CHAPTER IV
VILLAGE ECONOMY

The main occupation of the Nagas is agriculture which is practice in the form of jhum /shifting cultivation or terrace /settled cultivation or both. The Angamis, Chakhesangs and the Zeliangs etc are known to follow terrace/settled type of cultivation, while the Aos is basically known to follow the jhum/shifting type of cultivation.

In Longkhum village, the jhum type of cultivation is locally termed as tekonglu and is the main occupation of the villagers.

JHUM CULTIVATION

Under this type of cultivation, a fertile land on the hill slopes is cultivated by clearing the jungles. After clearing the area of cultivation, it is cultivated for the year and the next year they shift to another place and the same process is continued. This continued till about 20 years have lapsed, when the first plot is ready for cultivation. J. P. Mills remarked

............the Aos is careful to leave enough trees standing to regenerate the jungle and thereby enjoys land which is no nearer being worked out known then it was at the beginning.............provided enough tress are left standing and the land is 'jhumed' at intervals of not less than ten years the jungle will grow up strongly on the abandoned 'jhums' prevent

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the soil from being denuded by rain, killed out the useless weeds and deposit enough mould to keep the soil as rich as ever. (1926:107,108).

In the village however the cultivable area is divided into two categories- arzen and luno. For arzen the interval for cultivation is 20 years and for luno it is 10 years. The first year of cultivation is known as lozen/ looti and the next year of cultivation is known as ṃn/ abün. It is customary that the Samen (Village Council) demarcates the plots for cultivation every year.

In the village, the cycle of Jhum/Shifting cultivation begins from the month of December to January. First an area is identified and selected by the Samen. It begins with jungle clearing which amounts to intensive physical labour as thick shrubs and tress cover the ground. Large tress, a few of which are always left standing are salvaged and later sold to the people of the urban areas which are used as firewood. The cut fields are left to dry in the gradually warming sun of February and March until it is finally burnt for cultivation. Male members start preparing for the new fields by collecting bamboos and prefabricating it into mats and other structural parts which will be used in the construction of field huts (alu chen/ alu thi) in the fields. The villagers coordinate many of their agricultural activities and the burning is another instance, which demands coordination. Since all the plots are adjacent to one another it is impossible to burn one field without burning the neighbors as well. Just few days before setting fire, a mass social work is
organized where a representation of one member from each household is a must. Their task is to encircle the field by making a clearing path between the uncut forests to prevent the uncut areas from burning. After burning the field, the ground is cleared of charred woods with the help of a tool known as keeya which is made of bamboo with fingers like feature at one hand with a long handle.

It is observed that construction of field hut is a must even today. In the olden days rituals and propitiations are made in the new fields so that the evil influence of any animals burned in the jungle/field may be powerless and that bumper crops and good health may be granted. But, presently with the advent of Christianity such sacrifices are no more practice. It was also customary that the rich man's hut should be built first before the start of cultivation, as the villagers believe that they are endowed with prosperity (aaren). They also performed numbers of agriculture related rituals like tenten, melong, jangpetmelep etc (the details are given in the chapter 'Religious Organization'). Today such beliefs and practices are no more prevalent in the village.

Sowing of paddy is done in the month of March to early April. The method of sowing for the looti and aben cultivations is different. In the former the crops are drop in separate furrows and the displaced earth automatically covers the subsequent furrows. Normally 2 to 3 inches are kept in between
each furrows, so as to enable the grains to grow freely and healthy. In case of *aben* cultivation, grains are covered indiscriminately and cover with earth. Thus, many a times the grains are unevenly scattered making some area thick and some scanty and the production is less. They use different varieties of paddy in the two fields. In *lozen/looti* they use bigger paddy known as *jakja* and in *bün/abün* smaller paddy known as *manen* is used. They stated that *jakja* grows well in fertile soil, whereas *manen* can be grown in less fertile soil also.

Once the shoots began to sprout out, the most important task is to initiate weeding. The first phase of weeding is called *manuya* which begins in the latter part of May, when the grains are grown about 2 to 3 inches tall. They consider this stage as one of the easiest in the process of jhum cultivation. A tool known as *alulum/aya* is used for this purpose. Earlier it was bamboo made *aya*, but today they used *aya* made of metal, that are easily available in the nearby market. Removing of weeds demands considerable skills. They start working from the bottom of the field and work up the hill side so that whenever the land is steep it is easier to work on the patch that is somewhat above the level of their feet. Rain become increasingly frequent throughout the month of May and June, but work still continue even in the rain, in the heaviest showers they take refuge in the hut in the field.
The second phase of weeding begins in mid-summer when the weather is very hot and humid. They consider this period as the most difficult and labour intensive because if due attention is not given; there are chances of weeds overtaking the grains leading to poor production.

