CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF TRIBES IN THE PRE-BRITISH NAGA SOCIETY
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As we have established in our theoretical framework, the Naga society in the pre-British period has been found to be categorised as tribal by their Western administrators, based on a general approach to the term 'tribe' in the field of social sciences, in view of its primitive socio-economic and political character; which was enveloped within a traditional cultural system as compared to the developed Western societies organised into states. But we can see that a lot of changes have occurred since. The constitution of tribes and the state of inter-tribal relations in the pre-British period are found to be entirely different from that of the present. However, as the basis of the existing classification of Naga tribes goes back to the pre-British period, a study of inter-tribal relations within the Naga society cannot be conducted without a thorough understanding of the nature of Naga society at this period.

Very little history of the Nagas has been recorded. Since the Nagas did not have a script, all history had been passed on through an oral tradition. Serious consideration of such history becomes extremely difficult as it cannot be separated from myths and lores. Also, urbanisation and Western
influence, apart from undermining its weightage, have almost totally disrupted the chain of this tradition. Another problem is that very little research work on the Nagas has been done so far, and those written by Western writers may not be comprehensive and insightful or may lack factual accuracy. This could arise because their perspective was restricted by the tendency to interpret facts in the Western outlook. A fine illustration of this can be seen in the confusion over defining traditional social divisions. As we shall find later in our study, it can be seen that the labelling of social groups by Western authors in certain cases did not tally with the traditional system. Even then, for our purpose, it will be beyond the scope of this study to look for first-hand materials to substantiate this chapter, therefore we shall rely solely on secondary sources.

The Nagas are Indo-Mongoloid people, occupying the eastern Himalayan foothills, extending from the plains of eastern Assam to the Samract tract of Northern Burma, with Manipur to the South and Arunachal Pradesh to the North. It is difficult to identify the exact boundaries of the Naga inhabited areas because they fall within different political units. According to J. P. Mills Naga inhabited territory is bounded by the Hukawng valley in the North-East, the plains of Brahmaputra valley to the North-West, Kachar to the South-West, with the Chinwin river to

The total area occupied by the Nagas is said to be around 20,000 square miles. Of the tribes living in this territory Asoso Yonuo identifies thirty-nine tribes: Angami, Chakhesang, Ao, Sema, Lotha, Kuki, Chang, Konyak, Khienmungan, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Phom, Damsa, Zemai, Liangmai, Rongmai, Mao, Maram, Thangal, Tangkhul, Maring, Kom, Chiru, Anal, Moyong, Mongsang, Lamgang, Nocte, Tangsa, Wancho, Sinpho, Khampti, Haimi, Htangram, Rangpan, Para and Kalyo Kengyo.

We do not know the basis of this classification. Factors such as British recognition of tribes, tribal reorganisation, Naga nationalism and the political division of Nagas into different states, may have a role to play in tribal taxonomy. As such, we can safely say that there is a difference in the constitution of tribes between the pre-British period and the present day. Our purpose now will be to find out at what social and political organisational level a tribe might have been identified as a distinct tribal entity in the pre-British period. In order to investigate this we shall start with the early migration of the Nagas.

The exact origin of the Nagas remains unknown due to lack of dependable historical records. Some writers have suggested the original home of the Nagas to be the east, and that

5. Ibid., pp. 6 - 7.
similarities they share with the natives of Borneo, Sumatra, Formosa and Phillipines support their view. On the other hand, Visier Sanyu, a Naga scholar believes that the Nagas migrated from China in the pre-Christian era. Their migration, he says, took place in various waves spreading over centuries; in the process of which they came across influences in technology, varied social, political and religio-cultural traditions as they came into contact with other races. He believes that the nations of Borneo, Java, Sumatra and the Phillipines are also a part of these migrations. Sanyu, however, fails to authenticate this theory as he does not provide any evidence, except for claiming that there are similarities among them.

M. Alemchiba is of the opinion that the different Naga tribes share the same original home at one time. He groups the Mao, Angami, Sema and Lotha tribes as a single wave of immigrants whose original home was Khezhakenoma. The Tangkhul, Sangtam, Kheinmungam, Yimchunger, Chang and the Ao tribes are considered as another such 'wave group'. This wave theory suggests that some Naga tribes were sharing the same home at a particular point of time in their history. Therefore, there is the possibility that they might have shared the same village and come

from a much smaller social group such as a single tribe, clan or even family. But it is difficult to explain the relationship between two different wave groups from this dimension, and this needs further investigation.

