy.

**Seniority in Age**

To the Angamis, advanced in age was a sign of maturity. *Phichū kehou* (Informal council of elders) was consisted of *Phichūmia, Peyūmia and Pehūmia*. *Phichūmia* were those who attained above 60 years of age having grand children. *Peyūmia* were those who had skill in diplomacy, knowledge of oral history, honesty, wisdom, and leadership quality. *Pehūmia* were usually above 75yrs of age. They were respected and considered as the ‘wise men’ of the village, which in turn influence their politics. In age roles, the young had to reach a certain age in order to be considered a “wise man”. In addition, the youths or younger generations had limited access to traditional institutions. Roles were also determined by lineage, which assigned specific rights and duties to certain
families, individuals and particular social groups. Thus, the social construction of the roles of individual was defined by age, gender and lineage, which predetermined a person’s status in the society. The persistence of the traditional value of respect for elders in the society have prevented the young educated and vibrant people from taking active part in important decision-making bodies at different levels. The traditional 'men only' institutions have continued in new forms without completely giving way to democratic practices.

**Kin protection and group solidarity**

The Angami traditional society was governed by a structure of values that privileged the community defined often in terms of the clan or the tribe. Such society resemble semi-organic units whose members are held together by semi-biological ties like kinship, living together, common dangers, common joys and common distresses. Such society considers tribe or clan as everything and individual as nothing. The Angamis politics is influenced by the traditional values of kin protection and group solidarity. They raise the issues of identity, identify values and interests for their own community, and very often adopted an excluvist and discriminatory politics against other communities who in their view are likely to pose immediate threats to their values and interests. In order to remain distinct from other communities and as political strategies, they revive their traditions and
traditional institutions, which are not democratic in the real sense of the term. Community politics seemed to have positively affected democratic politics as far as the question of participation is concerned. Some of the important community based organizations in the context of Nagaland include the Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), Naga Mothers Association (NMA), and Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), among others. These community based movements and organizations have been on many occasions able to draw a large number of people to active politics. These organizations at one level have strengthened democracy, as they have been able to garner public support against the state governments and even against the insurgent groups. However, community politics play a negative role as far as civil and political liberties such as freedom of thought and expression, individual rights, association etc are concerned. Community in many cases acquires precedence over individuals in pursuit of its own goals and values. Thus, it is not always possible for a non-Naga or a non-tribal to participate freely in political activities, as the elites from the dominant community are intolerant towards other communities. In the name of maintaining group solidarity, the people are led to adopt an unfavorable view towards the outsiders. The treatment meted out to some non-Naga labourers in Nagaland by the Naga Students Federation is one example of suppressing the rights of a non-Naga individual member.\footnote{A.K. Baruah, “Communities and Democracy: A Northeast Indian Perspective,” North East India Studies.} Similarly, the Naga People’s
Movement for Human Rights has not condemned the killings of hundreds of innocent Kukis in Nagaland because of the Kuki Naga Conflict in Manipur, although it has not failed to condemn the violations of human rights by the security forces against the Nagas. Thus, the traditional values of kin protection and group solidarity that still remains an important characteristics of contemporary Naga society undermines the values of democratic politics such as rule of law, equality before law, freedom of thought and expression. This stress on group solidarity runs counter to the democratic spirit of competition.

**Responsiveness and Accountability**

Responsiveness means that all forms of authority should act in the interests of the people considering their priorities and needs. In other words, since the decision makers make decisions on behalf of the people, the decision should respect the will of those people. Accountability requires that there should be mechanisms in place to penalize the decision-makers for their poor performance. Brinkerhoff makes a distinction between accountability within government and outside accountability, which have different sanction capacities. While the former includes courts, parliaments and legislative committees, the latter includes elections and the media. Thus, the basic concept of a democracy with elected


representatives is that elections guarantee responsiveness and accountability to the authorities. Since, the traditional leaders held their positions inherently for life, the possibilities of sanctions were restricted. They were not accountable to the village as a whole.\textsuperscript{241} It is hard to determine whether the traditional leaders were responsive or not because of their functional limitations and biasness in many cases. Nevertheless, one may argue that the Angami's system of village level deliberation based upon community consensus as compared to chiefship in other societies as democratic. This argument stands in sharp contrast to conventional approaches to democracy, which would suggest that traditional leadership is an anachronism of lesser developed countries, and stands in contrast to western democratic norms and values.

