CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem:

Village life in India has been an important field of study since the beginning of the nineteenth century. British officials undertook a number of surveys of rural regions since they considered the knowledge, subject, people and their culture indispensable for their governance. The early administrators' reports were used by Karl Marx and Henry Maine in course of their reconstructions of the early history, if not prehistory, of social institutions the world over. Both the administrators' reports and the writings of Marx and Maine influenced the thinking of Indian nationalists and scholars.

The first influential account of Indian village appeared in the celebrated Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East Indian Company (1812). The Report is an oversimplified and idealized account of the village in the pre-British India. The next influential account of the Indian village was in Sir Charles Metcalfe's Minute included in the report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1932. Metcalfe viewed Indian village as 'little republics' which were almost independent of foreign relations and with economically almost perfect self-sufficiency. These erroneous, idealized and oversimplified views of the Indian village first
propounded by the early administrators was later cast into the framework of universal history by Marx and Maine which influenced the scholars and writers who undertook research and surveys on the Indian villages.

The early village studies were of fictional nature and were conducted with least awareness about methodological sophistication. They treated villages as isolated entities, self-contained and little republics. However in course of time macro surveys were replaced by microcosmic studies of selected villages from different parts of India, which led to the development of analytical phase of rural studies. Such a turning point in social anthropology could be possible owing to the increased contact with the American anthropologists who were interested in village studies. The methods used for the study of isolated tribal communities were modified for studying villages in the context of civilization. The various studies on villages over the years focused on the life-ways and thought-ways of people living in particular villages. Light is also thrown on institutions as well as solidarities manifested in villages. Thus these studies led to a significant advance in the methodology of social sciences.

In the field of Anthropology, Robert Redfield was the first to provide the model for village studies in his investigation of a Mexican village and published the book *Tepoztlan, A Mexican Village: A Study of Folk Life* in 1930. His approach was later popularized in India through the field works of
Morris Opler, Oscar Lewis, Mckim Marriot and many others. During this period a number of specific village studies were published by administrators, economists, anthropologists, geographers, missionaries, etc. which created an atmosphere for later village studies. This was followed by another period marked with the publication of a chapter on *Division of Labour in an Indian Village* in 1948 by Morris Opler and Rudra Singh, which is considered as a turning point in the history of village studies in India, as trained and theoretically sophisticated anthropologists undertook field researches in Indian villages and utilized modern methods of investigation.

It may be noted that village studies in India took a distinct turn after India attained independence. The call of Mahatma Gandhi to 'go back to village' was well heeded and the government of India's plan to improve the life of rural communities commissioned researches to investigate into the village life. The Community Development Programme was launched in the villages and the Programme Evaluation Organization was established by the Planning Commission to undertake such researches. During this period there were increasing contacts with the American anthropologists interested in village studies like Morris Opler, David Mandelbaum, and Mckim Marriott. Among the Indian scholars several eminent social anthropologists like M. N. Srinivas, S C Dube, N S Reddy, and D N Majumdar also engaged themselves in village studies. They opined that Indian villages have been least isolated and were in contact with the centres of pilgrimage. The religious interactions
have been reflected in several studies. The network of relationship to the outside world has been emphasized. Economic relations cut across the boundaries of village in a variety of ways. Village is becoming progressively a part of wider economy. Social relations overflow the boundaries of the village easily and extensively. Kinship ties link members of every caste to people in other villages or towns. Families and lineages have become scattered but they continue to retain some contact with those who have stayed behind in the village. Village is linked through the system of Panchayats to other villages and larger organs of local government. During the British rule as well, the outside political agencies entered the village and after India’s independence, political parties and government sponsored village panchayats have been instituted in the villages. In spite of the fact that communications between the villages are still poor, they were far from being self-contained. There were intimate economic, religious, and social links in existence between neighbouring villages.

The historic descriptions of Indian village, first given by British administrators early in the nineteenth century, are now seen as somewhat idyllic and oversimplified. Yet they have influenced the perceptions and views of generations of scholars. It is only since independence that a few social scientists, especially social anthropologists who carried out intensive field-studies of villages, have begun to critically examine the conventional representations of the Indian village.
The village community is a historical as well as a social fact. The inhabitants of a village had intimate social, economic, ritual and political relationship regulated by age-old traditions and institutions. In most parts of India, a village is not merely an administrative but also a revenue unit.