The postulate that the Nagas might have been of a singular origin and ancestry finds support in the works of many anthropologists pertaining to the Nagas of the 19th century. W. C. Smith found similarities, though apparently they were not entirely uniform, in the customs and lifestyle of the Naga tribes. M. Horam opines that the Naga tribes and sub-tribes resemble one another to a great extent and as such the similarities outstrip the differences between them. He says that factors such as the multiplicity of language can easily be understood when one realises the isolated nature in which they lived as small social groups. According to E. A. Gait, the Naga tribes shared the same religious beliefs and differences occurred only in terms of practice, while the fundamental principles remained the same. Pemberton also describes the Nagas as a "singular race of people" and identified them as those living between the north-western extremity of Kachar and the frontiers

of Chittagong. 12 In the view of William Robinson, there appears to be some marks by which the Naga tribes are distinguished from their neighbours and some commonalities by which they are all bound together as one people. 13 The works of these commentators reveal that they have come to these conclusions by observing the customs, traditions and cultural practices of the various Naga tribes. Verrier Elwin observes that "there is an atmosphere, a spirit in a Naga which is unmistakeable." 14 But of course, this seems like, it is a very personal view.

The Nagas might have been one people, but they did not have a common name known to themselves - one which defined their identity as a single ethnic group. Their stage of development in the pre-British period is proof enough that there existed no socio-economic, political or religious unity among the Naga tribes and that they did not have pan-Naga inter-communication among themselves. Each individual village, therefore, might have existed independently on its own. It may be appropriate to quote Verrier Elwin here:

"The name (Naga) ... was not in general use among the Nagas until recently. It was given to them by the people of the plains and in the last century was used discriminately for the Abors and Daflas as well as for the Nagas themselves. Even as late as 1954, I found

people of Tuensang rarely speaking of themselves as Nagas, but as Konyaks, Changs, Phoms and so on.... Gradually, however, as the Nagas became more united they began to use the name for themselves until today it has become widely popular."15

A point worth mentioning on the Naga identity is that though they themselves did not have unity and lack a common name, they were easily distinguished from non-Naga tribes such as Kukis, Lushais and Chins inhabiting the same geographical area by early anthropologists.16 Even T. C. Hodson picked up Tangkhuls, Mao and Maram, Kolyo Khoirao, Kubuis, Queirengs, Chirus and Marings as Naga tribes in Manipur, but clearly stated that the Kukis who were a nomadic tribe are not Nagas.17 Again, it may mentioned that though the Naga territory touches the Hindu boundaries of Manipur and Assam, they remained more or less untouched by Hinduism.18 This happened inspite of the contact they had with both the Ahoms and Manipuris, and the economic relations that existed among them.19 The fact that there exist a distinctive Naga character cannot be doubted. Neville Maxwell points out that Nagas find no difficulty in identifying themselves from the other non-Naga tribes of Assam and Burma.20

15. Ibid., p. 4.
Similarly, Hokishe Serna opines that the Naga identity is distinct both in India and Burma. However, it is evident from their amorphous state that in the pre-British period, the Nagas never claimed such an identity.

What we have seen so far is that the Nagas might have come from a common origin and that they apparently share common features of a distinguishable identity. What then are the reasons for their division into different tribes of distinct characters that led authors such as Hokishe Serna, to say that the Naga "cultural and social set-up varies vastly from tribe to tribe?"

The underlying assumption here can be seen to be that social organisational patterns and cultural traits form the basis of tribal differentiations. A similar opinion has been propounded by Sanyu in saying that "the whole Naga tribal society was divided into various tribes and each tribe was independent of the other." We know here he is referring to the pre-British period because he claims that "there was no centralised political structure and each tribe was governed by its own Chiefs or elders, under various tribal customs and traditions." Such a tribe as mentioned by Sanyu, cannot encompass a social organisation bigger than the village, since in the early days Nagas had no organisation beyond the bounds of the village.