**Legitimacy**

The leaders of democratic country derived their legitimacy from electoral processes, rule of law, constitutional and legal systems that structures decision-making processes. In contrast, the legitimacy for the traditional authorities of the Angami was rooted in customs, traditions history and culture, often combined with religious/divine reference.\textsuperscript{242} Traditional leaders claimed special legitimacy in the eyes of their people because these institutions were seen as embodying their

\textsuperscript{241} Ms Kerihovile Kikhi, age 64, Chairperson, Women Organisation, Viswema village on 1 February 2009.
\textsuperscript{242} Interviews with village elders: i) Mr. Pelhusievi Nakhro, age 87, Medziphema village on 6 January, 2006; ii) Mr. Solahie Sogotsu, age 72, Chiechama village on 5 February 2006; iii) Mr. Pudel Kikhi, age 80, Viswema village on 2 January, 2006; iv) Mr. Neinguto Napransu, age 74, Jotsoma village on 14 April 2006.
people’s history, culture, laws, values and religion. Since, many of the
traditional leaders held their positions inherently for life, the possibilities of
sanctions were restricted. Thus, while legitimacy is closely linked to democracy, it
is rather a foreign concept to the Angamis and other communities of the region. It
is therefore, not surprising that the legitimacy of traditional authorities is greater
than the legitimacy of the democratic structures in many tribal societies of the
region.

Conflicts between the two values

In almost all the tribal communities of the region, some elites are
demanding for recognition of their traditional institutions, while another section
seems to be accepting the constitutional form of governance more seriously. A.
Lanunungsang Ao argues that the introduction of traditional institutions is the
only answer for the Nagas, because the present alien political system, which is an
imposed one, can never bring solution to meet the needs of the Nagas. Similarly, B.N. Lanong, the Deputy Chief Executive Member, Khasi Hills
Autonomous District Council states that the Autonomous District Councils, which

243 Interview with Mr. Puhozo Visu, age 39, Ex-President, Youth Organisation, Viswema on 2 January 2006.

244 A. K. Baruah, “Democratic politics and Traditional Institutions: Some Reflections”, presented at an International
Workshop on Community, Conflicts and Crisis of Democratic Governance: An Analysis of the Societies of North-East
India, at North-Eastern Hill University, 18-19 September, Shillong, 2002.

245 A. Lanungsang Ao, “A study of Traditional self-governing Institutions among the Hill Tribal population groups of
Nagaland”, presented at a seminar on Traditional Self-governing Institutions among hill tribal populations in North-
East India. 29-31 August, Guwahati, 1994.
aims at uplifting and protecting the minority tribals, their cultures, traditions, customs, dialects and faith was the product of the prolonged debates of the Constituent Assembly. Other argues that the traditional institutions, which were not inclusive of women and ethnic minorities, have become instruments for privatization of community resources of land, water and forests. The issues of women’s role, representation of minorities, and public scrutiny of functionaries and auditing of accounts of traditional institutions need a critical analysis before giving them constitutional recognition. Thus, there are democratic governance with elected representatives, rule of law, equality and other legal systems on the one hand and traditional structures with long-standing historic norms, often linked to spiritual, religious, political, judicial and economic functions on the other interacting at different levels of governance.

However, there is a significant variation among the tribal communities of Northeast India regarding the extent of their attachment to the traditional values or to the democratic values in their daily lives, as well as, the degree of influence of one or the other form of authority. Nevertheless, it is clear that traditional values were, and continue to be the source of political authority in most of the tribal societies including the Angamis of Nagaland. Therefore, the tendency to revive traditional institutions for various reasons remains strong in many tribal societies

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of the region despite the introduction of liberal democracy by India in 1950. Both
the Centre and the State governments neither are under pressure, as can they
neither abdicate their constitutional responsibility of protecting life, liberty and
property nor are in a position to invigorate institutional capabilities for orderly
governance. Thus, the issue of recognition and revival of the traditional
institutions of the tribal communities therefore is a major political problem
generated by conflicting political aspirations and complex political realities of
tribal areas, particularly in the northeastern hill states. The question is whether and
how the gap between these governing systems can be bridged. Most of the tribal
societies of the Northeast India, are today at serious socio-political crossroads.
The three sets of authority- traditional, colonial and post-colonial have interacted
with each other in different ways at different junctures. This has resulted in
further confusion on the part of traditional leaders and the policy makers leading
to crisis in governance.