Though village studies in India have progressed tremendously in course of time, most studies are confined to caste-based villages and have emphasized the significance of caste system in understanding the social structure of Indian villages. Very few studies have been made among tribal villages. The present study is therefore a humble attempt to understand contemporary Naga life through an intensive study of a Naga village of Nagaland, with special reference to social, economic, political and religious organizations of the village.

In social anthropology the concept of ‘social organization’ stands more as an addition than as an alternative to the concept of ‘social structure’. While ‘social structure’ gives the impression of staticity, ‘social organization’ appears as dynamic process of social relations. The former is used as a model for understanding the pattern of social relationship and the latter as a study of how actually the social relations take place. Raymond Firth in his Presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute delivered in 1954 brings out the various difficulties with the concept of social structure. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown defined it as a network of actually existing relations has
revealed significant differences. The difference in its appropriations by scholars like Evans Pritchard, Talcott Parsons, Edmund Leech and Levi Strauss are not only about the scope of this concept but also about its content and degree of abstractions it entails. (Firth1954:1-6)

Firth in his next Presidential address delivered a year later at the same institute, explores further into the concept of social organization and its applicability. He reaffirms the importance of the concept of social structure but calls upon his fellow social anthropologist to appreciate the need to emphasize on its dynamic, that is, social organization. In this regard he lays down four spheres of its operation: 1) allocation of rights and duties on persons 2) range of social recognition, 3) resolution of conflict and 4) social control (1955:15-17) and also illustrates how these operate with examples of the role of the mediator, sibling and succession. In other words family, marriage and kinship provide the best possible scope to explore the dynamics of social relations.

Anthropologists generally agree that economic activity is usually sub-divided into three distinct phases: production, distribution and consumption. Production involves transforming nature's raw materials into products useful to human beings. Distribution involves those distributing products to people. Consumption involves using up the products- for example by eating food or wearing clothing. “All societies have customs specifying
how people gain access to natural resources, customary ways of transforming or converting those resources, through labor, into necessities and other desired goods and services, and for distributing (and perhaps exchanging) goods and services" (Ember & Ember 1973:104).

Radcliffe-Brown defines the political organization of a society as that aspect of the total organization which is concerned with the control and regulation of the use of physical force. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard have classified political system into two types: State and Stateless. The State societies have centralized authority, a government and in which cleavages of wealth, privilege and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority. On the other hand Stateless societies lacked centralized authority, and in them there is no sharp division of rank, status or wealth. In such societies kinship societies play a more prominent role in political organization.

When man made the distinction between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural' he had also distinguished 'profane' from 'sacred'. It is the domain of the supernatural and the sacred that constitutes what is called religion.

It is obvious that as knowledge increases, the understanding of the sphere of 'natural' also increases. Here the sphere of 'supernatural' decreases complimentarily. In complex societies it is the situation that
obtains. On the other hand, in simple societies, the sphere of 'natural' is smaller and the sphere of supernatural is larger. Nevertheless, both in complex and simple societies both these spheres are distinguishable. In short, Religion exists in all human societies.

Edward Tylor attempted a 'minimum definition of religion' According to him; Religion is the 'Belief in Spiritual Beings'. All religions seek answers to the fundamental and important ideas and events regarding the inexplicable in the universe. Religion will remain a characteristic of all human cultures as long as there continues to be puzzling and inexplicable events in the universe.

With these concepts in view, the study on changing social, economic, political and religious life of an Ao village known as Longkhum village, has been attempted.

**Review of Literature:**

Village studies in India in a systematic manner started with Henry Maine with the publication of *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871). In 1892, Baden Powell also did some valuable work on village communities based on data collected through revenue settlement, survey records, district manuals, and gazetteers and published his book *Indian
Village Community (1892). This book deals with land tenure system in India with special reference to the physical and historical conditions of India. He examined the tribes and the villages to describe different types of village groups based on physical and ethnographic conditions. Land revenue system is a special aspect which he had incorporated in his work. Thus Powell's contribution is considered to be a landmark in the study of villages and tribes in India.