The third phase is simpler, as they remove only the leftover weeds to make harvest easier. The paddy harvest begins in early September. The grains are cut with a sickle known as lai and are placed in small bunches. These are immediately collected in large baskets called malei chil malei ki and disposed in the hut. Once a huge amount is collected, they start separating the grains from the stalk by stamping or sometimes with the help of a stick. If the fields are not far from the village, the harvested paddy are brought manually or otherwise by hired vehicles in case of far off fields. Presently, the village is connected with roads which make life easier for the cultivators specially for bringing of the produce from the fields. They grow almost everything in the jhum field for their requirement. Paddy tsük/ajak is their main crop besides, they also cultivate vegetables like ami (yum), mafu (pumpkin), pento (brinjal), poka (chord), longkok (bitter gourd), lolee (long beans), pingana (tomato), merütsü (chili), súngmok (ginger) etc. The paddy is stored in the granaries called chen lati. The villagers also cultivate fields near the village known as Ongpanglu where varieties of vegetables are cultivated.
Table I shows the gender activities and participation in agriculture.

### TABLE I

**GENDER ACTIVITIES & PARTICIPATION IN JHUM CULTIVATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Participated by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clearing/cutting of the selected plot for cultivation (alu ajiba/alu tsüba)</td>
<td>Mostly by males though women also render their support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Burning (alu arongba/alu rongba)</td>
<td>The entire male members of the village take part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sowing (tsük azümga/ajak lüngba)</td>
<td>Both males and females participate though females participation is more required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Weeding (manuya)</td>
<td>Both male and female participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvesting (aluuaruba/alu zheba)</td>
<td>Both males and females participate. It is the time when children participation is highly required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field work 2002

Another important characteristic of the agricultural practice is the co-ordination among the villagers in the form of exchange of labour. It is interesting to note that if any families lag behind the rest of the villagers due to prolong sickness or death, the *kin* (clan) members initiate a collective work to enable the family to catch up with the rest. Another form of exchange of labour, they called yangteba is normally between friends. They work on each
others field alternatively and this form of labour is required most in the second phase of weeding and harvesting.

It may be noted that in the village there is no particular group specified as labourers, because labour is often combined with other occupation. Thus it is difficult to estimate how many households are engage in labour occupation. The regular wage labourers are mostly from other tribes who are employed in agricultural activities. At present the villagers have the wage laborers from the Konyak tribes. Rs.100/- and Rs.70/- are paid for men and women respectively. However, the amount paid to the labourers various according to the nature of work.

As far as land ownership is concerned, it may be broadly classified into three categories i.e. common village land, clan land and private land. Common village land is owned and managed by the village council, clan land owned and managed by a particular clan and individual land managed by individuals. The basis of decision-making regarding landholding, usage, management and inheritance of land is closely linked with the social and kinship structure of the village. About 70% of the total area constitutes clan land. The private land has also emerged within a broad framework of the clan land. The common village land constitutes those areas which are not suitable for cultivation. Any villager can used part of this land with due permission from the village council Samen. There are twelve areas demarcated as cultivable
area known as chaok and every year Samen indicate which chaok has to be cultivated. It may be stated that selling of the land to the outsiders is not known although it takes place within and among villagers. The tradition of sharing is so well established in the village that the landless people are engage in agricultural work on the land provided by the land owners and these constitutes the basis of economic and social ties between the different categories of the people. Mobility of landowners from the village has been taking place and today most of the landowners are settled outside the village. However, if any clan members stay away from the village, the remaining members looks after the land, and if any part of the land is to be utilized; the absentee landowners is being consulted.

It is observed that the villagers have also learnt the art of cultivating variety of cash crops. During the field work 40 families were enumerated to have engaged in passion fruit cultivation. Usually passion fruit are cultivated in the forest adjacent to the village, and the plot constitute about one acre. The seeds are sown in a small plot of land during October to November before it is being transferred to the actual plot for nurturing after the shoots sprout about five to six inches tall. The demand of labour is comparatively less and once the fruits are ripe, it can be sold out in huge quantity to the outside market. However many informants expressed dissatisfaction about the market prospect for passion fruits.
Tomato cultivation bring significant amount of income to many in the village. They stated that tomato cultivation is good income generating.

Case study 1

Aren age 50 has four children and all his children are studying in Mokokchung town. He stated that he prefers to cultivate other vegetables rather than paddy. As such every year he and his wife cultivate large plot of land exclusively for vegetables. He stated ‘during mid-summer when there is flood in Assam the entire Mokokchung town people depend on local products. Thus income and demand becomes progressively high particularly at this season’. He stated ‘accurate income cannot be figured out however, about Rs. 20,000/-Rs.30,000/ is benefited annually from tomato alone’.