In the context of the Angami Nagas, the values upheld by their traditional
socio-political institutions are not compatible with the democratic values adopted
by the Indian constitution. In spite of all these variances, the conflict between
traditional leaders adopting a revivalist stand, and those deviating from it does not
arise in the case of the Angamis since the Indian constitution under Article 371A
accommodated and amalgamated the traditional political institutions of Nagaland.
The issues concerning decentralization and devolution of power and responsibilities, has not generated the form of debate as seen in other states, particularly Meghalaya. Yet, a sense of ownership of the system is still missing in many parts of the state.247 This is evident from the study that chienuos still accept the traditional authority for settling land disputes, religious or social matters at thepfiu levels in spite of the existence of statutory bodies at the village levels. Nevertheless, there has been an attempt to discuss the possibilities of restructuring these traditional institutions on the model of Naga Hoho amongst Naga scholars, political thinkers and planners. The issue in question is to adhere to traditional values and practices to preserve their identity even if, they contradict with modern democratic principles.

Further, although the values of democratic politics and traditional socio-political institutions have not led to political problem, the traditional values that profess group assertion, kin-protection and collective efforts continue to influence the working of constitutional and community-based bodies as community in many cases acquires precedence over individuals. The modern democratic system of choosing representatives through votes is not only confined to the organs of government but is adopted by other organizations such as the Church, Angami Students Association, Angami Public Organisation as well as other Naga

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organisations. Thus, the Angamis are largely supportive of the modern democratic practice of choosing representatives through voting as against the traditional way of gaining positions of authority through might or through heredity. Thus, while the statutory bodies and community-based organisations are modern and constitutional in form, their behavioural content is traditional. So long as the Angami middle class and the educated are able to generate economic, political and social capital and have access to positions of authority in democratic governance, conflicts between the two values are not likely to generate political problems. However, as long as seniority of age, traditional wisdom and kinship, group solidarity and clan takes precedence over individual liberty and rule of law, the values of democratic politics cannot be firmly established. Since, community receives precedents over individuals in many societies, traditional values that profess group assertion, kin-protection and collective effort come in conflict with democratic governance, which profess individual liberty, rule of law and other democratic values. While many Nagas view the traditional institutions, which were functionally required to meet the needs of an isolated society, as no longer relevant in meeting the modern needs of rapidly developed Angami society, others maintain that, retention of traditional institutions is necessary for preserving their distinct identity.
The party based politics of the Indian democratic system of governance, which was unknown to the Angamis has brought along with it political factionalism and fragmentation along tribal and even clan lines. Although political parties did issue manifestos, still, tribal affiliations and not party affiliation determine the outcome of the elections. The candidates have confined their campaign activities mostly at grassroots level institutions like Village Councils, Gaonburas, Youth and women organisations. The villagers without comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the democratic set up are caught into emotional support of one candidate against another. This emotional support has led to conflict and violence amongst themselves seriously affecting social life and social solidarity. Nevertheless, the recent elections saw an increased fervour among the electorate for participation in the state's electoral process.

The modern democratic principles have penetrated to the Angami society to a certain extent. The penetration of modern democratic principle of grassroot participation in decision-making is evident in the function of the Village Development Boards and Village Councils in calling public meetings. The participation of people from all walks of life in such meetings have shown that they are interested in sustaining democratic system of choosing representatives and democratic method of taking decisions through majority votes. However, participation alone does not ensure a democratic society. For the smooth
functioning of the democratic institutions, the democratic values have to be deeply entrenched in the society. The developing trends in Angami society seems to be far from such ideals, although many scholars described their traditional society as practicing a pure form of government.

There has also been a great imbalance in the representation in terms of gender. The traditional value of gender inequality as a political norm in the present society seems to have adversely affected the participation of women in politics and in important bodies of decision-making in the society. In Angami society, women and politics are more often seen as an antithesis. In the electoral history of Nagaland, women never held positions in the state legislature. The most important factor that precludes women from elected office is the socio-cultural prescriptions, among others. The traditional values, which did not, recognized the rights of women as primary decision-makers influence even the political parties as both the national and regional parties consider women as good voters and not as good candidates. Men appear to control all institutions of the society. The male elites who controls and interprets their customary laws reinforce this process. The persistence of the traditional value of respect for elders also seems to have prevented the young educated and vibrant people from taking active part in important decision-making bodies. The establishment of the new democratic institutions has not brought about a corresponding change in the attitude and
values of the people. The people do not seem to have internalized the democratic values, although they are interested in sustaining modern elected government. On the contrary, it is found that people still cling to their traditional ideas and values. This inclination often renders the rule of law meaningless and group interest often stands in the way of individual freedom and rights.