Among the Indian writers Rev. Lal Behari Dey was the first Indian to write about village life. His book Bengal Peasant Life (1874) is about the village life including those pitiably poor conditions of the villagers as reflected in their indebtedness, superstitions, and religious bent of mind and also orthodoxy and tyranny of landowners. Based on his first hand experience he published his book which is considered to be refreshing and pioneering work as far as village studies in India are concerned.

Of the few empirical village studies in India mention may be made of H.H. Mann's Land and Labour in Deccan Village published in 1921 which is on the general features of the village such as physical characters, land holdings, crop cultivation procedures, and agricultural stock of each village. The actual economic conditions of the people as measured in terms of income, expenditure, indebtedness, etc have also been brought out. One of the shortcomings of his study lies in his failure to take into account the socio-
economic relationship prevalent in the village. W.H. Wiser’s *Hindu Jajmani System* (1936) brings out the impact of caste system on the entire life of individuals living in the village. Thus Wiser’s *Hindu Jajmani System* and *Behind the Mud Walls* (1971) published in collaboration with his wife Charlotte V. Wiser a first hand account.

David Mandelbaum in his article *Culture Change among the Nilgiri Tribe* published in *American Anthropologist*, 1941, Vol. 43 highlighted various agents of culture change. He refers borrowing of culture by the tribes from the Indian, British and the missionaries, which have influenced the four tribes of Nilgiri - Toda, Kota, Badaga and Kurumba. He goes on to analyze change and observes that owing to totally different economic base, prestige symbols, different ritual cult, the inter-tribal borrowing have been kept to the minimum and in spite of their proximity the tribes maintain a cultural segregation and cultural distinctiveness. Marriott’s *Village India* (1955) has a definite and clear cut theoretical focus and it helps us in understanding the utility of the application of ‘the methods of holistic analysis to the village in India’s complex civilization’. Tom. G. Kissinger’s (1974) book *Vilyatpur 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*, is a diachronic study of Vilyatpur, a village in Punjab. This study combines the perspectives and methods of history and anthropology in an attempt to reconstruct the social and economic history of this village. He selected a single village to study the process of migration, commercialization, occupational differentiation, population
dynamics etc by using the sources of information like records of census, tax and land ownership from the British annexation in 1848 through the year of his field work in 1968. The unit of analysis is the family. The behaviour and decisions of the families constituting the village during 128 years are his principal concern. His purpose is not to show that village life in Punjab is changing today, as it certainly is, but to follow the course of his development over an extended period and to discover the factor responsible for particular events.

Indian scholars like S. C. Dube (Shamirpet), F.G Bailey (Bisipara), D. N. Majumdar (Mohana), G.S Ghurye (Lonikand), and Andre Beteille's (Sripuram), also engaged themselves in field investigation and published several papers. Dube's Indian Village (1955) deals with specific village communities in different parts of India. F.G. Bailey's full-length monograph on Bisipara was published in 1957 under the title Caste and the Economic Frontier. This study presents an excellent cross-section of the interrelationships of the economic, social, and political forces in an Indian village. The author also examines the economic and political implications of sankritization in the context of the village as well as the wider canvas of the state. Taken on the whole, it is a theoretically sophisticated village study, which examines important problems facing Indian villages and community development plans. Though the book fails to give a total picture of Bisipara, it makes a departure from the other village studies by emphasizing the inter-
relatedness of the various aspects of the village life. Majumdar's *Caste and Communication in the Indian Village* (1958) is an elaborate study of the inter-caste relationship in the process of caste mobility and fusion and fission, which had produced innumerable social groups. According to him Indian village is not self-contained; it is integrated at different levels with the social system of the country. However it may be noted that the drawback of his studies lies in the generalization on all India level on the basis of village study of a particular region. G.S. Ghurye's (1960) *After a Century and a Quarter: Lonikand Then and Now*, was inspired by Coats' study of Lonikand, a village near Poona in 1819. Ghurye in 1960 studied the same village to find out the aspects of change. By far the greatest change that Lonikand had gone through was with regard to the facilities of education. The structure of the village community, its social organization, the change through a century and more in bio-social life are recorded and amply commented upon. The pattern of living is brought through description of representatives families. *Caste, Class and Power- Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (1996) by Andre Beteille is an intensive study conducted in a village called Sripuram of Tanjore village in South India. The study is about the changing patterns of social stratification in a multi-caste village. This village provides the background for unusual description of a traditional society reacting to outside pressure. The transformation in the village takes the direction of a more open social system. Previously, the village social life was shaped by its division into three caste groups, the Brahmins, the middle-level Non-
Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas. The caste of a villager determined his position in the class system and power hierarchy and caste itself was acquired by birth. The study shows new forces disrupting the existing pattern and producing economic and political system that no longer depended entirely on caste. This study concludes that the caste structure does not afford an adequate framework for the analysis of Indian village society today. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to provide a more differentiated analytical scheme for the study of social change in India. Though this study is confined to a single village it provides insight in understanding the dynamics of village communities in India.