Case study 2

This is a case of Atiba, a widower, age 50 years and a father of three children. His wife expired about ten years ago. He is IV grade government servant. He stated ‘since the salary is very less so I decided to cultivate tomato as it demands less labour and is income generating. Seeds are procured from Mokokchung town. Tomatoes are in great demand during mid-summer when nothing can be brought from Assam due to flood’.
NON-AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY:

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

The importance of animal husbandry in the economy of any tribal society is high and the Longkhum village is no exception. Almost every family rear pigs and fowls, however rearing of goats and cows are not common. During the field study 210 families reared pigs and 322 families reared fowls. Only 4 families are found to rear cows and 5 family's goats.

The traditional system of rearing pigs and fowls have changed. Today they no longer keep pigs in their house nor let them roam about in the village. The villagers build shed ak ki/aok ki away from their houses for pigs and for fowls anula ki/an ki they build adjacent to their house. Fowls are feed on the grains produce in the field. Pigs are feed on the products like grains, yam and other wild products. They keep both local and hybrid breed of pigs. However hybrid breeds are more preferred as the demand for hybrid piglets are higher.

Case study 3

Chuba, an IV grade Government servant and his wife Naro have four children. His wife is very hard working that every year they cultivate two fields of large plots. Besides they also rear pigs for commercial purpose. They sell piglets at the rate of Rs. 1000/- and also adult pigs are sold as per the rate fixed by Village Council. She stated 'rearing of pigs is very tiring task
specially having two fields to look after simultaneously, however having the two fields, we need not spend anything on fodder’.

In the olden days rearing of such animals were more of socio-cultural than economic purposes. For instance the socio-religious ceremonies related to birth, marriage, feast, death etc would not be completed without the sacrifice of domestic animals. A new house side or fields required the sacrifice of pigs and fowls; thus rearing of the animals was a must for every family in the village. Animals were also sacrificed in order to appease the concerned deity or spirit that causes illness, the details of which I have explained in the chapter ‘Religious organization’. However with the advent of Christianity, the villagers neither sacrifice pigs and fowls for one’s sickness nor do they sacrifice in the field for good and bumper harvest. Pigs are slaughtered in large number during Christmas, marriage etc. Dogs are also rear by some families particularly for guarding the house, hunting and also for consumption.

Today it is observed that animal husbandry brings significant amount of money to the family as these are reared mostly for commercial purposes. Domestic animals like pigs, fowl, cows etc plays a considerable role in the economic life of the villagers. Today piglets of one month old are sold at the rate of Rs.1000/- and fowls are sold between the range of Rs. 60/- to Rs. 150/-.
WEAVING

Earlier one of the most important duty of a woman was weaving. Weaving is considered as women's work and every woman were expected to know the art of weaving and provide the needs of the household. Initially cotton was seeded by rolling a round stick over it on a flat stone. Later on they used a little seeding machine that was imported from Assam. The machine consists of two wooden rollers geared to revolve in opposite direction. After being seeded it is rolled and make ball for spinning. The spindle consists of a long pre-shaped piece of wood with a stone spindle whorl. The stones are ground to the proper shape on the other stones and bored with spear-bull twirled between the hands. The thread collects above the stone until the spindle is full. It is then taken off and damped with cold water and vigorously pounded and after being socked in starch, it is dried and rolled into a ball, making it ready for weaving. For dyeing they used an extract of leaves known as strobilanthes flaccidefolius locally termed as mosak. Thus in the olden days women weaved cloths out of cotton yarn prepared by them for domestic consumption.

The present generation hardly grows cotton due to easy availability of varieties of yarn in the markets. They use ready made threads of varying colours, shades and quality. For warping they use well furnished timber-frame known as takrotung. The other tools used are anem, sümlong, anet, and api.
These are made of bamboo and timbers which are normally made by their male counterparts from the materials procured locally. The design of traditional shawl is simple which involve only two colors of yarn i.e. black and dark blue. However traditionalmekhlas are rather complicated as the design are numerous and involves many colours.

It is observed that today, only few women involves in weaving as varieties of cloths are readily available in the markets. This has however resulted in increase of dependency. The traditional cloths are now largely replaced by modern dresses. Today the village has a Weaving Cooperative Society looked after by Village Development Board (Women). They weave all types of modern shawls and mekhlas. However today many women do not know art of weaving as varieties of shawls and mekhlas are available.

BASKETRY

The villagers make baskets from the material available in the village vicinity. They make different kind of baskets for household and agricultural purposes. Normally basketry is considered as men’s work however some women do know the art of basketry. Basket such as chi/ akhi which are used for carrying paddy and agriculture products are made of bamboos and canes. Mülök is a closely knitted basket for storing vegetables and carrying paddy too. Kho/ akho are also a basket made of bamboos and canes for carrying firewood and vegetables. They also make mats known as pakti/ apak out of
bamboo for drying paddy, *būr/ apa* for cleaning rice. It is observed that the contribution of basketry in income generation is less significant however, it suffice to meet their basic requirements.

