CULTURE CHANGE AMONG THE LOTHA NAGAS: A CASE STUDY OF WOKHA AND AKUK VILLAGE IN NAGALAND

ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to study the socio-cultural changes which might have taken place in the life of the people of Wokha district as a result of the introduction of British administration and Christian missionaries activities in the district. Prior to the arrival of the British and Christian missionaries in Nagaland, the Lotha tribe lives a simple life. Their way of life including food habits, dresses, house patterns, beliefs, customs and traditions are strictly observed and maintained as the forefathers lived. But their socio-cultural and economic life are changing. The main intention of this study is, therefore, to find out why such changes operating among the Lotha Nagas.

The Naga society, so also the Lotha, is undergoing a rapid change in their cultural set up. In response to such situation they are adapting to a new way of life and in certain cases disregarding their old way of life. A new set of values are thus emerging in their society in which the old is disappearing, making a room for a new ones. Such changes taking place in the cultural set up of the Lothas are noticeable in their attitudes of life, family life, social life, customs and traditions, religious beliefs and practices, food patterns and dresses.

In the nineteenth century a significant landmark has taken place in the history of the Lotha people. It witnessed a change from traditional to
modernity. Prior the arrival of the Britishers the Lothas lived relatively in isolative lives in their own respective villages. There was no scope of mixing up with other groups of people. During that time the British made their first entry into the Naga Hills in 1832, but to the Lothas the first contact was made only in the year 1841.

The entry of the British administration brought along the Christian missionaries. The British intervened with the indigenous political institutions and later they also introduced changes in the subsistence activities of the people. The Christian missionaries who came at the same time as the British colonizers, brought changes in the indigenous religious beliefs and practices and many aspects of life such as Christianity and education.

The impact of westernization and modernization on the life of the Lotha people has a tremendous affect which, in the long run, led to the gradual decline of traditional system of village administration, religious beliefs and practices, customs and traditions. Such transformation in the way of life of the people was due to the introduction of alien cultural elements into the Lotha's traditional way of life. Thus changes have occurred as a result of a new experience initially due to the contact with the western civilization and adaptation of a new religion and various relating aspects of style of life and more so after 1947 with improved communication, transportation, development opportunities and contact with people from other cultural groups.

The Christian missionaries not only changed the faith of the people but also brought along with them an important factor of
modernization and that is education. The missionaries goaded the people to give up their tribal practices and encouraged them to take modern education and other modern practices. Education is not an independent variable. It is interlinked with economic factors. Therefore, if people have only subsistence economy then they cannot make much use of schools and teachers etc., though it is quite possible that if people are educated then economic development may be accelerated and may readily accept an innovation.

More rapid changes taken place during the post-independence period. From 1947 onwards the Government of India launched a series of developmental programmes in the country and as a result of which hardly any aspect of life of the people that remained untouched. This bring us the need of proper understanding of socio-cultural organization as well as the nature of change that have been taken place within the Lotha society.

So far we have been saying that changes begin to take place ever since they had come into contact with the British and missionaries in the later part of nineteenth century. They had moved towards greater change at the later stage during the post-independence period. The Lothas, though not highly develop, have attained certain degree of modernity and pressing towards greater change in various aspects of life.

In this study the ethnographic materials of the previous work done by the British administrators and the missionaries are considered useful and carefully examined in the discussion of the Lotha traditional culture.
In the light of such discussion an attempt has been made, as far as possible, to present the traditional culture of the Lotha society and the new ones which have been incorporated into it. Further, an attempt has been also made to trace out their persistence of change of culture through the ages in the process of acculturation.

Many people of both Wokha and Phiro villages have changed their occupations. The Lothas, in general, are cultivators but there are also some people who does carpentry, contract works, basketry, blacksmithy etc., besides cultivation as subsidiary income. Many women are engaged themselves in weaving and knitting as profession and a number of them are also serving in different offices as teachers and clerks. As a result majority are depending on a combination of more than one source of income.

Subsistence economy has been changed to cash economy. The cultivation of cash crops brought Lotha’s economy to market. Change from subsistence economy to cash economy indicates drastic change from barter to cash.

