CHAPTER V
POLITICAL ORGANISATION

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

The organization of village is based on two main principles. First the whole village is divided into age-groups to which the various communal duties are assigned. Secondly the control of affairs lies with a council. The system of age-group is described as follows:

The boys after attaining 9 years of age get registered in the tsuir which is the entry point. They are referred as the beginner, and helper of the ariju (male dormitory). The tsuir group is expected to behave well towards their seniors, failing which they are penalized. They are responsible for providing all the basic requirements for the ariju members like, firewood, water etc. They are also engaged in supplying torches in lighting the ariju and when the seniors are out to visit girls' dormitory at night, the tsuir group provide torches and escorted them to their destination. The seniors meanwhile share pleasantries with the girls of their choice; the tsuir group sits and waits until the seniors arrived. Thus, the first four years are spend in providing manual services to the seniors. The young men learn about the need to follow rules in order to survive in hostile surroundings. They are also taught the history, beliefs and practices of the village and also correct form of
address in an assembly, the right way of narrating stories, singing songs and ballads etc. Besides they are also taught basic arts, handicrafts etc.

After completing four years in the tsuir group they are promoted to the second group tenapang. By the time they enter this group they are equipped with all the basic knowledge of the customs and traditions, they are to supervise the junior group.

After they complete four years in this group tenapang they are promoted to sangmen. After the completion of four years they are promoted to the fourth and the highest group juzen. The moment they complete four years in the juzen, they form a foso (age-group). Thus whoever has registered in the tsuir during the completion of this process will fall in that particular foso. Therefore in one foso there is an age gap of 16 years between elders and the younger ones. The batch that registers in the ariju subsequent upon the formation of one foso are more privileged because, they will be the elders in their foso and similarly the moment they complete four years in the fourth step all the members in the ariju will form the next foso. This is a continuous process as every year new entrant’s register in the ariju and follows the same cycle. There are five foso- Medemjanger, Müjenjanger, Mevongjanger, Kochajanger, and Riyongjanger and these five foso rules the village in a rotative manner. One foso rules the village for thirty years.
The members of the reigning foso are referred as Samen (Village Council). The Samen is in charge of overall administration of the village. There is no higher authority above the Samen. All the matters relating to law, justice, administration, civil, criminal, etc are taken care by the Samen. As there is no compartmentalization between secular and religion, people consider the Samen as sacred. In the Samen there is a group known as 'elders' and under their leadership the Samen rule the village. The 'elders' are designated on the basis of age, moral and ethical standards and ability for leadership and service. A man's social standings depended largely on his merits as a member of that group. As an individual in a family, he may not have much to boast of by way of worldly possessions, nor may he belong to the major clans. But if such a person had learned the art of social interaction, is articulate in public and knowledgeable in the lore of the people, then he is accorded with merit and recognition and is held in high esteem by his peers. Each clan therefore should choose members who would be able to safeguard their interest in the council and would be able to discharge their official duties in such a manner as to uphold the dignity and prestige of the clan. There is no greater shame than to be recalled on the grounds of being thieves, liars, and adulterers.

Each clan are represented in the category 'elders' and each clan unanimously chooses their representatives on the basis of age, moral and ethical standards and ability for leadership and service. Members to be
represented should have no physical deformities, should be trustworthy, hardworking and responsible. The fundamental principle of clan division facilitates the political organization of community life among the people and assured the smooth running of the village.

Among the 'elders' there is a kind of hierarchy, the highest in the hierarchy are called Sami. Sami will be represented by two members, one from the atsüng phratry and one from the rapi phratry. They are allotted the portion of the 'hind limb' of every kill of pig by the council.

The next in the hierarchy is the Tütüm. Tütüm will also be represented by two members, one from the atsüng phratry and another from the rapi phratry. They are allotted the 'fore limb'.

The third in the hierarchy is the Tüküng which is represented by three members, two from the atsüng phratry and one from the rapi phratry. They are allotted the neck portion.

The fourth in the hierarchy is the rudi. This is represented by two members, one from the atsüng phratry and another from the rapi phratry. They are allotted the portion of the large intestine of pig killed by the council.
The fifth in the hierarchy is the *Rūza*. This is represented by two people, one from the *atsüng* phratry and one from the *rapi* phratry. They are allotted small intestine of pig.

The sixth in the hierarchy is the *pangmi*. This is represented by two members, one from the *atsüng* phratry and one from the *rapi* phratry. They are allotted the portion of the stomach, heart, liver etc.

The last in the hierarchy is the *yangar mendi* which is represented by a person, who is least fortunate. For example, he may be either an orphan, single, handicapped etc. The head of pig is allotted to him.