In the North-Eastern region one of the best known village studies was initiated by an American scholar R. Burling in a Garo village called Rengsanggri which is a full-fledged monograph on a tribal village, which was published in the form of a book titled Rengsanggri Family and Kinship in a Garo Village 1963. He made an attempt to study kinship and social structure. R. Burling in his article 'Return to Rengsanggri' edited in NEHU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. Shillong in 1998 made an attempt to see how change has taken place in Garo society. He attributed change to factor like imposition of external political control, new agricultural methods and Christianity. Other significant contributions include the work of B. M. Das and Bandhopadhyay's study (1963) confined to a particular caste living in two villages of Polpara district in Assam. An ethnographic description of the art of
making pottery and pottery makers being the primary concern of the authors, the inter-relationship of this caste with other villages have not been adequately described.

The first anthropological accounts on the Nagas were motivated by the British administrators like J. H. Hutton and J. P. Mills. Hutton wrote a monograph on the Angamis in 1915, which was republished in 1921. He has provided ethnographic account of the Angami culture including their agricultural practices. For the first time, the Angamis' terms of relationship recorded in the genealogical table have been collected and the patterns of inheritance have been described.

Hutton also published *The Sema Nagas* (1921) which was based on his eight years' experience at Mokokchung and Kohima. Though, in general, he followed the model of his earlier monograph, he added new topics like land tenure, position of women, kinship etc when he re-edited the book *The Sema Nagas*.

Mills' account of the Lothas, Aos and the Rengmas also provides descriptive accounts with emphasis on domestic life, law and custom and religion on the life of the Lotha Nagas. Under the active supervision and encouragement of Hutton, Mills published his book *The Lotha Nagas* in 1922.
Mills described the process of de-tribalization under the influence of Christianity that was introduced by the American Baptist Mission.

Mills published his monograph *The Ao Nagas* in 1926 which is based on his field work during his stay as a Sub-divisional Officer at Mokokchung for seven years from 1917 to 1924. He presents a descriptive account of the Aos with emphasis on the domestic life, law and custom and religion. He described various aspects of traditional Ao culture. The distinctive feature of the Chungli group and the Mongsen group in the pattern of tattoo, attires and clan stratification has been highlighted. The traditional house types, dress and social status attached to it have been discussed. He also explained at length about law and custom with special reference to marriage, kinship and inheritance practices. The economic life of the Aos and the rites and rituals related to agriculture has also been elaborately discussed. Another important constituent of his contribution is the religious life and ethos. According to him the Aos believed in several deities and spirits and they considered Lichaba the greatest of all and the creation of world is attributed to him. Rituals related to birth, illness are also explained. Mills has also made an attempt to highlight the social impact of the American Baptist Mission on the Ao society. He highlighted the errors in approach of the missionaries towards tribal problems and suggests changes in their orientation. He also criticized the subjective prejudices of the missionaries against all traditional custom,
ceremonies and dances of the Ao on the plea that they belonged to the old
day of heathen dominance with head-hunting.

Mills' third monograph *The Rengma Nagas* published in 1937
presents a descriptive account of the Rengmas. The tribe was geographically
divided into two areas—the western and the eastern and their habitation was
located between the Semas and the Lotha Nagas. At the level of
acculturation, the eastern Rengmas being isolated and cut off, have
maintained their old traditional culture, while the western Rengmas being
greatly exposed to Christianity have undergone transformation.