22. Ibid., p. 1.
24. Ibid., pp. 51 - 52.
Due to factors of primitive economy, social structure and geographical isolation, it is believed that the Naga village was self-dependent, sovereign, politically and economically distinct, as well as a completely separate religious unit.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, at this period a tribe could not have been larger than the village.

We agree with Hodson that "the village rather than a group of villages or tribe, is the natural unit of organisation and therefore the proper basis of investigation," for the understanding of the Naga society.\textsuperscript{26} By this we do not deny that cultural and linguistic links may extend beyond the village organisation. Henry Balfour says:

"Although the Nagas as a whole exhibit a general similarity of culture and possess many ideas, habits, and occupations in common, there are many individual traits which differentiate the culture of one group from that of another. Variations in physical type, in language, and in customs afford materials for classification and segregation into more or less well defined ethnic divisions, and inspite of evidence pointing to a common ancestry, it is manifest that various influences have affected the development of the Nagas, both physically and culturally, and have contributed to a complex which calls for scientific analysis."\textsuperscript{27}

We can see that this justifies the Western division of Nagas into tribes. But such a classification may not be totally dependable as there is the tendency to differentiate between

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\textsuperscript{27} J. P. Mills, \textit{The Ao Nagas}, (Bombay, 1973), pp. xix - xx.
\end{flushleft}
tribes on the basis of external variations, such as dress and
coiffure, which are liable to change, rather than on more
important aspects like structure and customs which are less
capable of undergoing rapid change.28 It is more so because
customs and styles may emerge loosely as cultural phenomenon, but
are not necessarily ethnic. We need to note that differences in
customs and traditions within the same group, such as the
Angamis, may also exist at different levels.29 A. Yanang Konyak,
writing about his own tribe says cultural practices among the
Konyaks differ from village to village.30 In the opinion of J. H.
Hutton, a tribe such as the Semas, can only be called so because
the villages which they inhabit are organised on a generally
prevalent pattern throughout the tribe, as "the tribe itself is
not an organised community at all."31

As far as differences are the matter, we find that in a
single village such as Tesophenyu, two widely differing languages
are spoken.32 It may be difficult to draw tribal boundaries on
the basis of differences in characteristics, as proximity between
villages may act as a determinant of affinity. To quote Hodson:

"The affinities of the tribes with their proximate
neighbours are great, and they are very similar
in political construction, in economic development,
in the essence of their religious beliefs and in

30. A. Yanang Konyak, From Darkness to Light, (Gauhati, 1969),
p. 11.
their general habit of thought." 33

We also share the view that neighbouring Naga villages interact regardless of tribal differences. 34 Therefore, even though we are working on the assumption that the Naga society can be divided into different tribes, it is extremely difficult to demarcate tribal boundaries. The questions relating to differences and similarities existing between various Naga tribes cannot be easily understood without going into a deeper study of the Naga village, its formation and structure.

The Nagas did not have a common political organisation in the past. In the Naga society it was the village which was the sole political and social unit. 35 This is quite true since no traces of a socio-economic and political organisation beyond the village society could be found. This is why Yonuo, who says the Nagas had a fairly developed culture, made a parallel comparison of the Naga village system with those of the Greek city-states. He reasoned that the failure to develop an integrated political structure by the Naga villages was due to geographical isolation. 36 It must be this that leads him to say "the permanent political institution of the Naga society has been the sovereign

village-state." However, he fails to show why the Naga village organisation can be called a state.

Hodson suggests that traces of "higher organisation of villages" resembling a tribe can be seen in the similar practices found in the different villages which speak a language more or less intelligible, the inter-marriage between villages which are mutually intelligible in language and the "political supremacy" of one village over other neighbouring villages which are weaker. Since tribal identities do not exist, such relations are bound to be determined by proximity and the possibility of drawing out political boundaries between tribes does not occur. Mills talks of a "tribal feeling" and a sharp distinction which might have existed among the Aos with other tribal groups. But he was paradoxical as he also says that in times of war between villages "an Ao head was as good as any other." He himself writes that "with all the Nagas the real political unit of the tribe is the village."