The Chairman and Secretary are selected from the ‘elders’ for a term of five years, taken into consideration both the *chungli* and *mongsen* group and all clans in the village. Thus, under their leadership the *Samen* (village council) rules the village for thirty years. After they complete thirty years of rule the next *foso* takes over.

The transition from one *foso* to another is a very well planned affair. The *Samen tsüngni* is the day considered significant for the villager as it marks the beginning of a new era in the village administration which is for a term of thirty years. Each clan selects its representatives well ahead of time. Meat and drink will be set aside for the day when the changeover would take
place. There is feasting and drinking and recounting of village history, important events are remembered, friendship and enmity with other villagers recounted. There is singing and general rejoicing. The reigning foso bless the new foso and the changeover takes place. The day is also marked by contribution and distribution of meats among the new and the outgoing foso. On that day the new foso bring a pig each and the Sami from atsung phratry contribute a cow. The meat are distributed to the 'elders' as per the allotment as cited above. The remaining portions are distributed among the rest of the council members. It is customary that a cow and three pigs are given to their predecessor.

Girls also follow the same trend as boys and they are also part of the foso, however they have no direct role to play as far as administration of the village is concerned.

Even today the same tradition is followed, and the registration in the ariju is marked by paying Rs.20/- to the next foso who are in charge of it. Though ariju in practice is no more in existence in the village, however they continue to follow the tradition in principle. The tradition is such that whether a member of the village is in the elder group or middle, or younger in their foso they all will be part of the Samen during their reign. However thirty years of rule by one foso is too long for many people to wait and it is stated that many people die before their turn comes.
POWERS AND FUNCTION OF SAMEN (VILLAGE COUNCIL):

The Samen (Village Council) is headed by a Chairman who is one among the 'elders'. And he will be assisted by a Secretary who is also chosen from the 'elders'. The Chairman is selected from the chungli and mongsen group alternatively for tenure of five years. Similarly is the case of the Secretary. The Samen performs the role of an elected assembly to look after the welfare and security of the people living in the village and ensure that friendly relations are maintained with the neighboring villages. The Samen enjoys a wide range of power concerning the running of the village affairs and is entrusted with a variety of duties.

The Samen act as court of appeal and all the council members pronounce judgment to decide over the case. It is the duty of the Samen to frame the rules and regulations concerning civil, criminal and tradition-related cases and also to ensure that offenders are duly punished. Since the norm regarding this is embodied in the primary tradition itself, there is uniformity in the dispensation of justice. It is because of this that the British administrators have recognised the validity of these laws. Mills records............‘but wherever possible the principle is strictly observed of interfering with local custom as little as possible. In dealing with disputes even the customary procedure is followed’. .............for instance, in an Ao village, cases, save
when so serious as to make an immediate report to the Sub-divisional Officer imperative, are heard and adjudicate upon by the council of elders, a practice which helps to prevent the decay of their authority and sense of responsibility (1926:406). After independence under the constitution of India, provision for safeguarding social and religious practices, customary justice and landed property of the Nagas are included under Article 371 (A), one may add here that this greatly facilitates smooth administration at the village level.

It may also be noted that the system of administration through the *Samen* was such an ancient tradition that to upset it would have meant a serious dislocation of an entire system of life, and might have created an enormous problems for the British. Thus Mills' records 'The Indian Penal Code and the codes of Criminal and Civil procedure are not in force in the Naga Hills, the Magistrate being required to administer justice in the spirit of the codes and not by their letters' (1926:406).

Most disputes were settled within the villages by the village council according to the customary laws; however some cases may be appealed to the court of the magistrate. In order to adjudicate over such cases, the British appointed certain handpicked men to act as interpreters and were requested to advice the magistrate on custom. These men were called Dobhashis and they have a separate court called *The Dobhashis' court*. Besides, Headman or Goanburas were also appointed to act as go-between and the village.
However, it may be noted that traditionally, the village administration was carried out by the village council guided by the Ao Customary Laws.

The village administration is carried out by the *Samen* guided by the customary Laws. These laws encompass every aspect of village life. They deal with civil and criminal cases, land disputes within the village and between neighboring villages. Norms about marriage, divorce and inheritance are also encoded in these laws. Though there may be slight variations in the settlement of cases, there is fundamental uniformity on all vital issues. The laws are therefore valid even today and though people go to the court established under the constitution of India, by and large, village level cases are heard and adjudicate under these laws.

The executive and judiciary powers of the *Samen* in the village may be summarized as under:

**EXECUTIVE POWERS**

The *Samen* controls the entire administration of the village which includes students union, youth organization and women societies. The *Samen* also supervises and controls the Village Development Board (VDB) to ensure that the VDB implement developmental works effectively. It also initiates audit on VDB’s developmental works and for audition the *Samen* appoints auditors and the reports made by the auditors can either be
approved or rejected by the Samen. It is the duty of the Samen to frame the rules and regulations concerning internal, external and traditional related cases and also to ensure that offenders are duly punished. They are;

1. To examine village funds *yim saru*. *Yim saru* involved a contribution of a basket of rice by every family in the village.