**CARPENTRY**

In the olden day people were skillful wood-worker. The conventional figures of men, tiger, hornbills, pythons, mithun head etc were very common adornment of the *ariju* (male dormitory) post. They use timber in construction of houses and do not require any special tool or training in carpentry. However through experience they have learnt the art of construction and other carpentry works. They also make agricultural tools and implements out of bamboos and wood. These kinds of works are expected to be known by all males. During field study only 29 men were found to the art of carpentry. With the change of time carpentry has become easier and less taxing. Today electrical appliance for cutting, carving and polishing are available in the markets. With the help of these machines the villagers are able to make beautiful furnitures, statuette etc. Today, though carpentry is not yet fully developed as an occupation in the village, yet it serves as an additional source of income to the villagers.

**TRADE**

The establishment of Mokokchung as a Sub-Division in 1890 has opened up opportunities for trading. Prior to this trade was based on barter
system. The villagers bartered with other Ao village like the Changki, and other tribes like the Lothas, the Konyaks and the Phom. It may be worthwhile to examine briefly the exchange mechanism through which this is brought about. The agricultural product is exchange with other neighboring tribes such as the Semas and the Lothas and in return they get produces like soyabean from the Semas, and dry bamboo shoots and dry chilies from the Lothas. The villagers used the currency locally termed as Adongmia and it is stated that 8 atongmia was equivalent to a rupee. Before 1940's a rupee could purchased 30 kgs of rice. During that time rice and salt were of same value and they could purchase 30 kilograms of salt for a rupee in Assam. One kilogram of dry fish cost only one adongmia. Thus, one rupee was sufficient for purchasing ample amount of salt, dry fish, tobacco leaves etc. The nearest market for procuring salt was Assam. It took about three to four days journey to reach Assam on foot which was indeed a difficult task for the people.

The villagers considered themselves incomplete unless they possess a spear ornamented with a red goat's hair, and these shafts were brought from Longla. The Longla people were known for repairing iron tools. The villagers exchanged their worn out doas with the Longla people and they in return provide new ones.

The establishment of Mokokchung as District headquarters which is 20 kms away from the village and the improvement in transport and
communication system has paved the way for trading which enabled selling and buying easier for the villagers. They are able to sell their agriculture products and fruits to the wholesalers at Mokokchung. It is surprising to see none of the villagers engage in the daily bazaar in spite of the village being near the district headquarter. One of the main reasons behind this is their reserved nature. On being asked as to why they are not taking advantage, most of them stated that engaging in such daily bazaar requires the art to sell and attract customers which they do not possessed.

Case study 4

Alemla age 48 said 'behaving and talking sweet languages to attract customer is a very difficult task for me'. She jokingly remarked 'if I sit in daily bazaar sweet vegetables may appear bitter and sour to the customer because of my language'.

Case study 5

Naro age 58 years is a hard working woman. Every year she cultivates two fields. She said 'vegetable produced in the field are huge enough to sell in the market however since olden days we have no such practices. So I feel awkward to involve in such activities. I sell off my products in bulk to the wholesalers'.
At present the villagers are engaged in different occupations, however agriculture continues to be the mainstay for many.

### TABLE II

**OCCUPATION OF THE VILLAGERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI.No</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>No of families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agriculturalists</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>63.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Traders or business</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Government servants</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>27.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>340</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field work 2002

The above table shows the number of household engaged in different occupations. 27.94% constitute the number of people engaged in 'white collared' occupations. They are school teachers, dispensary staff, water supply staff, power staff etc. Some of them work in Mokokchung town while others in Alichen sub-division (about 5 Kms away from the village) or elsewhere. However, 63.24% of the family constitutes agriculturists who depend entirely on it for their sustenance.
The present study reveals that the form of cultivation has not transformed from shifting to settle. With regard to animal husbandry, in the past, keeping animals was mainly for food and sacrifices; today it is evident that its economic value has considerably increased. Besides agriculture, there are various sources of income which bring money to the family. It may be noted that village economy has improved with the change of time. In fact, today the village economy has changed from subsistence economy to cash economy. However, such change has brought certain change in the behaviours and relationship among the villagers. Traditionally, reciprocity between neighbours and kin groups was a common phenomenon. Agricultural surplus were shared among them but today due to high demands from the markets and the need for money, they have become more commercial.

With improvement in transport and communication, opening of markets in the nearby town etc, the village economy has improved to a great extent. However since olden days, the village economy has never been self-sufficient. They have to depend on other villages or tribes for one thing or the other. For instance, salt, earthen pot, iron etc were procured from elsewhere. Even today, inspite of so many changes and improvement, their economy is still far from self-sufficiency. The idyllic set up of the villages as self-sufficient is just a myth for the people of this village.