A Naga village is composed of clans living in a well-defined territory. It is a complete societal system in itself. Hodson describes the Naga village thus:

37. Ibid., p. 15.
40. Ibid., p. 73.
41. T. C. Hodson, op.cit., p. 73.
"Not only is a village a distinct unit of political and economic importance, but it is organised as a religious community, acting as whole, affected as a whole by food gennas, participating in the ritual associated with and intended to assist the cultivation of the staple of the country." 42

According to Horam, the independent and self-sufficient nature of the Naga village facilitated their separation from one another. 43 We can see that the Naga villages were still at a level of primitivism in which the socio-economic and political character did not require a social organisation above the village boundaries. Such a society is bound to be insusceptible to change as it is not open to outside influences. We must say that, at this stage, if a consciousness of being a political tribe existed at all, it could not have been outside the village organisation, which was apparently a closed and a well-knit one.

This does not amount to an acceptance of the idea that the village was the tribal unit. We need to further analyse the different social components of the village. The Naga village is said to have consisted of clans which formed the real social unit of the village. 44 The clan is described by Hodson, as a sub-group composed of a number of nuclear families, occupying a definite portion of the village. It is supposed to be strictly exogamous and its members are believed to be descended from a common ancestor, by whose name the clan is usually known. 45

42. Ibid., p. 74.
There is another sub-division in the Naga village which has been referred to as Khel by many writers, and is often confused with clan. The term Khel is borrowed from the Ahoms for whom it is a division of the adult population on the basis of their their occupations and sometimes territory.\textsuperscript{46} We will find that its usage is quite different in the case of the Nagas.

A. W. Davis records Khels as exogamous sub-divisions among the Angamis.\textsuperscript{47} But this is not true. Keviyiekielie Linyu, in his analysis of the Kohima village structure clearly differentiates between clan and khel. He identified six Thinuos (khels) and mentioned that each Thinuo is composed of several Chienuos (clans).\textsuperscript{48} We know that both these two categories can claim common ancestry. But Thinuo denotes an earlier ancestor. Chienuos are splinter groups which take after ancestors descended from the Thinuo. In Thinuos the lineage can be diluted, but in Chienuos such chances are less. This more or less explains the fact that Chienuos are exogamous while Thinuos are endogamous social formations. Since Chienuos are only immediate family ties through blood relationships, their boundaries are not politically defined as Hutton claims,\textsuperscript{49} but they may be found

\textsuperscript{46} S. K. Bhuyan, \textit{Anglo - Assamese Relations, 1771-1826}, (Gauhati, 1974), p. 10.
living together in a particular section of the village. Hutton
did say the sub-division of the Thinuo is the Putsa and
translated it as 'kindred'. But literally, Putsa is just another
term for Chienuo. The confusion over Chienuo and Thinuo also can
be seen in Sanyu's work, where he identified Thinuos such as
Rhiepfumia, Tsieramia and Huruotsumia, which are actually
endogamous groups, as clans.50

The social unit Khel51 or what has been called the
Thinuo in Kohima village is particularly characteristic of the
Naga village system. A. Y. Konyak mentions that the Konyak
village organisation is characterised by Thinuo and clan
system.52 Mills writes that an Ao village is divided into two
Thinuos, and that two lingual groups, like the Chongli and
Mongsen can be living in the same village, occupying different
Thinuos and existing like each group occupying a separate
village.53 Even till today, we can see that in most of the Angami
villages, each Thinuo builds its own village gates and lives
within a specific confine of the village area. It can be seen

50. They are actually separate Thinuos, even though they have
merged to form a single Khel. See Visier Sanyu, Op.cit.,
pp. 62 - 63.
51. We shall refer to it as Thinuo which is more appropriate. In
Sema it is Asah. See J. H. Hutton, The Sema Nagas,
(Bombay, 1968), p. 121; in Ao it is Muphu, See J. P.
Mills, The Ao Nagas, Op.cit., p. 82. But the difference
lies only in dialect and their meaning is nearly the
same.
that the Thinuo identity existed as an obviously visible social unit incorporated into the village organisational system.