2. Initiate collection of household tax *kilen saru*, water supply tax *atsū chen* collection of tax on council properties.

3. To formulate and supervise village development schemes and to supervise proper maintenance of water supply, electricity, roads, forests, education and other welfare activities.

4. To help various government agencies in carrying out developmental works in the village.

5. To pursue and request government to take up developmental works in the village.

6. To borrow money from government banks or financial institutions to initiate development and welfare works of the village.

7. To apply for and receive grand-in-aid, donations, subsidies from the government and other agencies.

8. To constitute Village Development Board.

9. To recommend for appointment of Secretary, VDB who is appointed by Deputy Commissioner Mokokchung on the recommendation of the Samen.
10. To lend money from VDB accounts to deserving permanent residents of the village and to obtain repayment thereof with or without interest.

11. To provide security for due repayment of loan received by any permanent residents of the village from the government, banks or financial institutions.

12. To enter into any loan agreement with the government bank and financial institutions or a permanent residents of the village.

13. To raise funds for utility service within the village.

14. To demarcate land for jhum cultivation (jaok or long)

15. Power to initiate preventive measures on the event of epidemic in the village.

16. Authority to accept or decline invitation of official guests from outside.

Besides having duties and responsibilities in the village, the members of the Samen have certain duties in the larger political network. Nine members of the Samen are chosen as Gaonburas who act as mediator between the Samen and the district administration. During the colonial period the Gaonburas were chosen by the Britishers on the basis of knowledge of customary laws. Today the Samen are able to choose their representatives which of course need the approval of the District administration. Gaonbura are identified by a red shawl which is specifically meant for them a tradition started by the British.
JUDICIARY POWERS

Judiciary powers of the *Samen* include:

1. To settle all the cases effectively including criminal cases involving inter village feuds were settled amicably between the villages concerned.

2. It is responsible for maintaining law and order situation in the village and in serious cases offender may be arrested and handed over to the nearest Police Station without delay.

3. It also act as a court of appeal in which all council members pronounce judgment to decide over the case.

4. Matters relating to land disputes, robbery, criminals etc. are settled and adjudicated in the village court.

In the village court the *Samen* act as advocates. However, the cases which are beyond the jurisdiction of the village court are brought to the District Magistrate Court. Any disputes or fights are resolved at the *khel* level or the village level. The disputes which remain unresolved at the village level are brought to the District Court.

Before the establishment of the District Magistrate Court, the village itself settled all the cases. However, when people are not satisfied with Village Court verdict, an alternative measure was undertaken in presence of the *Samen*. The claimants perform a ritual in front of the court witnessed by
the Samen and based on the outcome of the ritual the judgment was given. A brief illustration of the ritual is given below.

They called this ritual *komatakba* where the claimants are asked to cut the neck of one fowl each in front of the village court. The fowl is then hoisted on a long and pointed stick for thirty days. Meanwhile the village court act as a watchdog and observe the happenings till the stipulated times. Following are the conditions on the basis of which judgment is given.

- Failing to cut the neck of the fowl at the first stroke
- Blood stains in the dao
- Fowl mauled by tigers or any animals within the stipulated time
- Untoward incidence like accidents or deaths in the family.

They believed that if any of the above mentioned occurrences is observed, they are considered the culprit and nobody dares to overlook this judgment. However such traditional practices are no more followed.

The Samen also has the power to impose fines on the following offences:

1. Delivering wrong version of the (*livok lisang*) origin of the village in the public.
2. If anyone speaks out of turn during a council meeting and shows disrespect to it by doing so.

3. For not attending a general meeting of the village without any valid reason.

4. Makes public announcement in the village without prior permission of the Samen.

5. Fine are imposed on those who violate or disrupt inter-village peace treaty. For instance during the head-hunting days they were not allowed to hunt head from those village which are under the peace treaty with the village. If a person violates which they called Aotsü he had to pay heavy fines in terms of house-site, land etc.

6. For petty thefts, cash fines were imposed. For aotsü and robbery, fines were imposed by the Samen.

7. For creating public nuisance in the village through open quarrel.

8. Fines also impose in case of land disputes kimong lomong raktepba

9. It also has to power to impose fines for thefts aomet.

10. For non-payment of village taxes.

11. For general misconduct in public and bringing bad name to the village.
FUNCTIONS OF OTHER LOCAL BODIES:

Besides, the Samen, there are two bodies known as Yim Mungdang (Village Conference) and Senso Mungdang (General Village Citizens Conference). Yim Mungdang is held every year where only the residents of the village assemble. While Senso Mungdang is held once in three years where all villagers both residents and non-residents of the village get together.