Furer-Haimendorf wrote his first publication on the Konyak Nagas
which were left untouched by earlier ethnographers. *The Naked Nagas*
published in 1939 is an interesting account of the early life of the Nagas
before they were influenced by the administrators and missionaries. He has
also described the developmental process in the Naga society in this book.
He prefers recording his own impressions regarding the economic, religious,
political, and social system. Though it may be a disappointment for
theoretically and methodologically oriented anthropologist, it does fill in the
gap in the ethnography of the Nagas in the absence of any monograph on the
Konyak Nagas.
He later published another book *Return to the Naked Nagas* (1969), which was not in the nature of an academic study but a reflection of the impression of a western observer exposed for the first time to tribal people leading an 'archaic way of life'. Furer-Haimendorf at one place expressed grief at the Christianization of the tribes and their rejection of the tribal way of life, discarding exotic tribal items like local jewellery, drum and monoliths. He is pained by the drabness of Christian church as compared to the exotic beauty of *morung*.

Elwin published a handbook on the Nagas titled *The Nagaland* in 1961 for administrators and scholars interested in Nagaland. The book deals with the inhabitants of three districts of Nagaland, i.e., Kohima, Mokokchung, and Tuensang. The first two chapters deal with general ethnographic and historical perspectives of Nagaland and the remaining chapters deal with problems of adjustment between the newly created state and the union government, the armed rebellion, the Naga temperament, the development schemes, etc. This series was followed by another publication *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (1969) which is a collection of the original accounts of some of the earlier British administrators.

The ethnographic account on the Nagas presented by Hutton, Mills and Furer-Haimendorf clearly exhibits the colonial notion of the Nagas as 'primitive isolate' while the writings of Elwin tend to adopt a paternalistic tone.

Though the above mentioned publications are not village studies, they provide ethnographic account of the Nagas. No doubt all the above publications are useful in many ways. However it is apparent that there is hardly any village studies in Nagaland in general and Aos in particular, hence the relevance of the present study.

**Objective:**

The objective of the present study is to provide a contemporary ethnographic account of an Ao village with reference to the changing social, economic, political and religious life in the village.

**Methodology:**

The present study is based on field work which was conducted in a purposively selected village called Longkhum situated under Mokokchung District of Nagaland. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of about two
and half year during 2002-05 (July '02 to Dec'05). The proposed village is a legendary village with mythical caves and stones which are believed to have supernatural powers. Moreover the village is regarded as Aofonūmro, which means the guardian and protector of the Aos. Hence the proposed village is considered ideal for carrying out a village study.

Before the main work was initiated, a survey was made of the village, meeting the village council chairman, pastors, elders, women leaders, students' leaders, etc for preliminary information. After preliminary survey was made, detailed study was initiated by conducting household census. Research methods such as participant observation and interview were employed. My key informants were Tsukjemba, aged 79, Aliyangba (97), Narupula (98), Mayawati (79), Akangjungshi (75), Pangerwati (54), Chubasenla (70), Aoriba (102), Aosangba (83), Longdangscha (81), and Chubameren (78). The data collected were supplemented with case study and genealogy. Beside, secondary data were also collected from available books, journals, and research reports.

During the course of my field work, I enjoyed the status of an insider. Language was not a problem and making rapport was not difficult. I conversed with them in local language, participated in their daily life, seasonal and other activities and gathered information as much as possible in course of such participation.
Plan of the Thesis

Chapter I deals with the statement of the problem, review of literature, objective and methods of the study.

Chapter II deals with the land and people including geographical location and people and their material culture etc.

Chapter III deals with the social organization with reference to family, marriage and kinship.

Chapter IV deals with the village economy with focus on agriculture, and non-agriculture economy.

Chapter V deals with the political organization of the village with reference to the village administration, Village Council, and the relationship of the village with District and State administration.

Chapter VI deals with the religious life of the people with reference to both traditional beliefs and practices and Christianity.

Chapter VII deals with continuity and change and the factors responsible for the changes.