Conflicts and wars between rival clans were common and these may occur regardless of Thinuo and village boundaries. This is because the clan was a "unit of blood revenge." It is said that inter-clan feuds were as sanguinary as those between whole villages. As inter-clan relations existed in both alliances and infighting, it may be said that clan independence existed within the village. This is also true of the Thinuo. A good illustration of Thinuo independence can be seen in the incident leading to the siege of Kohima on 3rd October, 1879, by a group of Angami villages. Here, the villages of Viswema, Ciedema, Jakhama and Jotsoma consorted to form a combined force against the British, but from Kohima village only the Tsutuonuoma Thinuo took part. Hence, we may note that though the village is considered a political institution, sovereign and independent in all spheres, it was not a governing one, like the modern states. Its role appears to be limited. Therefore, we prefer not to call them states.

Yonuo observes that the Naga society was peaceful and stable because of the uniformity of customs, which is made

binding by the religiosity of sanctions. Horam also feels that the unity, closeness and discipline of each Naga village, is the outcome of collective adherence to uniform religious beliefs and practices. From this we can conclude that in a small and primitive society such as that of the Naga village, it may not be practically possible to demarcate between what is custom and religion from that of political and economic practices. This shows that we need to look into the Naga society in a holistic manner as their multi-faceted social life seems to be interlinked and interdependent, cumulating into a harmonious whole.

While at their own levels, the clan, the Thinuo and the village become functional and politically active, there appears to be a superstructural unity above them. As we cannot identify any authoritative institution in the Naga society, we may say that there was an absence of government just as it was stateless. Therefore, we cannot agree with Mishra that democratic pattern of self-government prevailed in Naga village-states. The Naga society can only be classified as a primitive traditional system which is characterised by the rule of blood ties, customs and beliefs, rather than a formal government.

If there is one thing that places weightage on the village as the tribal unit, it is the organisational pattern of the village social system. This is because above the clan and Thinuo divide, the village stands as the highest form of social system which is representative of its structural-functional unity. It may be relevant here, to examine its structure briefly.

We do not agree with the view of N. K. Das, that the traditional Naga society can be stratified into priests and village chiefs. The Naga village is an independent institution and the village functionaries, whether the chief or Headman and religious priests such as the Putir or Kemevo perform their functions only within the limits of a particular village. They are not linked with similar functionaries in other villages. Their roles are confined to their respective villages. As such they do not belong to the same social system.

The Naga villages are ruled by two main type of rulers and according to Yonuo one is the monarchic Chiefs and the other is the elected republican council. But Horam, maintains that these rulers did not exercise unlimited power. We agree, firstly, because the individual's alliances to his clan and

Thinuo may take precedence over that of the village. Secondly, as we have seen earlier, in the Naga society, what is political, economic and religious cannot be put into watertight compartments, as in the absence of a government, the same social rules, beliefs and customs are binding on the rulers as well as the people in general. Also, the ruler cannot be a powerful one because of the size of his jurisdiction, which is usually very small. The average population, for example, of an Angami village in 1901, was only 450.

The pre-British Naga economy was at a primitive stage. Each household had to produce its own needs as market economy has not developed. Though private ownership of land prevailed, it was obviated by the existing pattern of community ownership of land. Also, as there was neither the technology nor the market for disposal of surplus produces, cultivable land was available in plenty. This is why, though private and personal property existed, it did not warrant the growth of social stratification as it was unimportant "as a lever to social and political power." It can be said that the social differences which appeared in the Naga society were merely the outcome of

64. ibid., p. 50.
65. Ibid., pp. 80 - 81.
functional divisions, necessitated by societal complexity and need. 69

In view of the above, we may say that the traditional Naga society was a classless and an egalitarian one. This is because social classes arise from the relations of production or relations of power through which one class dominates the other. 70 The Chiefs, Headman and religious priests in the Naga society cannot be a class because they do not belong to the same socio-economic and political system. They also do not possess any socio-economic or political leverage over the rest of the population through which they can claim their dominant status.

We can see that the Naga social organisation has a highly decentralised structure, extending from the individual to the family, to the clan, the Thinuo and then the village. The relationships between all these categories are determined by pre-existing social codes, in term of customs and traditions. In the absence of a highly authoritative ruler or ruling class, along with the egalitarian social composition, the basic factor influential in mobilising collective allegiance remains to be in blood ties. This indicates that our next task will be to examine the processes leading to the formation of the village and to analyse its constitution with respect to the character and role

of clan and Thinuo which are its key embodiments.