Mongsen langbajang is the venue where both Conferences are held. It is located in the middle of the village. All male adults are entitled to participate in both the Conferences failing which fines are imposed. The Officers of the Conference includes President, Vice-President, General Secretary, and Assistant General Secretary who are chosen by the Senso Mungdang for tenure of three years. The Officers should not be a member of the Samen.

Agendas for discussion are introduced in the conference and the members attended are allowed to present their views. In adopting decision the consensus of all the clans are drawn forth. If any citizen has violated the norms of the village before or during the conference, such cases are discussed at length and appropriate actions are imposed. Enforcement of laws and orders including the functional actions undertaken by the Samen are presented in the conference for the endorsement of the entire village citizen.
They also examine the undertakings of the Samen and discuss about all matters relating to the welfare of the villagers.

**RELATIONSHIP OF THE VILLAGE WITH DISTRICT & STATE ADMINISTRATION:**

The village administration basically looks after the welfare of the village, executes welfare and development scheme, advises and assists for promoting normalcy and settle inter-village dispute within its jurisdiction. The village administration maintains certain relationship with the District and State at large. With the implementation of development plans and projects by the State Government, the Samen approach the District Deputy Commissioner for approval and sanctioning of funds. It also assists and advice the Deputy Commissioner in matter relating to maintenance of law and order.

The village has representatives in the District administration. Nine members of the Samen are chosen by the council with the approval of Deputy Commissioner. They are referred as Gaonbura who act as mediator between the Samen and the district administration. For the selection of the Secretary, Village Board Development, the approval of Deputy Commissioner is required on the advice of the Samen.
Even in judiciary context, the village administration maintains considerable relationship with District administration. The Samen generally settles all cases effectively. Criminal cases involving inter-village feuds were settled amicably between villages concerned. However the disputes which remained unsolved at the village level are brought to the District Court.

The village, District and State government work side by side. For the development of the village, Village Development Board (VDB) coordinates with the State government. The State government provide fund to the VDBs in the form of grant-in-aid and matching cash grant and additional grant in aid. Grant-in-aid is allocated to every tax paying households. In this scheme the VDB (Women) gets 25% and the Youth Organization gets 20% from the total allocation of the VDB fund. It is mandatory to have fixed deposit at the rate of Rs.10,000/- in the VDB account from villages having less than 50 households and Rs. 20,000/- from villages having more than 50 households. Another form of grant from the State government to the village is matching cash grant. In this scheme the VDB put money in fixed deposit for five years and the fund is to be raised by the village. The minimum year to attain maturity is five years. On the basis of fund raised by the village, the State government grant equivalent amount of grant to the VDB. This money is utilized as security for availing loans from government and other financial institution. Additional grant in aid is utilized for construction purpose, training and other VDB functionaries.
Though the village enjoys autonomy in many aspects, the influence of the larger political system cannot be undermined. Since British rule the village has been entwined with the larger political and administrative set up and after India attained independence, the participation in Indian politics become more prominent. Late Chubatemsu from the village was elected as the first MLA from Nagaland in erstwhile Assam Government. After Nagaland attained Statehood, the participation increased. So far three candidates from this village i.e Late Tiayanger Jamir from Naga National Organization (NNO), Late Dally Namo from United Democratic Front (UDF), and Late Nokyu Longchar from Congress I has represented as members in Nagaland Legislative Assembly.

The present study reveals that there have been some changes in the village administration. However the traditional village administration system still continues. The Samen (Village Council) headed by Chairman and secretary is considered to be the most powerful administrative body in the village. The Samen exercise both executive and judiciary powers in the village administration.

Though the village enjoys autonomy in many aspects, the influence of the larger political system cannot be undermined. Since British rule the village has been entwined with the larger political and administrative set up.
From the *Samen*, nine members are designated as Goanboras who will act as mediator between village and the District administration. In order to adjudicate over cases related on traditional and customary, the British appointed certain handpicked men to act as interpreters Dobhashis and were requested to advice the magistrate on customs.

Even after India attained independence, the village continues to remain under the administration of the *Samen*. However the village administration maintains considerable relationship with District administration. The *Samen* generally settles all cases effectively. Criminal cases involving enter-village feuds were settled amicably between the villages concerned. However the disputes which remained unsolved at the village level are brought to the District Court.

It may also be noted that today the village has become a part and parcel of larger political network. The village, District and State government work side by side. For development of village, Village Development Board coordinates with the State government. The State government provide fund to the village through Village Development Board in the form of grant-in-aid and matching cash grant and additional grant in aid. The participation of the villagers in the national and the State politics becomes prominent since attainment of Indias’ independence and Statehood of Nagaland.