Rearing of domesticated animals is no longer for ritual purposes alone but for both domestic purposes and commercial purposes as well.

Standard of living of the people have been improved significantly. Traditional dresses have been changed to modern dresses. Age-old earthen pots have been substituted by steel and aluminium utensils. People are now living in tin-roofed houses with modern amenities. Modern consumer goods like radio, T.V., Tape recorder, sewing
machine, furniture and cosmetic has become household necessities for many Lotha families. Several families have also owned trucks, jeeps and cars.

With the enlargement of various opportunities in different vocations reciprocal exchange of labour based on kinship behaviour has been broken down. As a result when such needs arise it has to be hired on wages rather than acquired of kinship relation as people thinks times and activities in terms of money. The institution of exchange of labour has virtually disappeared. However, kinship relation continue to play a vital role in village political affairs.

Change in roles and structure of family. Number of family members has been reduced due to social and economic factors. Household structure of nuclear family is also changing. With the improvement in the economic condition, in some family, one's own grand-parents, brothers and sisters, brother-in-laws or sister-in-laws also live together in one family. The women-folks of Wokha and Phiro villages have already come forward to serve in various occupations besides their agricultural activities to enhance the income of the family budget.

Age at marriage is increased. Formerly age at marriage for girl was from 14 to 18 years and 18 to 22 years for boys. Now it is raised from 18 to 22 years for girls and 26 to 30 years for boys. With the introduction of formal education there is no fixed age group for marriage in Lotha society today. Some got married at early age and some late.
Making of decision for marriage is made by the boy rather than his parents or relatives. The commonly accepted type of marriage is love marriage rather than parental arranged marriage.

Economic status play an important role among the Lotha marriages. It is observed that the emphasis on economic factors in marriage has been increased while significance of ritual in marriage appears to have gone down.

Traditional system of ritual and formalities in marriage are no longer observed. The practice of negotiation and marriage arrangement, divination conducted on slaughtered animal and system of giving and distribution of bride-meat are some of the elements and modified form of traditional system of marriage which are still in practice today.

The roles and functions of the dormitory, which was once the centre of village activities, has come to an end. It has been substituted by organization like schools, Christian youth fellowships, clubs, students' organization etc., in the village.

Traditional dresses and ornaments have been replaced and supplemented by modern dresses and ornaments like pants, shirts, blouses, trousers, coats, shoes, brass necklaces, finger rings, ear rings and watches.

House pattern has been changed. Many house buildings in the village are now found constructed in the modern ways with modern amenities and appliances.
Age-old mortar and pestle has ceased to perform its functions. It has been replaced by cottage rice mills in the villages. Liquor-wet and bamboo containers are no more in use by the villagers. Instead things like cans and barrels are used. Other kitchen articles have been replaced and substituted by modern porcelain cups, glass tumblers, steel and aluminium utensils etc. Modern consumer goods like radio, T.V., sewing machine, lamps, furniture and other minor modern gadgets are gradually becoming household necessities for many Lotha families.

Food patterns and items have changed. People are found consuming more of additional food and drinks like meat, fish, dal, milk, tea and bread. The food items of those who are in higher economic group consumes those quality foods like fried food, fruits, milk, tea, snacks and bread. Some people consumes tea and bread at lunch time instead of rice.

The Lotha's traditional religion is totally uprooted. It is a change from Animism to Christianity. Head-hunting is no more in practice. The old beliefs and practices have been replaced by the new doctrines of Christian faith. The converts no longer observe the rituals associated with so called 'heathen-worship'. People are found so attached to the western culture that western songs and hymns are much used in church services, youth gatherings and social gathering. Yet, Lothas have not been able to shake off their old superstitious beliefs. Indigenous festivals are no longer observed as they have been replaced by Christian festivals such as Easter, Christmas and New Year.
The Lothas are undergoing a transitional period, from traditional to modernity. In response to such situation they are adapting to new way of life, in a certain case, disregarding their old ways of life. Changes in culture are the result of the introduction of alien cultural elements into the Lotha's traditional ways of life. Thus, with the advent of Christianity, education, westernization and modernization more changes have occurred in the socio-economic and culture life of the Lotha people.