II

What are presently called the Angami, Sema, Lotha and Rengma tribes, are known through oral history, to have migrated into their respective present locations from Khezhakenoma.71 There exist a legend that the dispersal from Khezhakenoma was the result of a quarrel between brothers over a magical stone.72 This indicates that all these tribes are of the same ancestry, originating from a single family. This finds reasonable explanation in the pattern of migration and village formation. We find that migration was not synchronous, but rather it was a continued process, with people further migrating from the settlements, multiplying into numerous villages.73 The village formation does not take place with the migration of a whole clan or tribe. It was individuals who were responsible for new settlements.74 Therefore, migration caused clans to split up into different groups and also became the basis in the formation of new clans.

72. Ibid., p. 4.
73. See Ibid., p. 4.
If we roughly examine the formation of Kohima village, we can see that the first settlers were Rhieo and Tsiera, from whom the Rhiepfumia and the Tsieramia Thinuos came into existence. Huoruotsu, the third Thinuo in the present day Lhisema, are descendants of Huoruo who came from the Zeliang country and was adopted into the village. We also find that the Dapfutsuma Thinuo is formed with a migrant from the Mao tribe called Dapfu, along with two sons of Rhieo called Yiese and Sachu. This leads us to conclude that a village is not formed by a single clan, but by individuals who may have come from any ancestry or any other settlements. It also gives us a picture of how clans are formed. For example, Tsiera had five sons - Suorhie, Liezie, Rulho and Kesiezie. Each of these sons of Tsiera and Huoruo developed into separate clans.

Now we can see the difference between clan and Thinuo. Tsiera and Huoruo might have represented clans, in view of their initial development at the beginning, but later as their descendants multiplied, from each of their sons a new clan emerged. These clans came to be collectively known as a Thinuo.

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75. Ibid., p. 62.
76. Ibid., pp. 62 - 63. Lhisema, literally means people of three groups. It is actually a combination of three Thinuos into one, and not three clans as Sanyu claims.
77. Zeliang is an acronym which developed quite lately, representing Zemai and Liangmai groups. So Huoruo could be from any of these two groups.
79. Ibid., p. 63.
80. Ibid., p. 62.
under the name of their respective ancestors Tsiera and Huoruo. So we know that a clan is not indivisible in the long run. It can spilt up into component clans.81 The Meyase clan of Khonoma, for instance, split into six sub-clans, namely, Zetsuvi, Kenie-u, Khwukha, Pfulise, Sanyu and Iralu.82 It can be seen that the formation of clans is a continuous process characterised by time and population.

The village may not be of a single ancestry; it may be composed of settlers from different roots. The present Rengma tribe is said to have clans such as Lorin, Kepen, Kemp, which directly migrated from the Angami village Khonoma.83 Hutton says that the relationship between collateral clans continue to exist even after split-ups due to migrations.84 This may quite true as long as contact is not wholly severed for a considerably long period. The Western and Eastern Rengmas separated long ago and it is said that "no connection between their clan groups are now traceable."85 It is also known among the Lothas and the Rengmas, which are completely separate tribal identities today, that once they were a single tribe. However, details of their common origin seem to have been lost due to the intricacies of their migrations.86 The unity of different clans spreading over the

82. Ibid., p. 110  
86. Ibid., p. 4.
Angami villages can be seen in what Sanyu classified as 'moities', which grouped clans into Thekrunomia, Thevomia or Thepa/Thevo or Kepepfumia and Kepezuomia. All clans will fall into either group of these classification, irrespective of their Thinuo or village boundaries. Apart from this, there is also the belief that the whole of Angami villages originated from two out of four sons of Vadio, namely, Zuonuo and Keyhonou.

Our study so far, seems to show that the Nagas might have been of the same origin. But due to migrations and population increase which brings about proliferation of clans and villages, the relationships between different migrating groups might have grown apart. The purpose of migration may not be political to the extent that a clan decides to search for its own political identity, such as that of a separate tribe, with migration. We have already seen that the village formation was a multi-tribal process. In the opinion of Hodson, the agriculture based mode of livelihood requires a minimum amount of land necessary to feed the population. And when the population outgrows the land held by a tribe or village, migration is forced upon by the pressures of population and available land. In this case we may say that migration among the Nagas was a socio-economic and political phenomenon.

88. Ibid., p. 42 - 45.
It is evident that anthropologists and early investigators found the Nagas to have been of a common ancestry. Their studies of the different tribes and their findings suggest that the diversities among various Naga groups are rather the outcome of centrifugal movement rather than the difference of origin.\textsuperscript{90} The reason behind this diffusion of Naga culture may be attributed to the absence of a script, the isolated nature of the villages, and their migratory habits through which they come under new environment and cultural influences.\textsuperscript{91}

We understand that the differences in language cannot form the basis of tribal division. Due to isolation and migratory behaviour, Nagas have developed a weird lingual system. What we call the Ao tribe can be broken into three linguistic categories - Chongli, Mongsen and Changki. How group interactions chisel out new cultural structures is evident from the disappearance of a fourth language called Sanpur, spoken in Longsa, which is said to have been replaced by Chongli.\textsuperscript{92} We find that two lingual groups can be living in the same village, occupying different Thinuos and existing like each group is a separate village.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} Visier Sanyu, "Nagas In History", \textit{Nagas '90 Souvenir}, (Guwahati, 1990), p. 8.  
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 82.
Mills classified the Rengmas into three language groups—the Southern group of Western Rengmas, the Northern group of Western Rengmas and that of the Eastern Rengmas. Apart from this, he says that there are dialectical differences between the languages spoken in different villages.\(^94\) According to Mills, "languages are strictly local," and two widely differing languages may be spoken in the same village.\(^95\) It can be seen that the linguistic groupings cannot be taken as rigid and closed categories. Environmental influences may prove to be catalytic and bring about lingual changes. We find that in Tesophenyu village when certain clans moved from the upper to the lower Thinuos, they abandoned their original language and adopted that of their new neighbours.\(^96\)

What proves beyond doubt that language patterns are characterised by migration and environmental influences among proximate groups can be found in the Rengma language. Of the three groups of languages spoken by the Rengmas, the resemblances between two of them can be traced back to a previous common habitat. The third group which is said to be utterly unintelligible to either of the other two is found to be closer to the Angami language; while the other two have their affinity with the Lotha and Sema linguistic groups.\(^97\) If we look at the

\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 285.  
\(^{96}\) Ibid., pp. 285 - 286.  
\(^{97}\) Ibid., p.286.
settlement pattern, we find that the Angamis are found to the South of the Rengma group which speak the language closer to theirs, and their territories are contiguous. In the same way, the other two Rengma language groups which are nearer to the Lotha and Sema, are also their immediate neighbours on the Northern and Western side. \textsuperscript{98} Here, it should not be out of place to quote J. H. Hutton who writes that:

"the linguistic distinction between sub-groups can hardly be said to correspond to any sort of racial distinction, and monosyllabic languages like those of the Naga groups grow apart from one another very rapidly, particularly under conditions of isolation such as obtained till recently in the Naga Hills."\textsuperscript{99}

This isolation does not create distinctions in language but also in customs, habits and even personal appearance.\textsuperscript{100} The interactions among various social groups brought about by inter-group migrations might have given rise to a multifarious growth of lingual and cultural divisions. In regard to this, Hodson writes:

"The more detailed our examination, the more would it be possible to augment our display of variety, and to emphasise the remarkable graduation and series of development."\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., pp. 1 - 2.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 9.
We need not go into details but it may be necessary to illustrate the fact that interaction and isolation among migrating groups determine their characters. An example can be seen in the case of Svemi village which was raided by the Kukis. Later this village was inhabited by both Mao and Tangkhul groups, and it is said that this resulted in the modification of the typical customs of both the groups owing to the synoecism that took place. A case in which isolation created difference with the parent group can be seen in the village of Oinam and Purum, which belong to the Mao group but are quite different from it in character because they are far removed from the influence of Mao. J. P. Mills makes the same point in saying:

"The Eastern Rengmas have been cut-off from all communications with their parent stock for many generations, and provide specially valuable material for the study of the extent to which isolation causes changes of customs and language." 

If we look at the migrant Rengmas who had gone to the Mikir Hills, we find that they have not only abandoned many of their tribal customs, but also due to inter-marriage, they have very little physiognomical difference with the Kacharis.

So we can say that the migratory mode of Naga lifestyle was the main reason behind the multiplicity of language and

102. Ibid., p. 4.
103. Ibid., p. 4.
105. Ibid., p. 2.
culture. The processes through which these diversities occur can be seen to be caused by both centripetal and centrifugal forces. A migrating group moves away from a centre delinking itself from its parent group, but it comes to a new centre where influences from the new environment cause it to adopt a new character. We may say this is how differences among the various Naga groups emerged. Therefore, the varied character of the Nagas cannot be a case against the existing sense of an underlying unity, but it must be realised that these variations are outcome of the social evolution and development which came as man adapts himself to his environment in pursuance of his own benefits in life.¹⁰⁶

The purpose of investigation into the processes of change which brought about fragmentary socio-cultural systems into the Naga society, is not for the justification of the Naga historical unity, as it might seem to be, but to help identify political entities which we may find deem fit to be called tribes, if they existed at all in the pre-British Naga society. Our analysis has shown that at this period, the only identifiable social institutions are clan, thinuo and the village. But none of these have come to be known as tribes. We do not deny that there were linkages beyond village boundaries. We have already seen that proximity is a determining factor of relations and inter-cultural influences between villages. But

for the same reason, we must say that it will be extremely difficult to demarcate tribal boundaries on the basis of similarities and intercourse, because all Naga villages fall within a contiguous geographical stretch and inter-relations between villages form a continuous link, extending throughout Naga inhabited areas.

Apart from this, we know that at this period no group of Nagas thought of themselves as a tribe. This only came along with the coming of the British. This is what Hodson has to say about the Kabuis:

"In most respects the idea of tribal solidarity meets with no recognition among them. A Kabui, for instance, owes no duty to the tribe; he enjoys no right as a member of the tribe; it affords him no protection against an enemy, for as often as not his worst enemies are those of his own village or tribe. He acknowledges no tribal head either in matters of religion or in secular affairs. He is, it is true, acquainted with the general legend that all Kabuis are descended from one of three brothers, but probably regards it as a far off event destitute of any real importance." 

In view of the above, we are given to conclude that in the pre-British era, the Naga society did not have distinct tribes which can be identified in respect of their organisation on the basis of socio-economic, political, cultural or historical and territorial variations, as we seem to have today.

107. Ibid., p. 18.
This does not mean that the Nagas had no existing nomenclature by which different groups were originally known to one another. R. G. Woodthorpe divided the Nagas into two sections, the kilted and the non-kilted. This grouping is identical with the Tenyimia nomenclature, who by being the kilted group, called the non-kilted as Mezhamia. Both these groups can be further broken into sub-groups. The Tenyimia group for example, consists of sub-groups such as Chakri, Kheza etc. But names describing such groups are not consistently known among the various groups. Each group seem to have its own name for the other. The Tenyimia are known to the Semas as Tsungimi, to the Rengmas as Tsugenyu, to the Lothas as Tsungung and to the Aos as Morr etc. The same is true of the group presently known as the Ao tribe. They distinguished themselves from the Sangtams, Changs, Phoms and Konyaks and call them Mirir, while the Aos themselves can be further grouped into Chongli, Mongsen and Changki.

It is found that factors such as dialects, proximity and contact have much to do with nomenclature. It can be seen that each of the three Rengma groups, as classified by Mills, have their own names of different tribal groups surrounding them.

111. See Ibid., pp. 338 - 389.
This phenomenon of individuality extended to such a point that those groups which were far out of contact could not have any name for each other. The Western Rengmas never heard of the Southern Sangtams and had no name for them. The Eastern Rengmas knew nothing of Lothas, Aos and the people of the plains and did not have names for them.\textsuperscript{113}

From our study so far, it is clear that the grouping of different Naga villages into a common name was exclusive to the nomenclature and it does not necessarily indicate the presence of group awareness among those to whom the name is common. It can be seen that the same group can be called different names by those groups which come into contact with them. These names also do not necessarily identify with the name or the boundaries which may be known to the group they describe. As such we cannot rely on them for the classification of Nagas into different tribal entities. They were merely descriptive names which cannot be ascribed to any socio-economic and political category of the Naga society. However, we cannot ignore the fact that they might have formed the basis on which the present tribal identities emerged in the Naga society, as formal tribes, which is for us to examine in the next chapter.