CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LAND AND PEOPLE

Nagaland, a part of Assam and North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1947, became the 16th state of India in 1963. Statehood came as a result of political agreement. In this respect Nagaland’s case is unique and special constitutional protection was also provided under Article 371(A) of the Indian constitution to safeguard the culture, traditions and way of life of the Nagas. One of the smaller hill tribes of India, Nagaland is known for its myriad tribes with their rich culture and tradition. (Nagaland State Human Development Report 2004:14). Each tribe is distinct and unique in character from the others in terms of customs, language and attire.

By whatever name people have called this realm, hidden among the mountains of India’s Northeast, Nagaland has always evoked a sense of mysticism and awe, intensifyied by the remoteness of its geographical location. (Directorate of Tourism, 2012:1). One of the seven sisters of the Northeast, the state is situated between the valley of the Brahmaputra river and neighboring Burma (Myanmar). The eastern boundary is marked by the Patkai range; to the west the terrain flattens out into the plains of Assam. To the North lies Tirap, a district of Arunachal Pradesh and Nowgong and Sibsagar of Assam, to the south Manipur. These boundaries enclosed an area of 16,527sq km, most of which are hills and mountains. (Ganguli, 1984:266). It lies between 25°6’ and 27°4’ Latitude North of Equator and between the Longitudinal lines 93°20’ and 95°15’E. (Statistical Handbook 2013: 2)
The population of Nagaland, according to the 2011 Census is 19,78,502. Out of this, 71.14% of the population lives in rural areas. As recorded in the statistical handbook published by the Nagaland Directorate of Economics and statistics 2013, the density of the population is 119 per sq. km. 974122 are workers and 1004380 are non-workers. 79.55% of the population is literate.

The topography of Nagaland is nearly all hilly, the highest peak being Saramati (3841 metres) in the district of Kiphire that borders Myanmar. Many rivers cut through this mountainous terrain. The main ones are Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Milak, Tizu and Zunki. A population of only about 1.9 million, the number may sound meager when compared with the vast population of the Indian peninsula; but these few people are composed of 16 major tribes along with other sub tribes, each representing a different culture and preserving unique customs, language and dress. It has a rich oral tradition which has been handed down the generations. These colorful people span across 11 administrative districts, Kohima being the capital.

The multiplicity of the tribe, within such a limited space, could be due to the fact that the Naga ancestors migrated to the present location in different groups and they remained confined to their ridges and mountainous terrain. This subsequently resulted in their unique characteristic of appearing to be both one people and many tribe, displaying both unity and diversity in their customs, traditions, attire and political systems. (State human development report 2004:19)

The focus of the present study is the Lothas, one of the sixteen major tribes of Nagaland who inhabit the District of Wokha. The district is Situated on the mid – west of the State of Nagaland and is intercepted at the heart by latitude 26 degree 8’ N and longitude 94 degrees 18’ E. (Ghosh, 1979:1). With a geographical area of 1628 sq km, it is the third smallest district in terms of area of the state. It is situated in the mid western part of Nagaland,
adjacent to Sibsagar plains of Assam state. It is bounded by Mokokchung district in the North, Kohima district in the South, Zunheboto district in the East, and the state of Assam in the west. The Wokha District is situated at a latitude of 26˚8’ North and a Longitude of 94˚18’ East. (Wokha District Planning & Development Board). According to the basic table presenting the provisional census of 2011 published by the directorate of economics and statistics, the population of the district is 166,343 persons. The literacy rate is 87.69 percent. The density of the population is 102 persons per sq. Km.

The topography of the district is more or less similar with that of the other districts in the state, having hill ranges and ridges directed by the seasonal streams. The district is dominated by three ranges namely, Bhandari Range, also called Lower Range or outer Ranges with Baghty, Changpang and Ralan circles, Sanis Range, also called middle range, with Sungro, Aitepyong, Sanis and Lotsu circles, and Wokha range which falls in the upper area of the district with Chukitong, Englan and Phiro circles. It is a long chain of ranges and has emerged from Rengma area in the Kohima district. It is interesting to note that Doyang which is the biggest river in Nagaland state flows through the middle of the Wokha district and it crosses all the three ranges of the district. Wokha Town, the headquarter of the district falls in the middle part of the range. The altitude of Wokha Town is about 1500 Metres and it is the highest altitude of the inhabited areas of the district. (Ghosh, 1979: 2)

Mount Tiyi, 6, 600 ft above sea level is the highest peak in the area. This hill is important in the Legends of the Lotha tribe as much as to the whole Nagas who believed it to be a repository of their deceased. The mountain is referred to as the “abode of the departed souls”. Legend has it that human spirits upon their death travel to this mountain for their final and perpetual rest. It is one of the few places in Nagaland where Rhododendrons are found in plenty. When the Lothas migrated to the present area they built the first village on the southern ridge of Mt. Tiyi called Tiyilongchum. It was from this place that they spread out to
the whole of the district. Milada Ganguli makes us picture the Land of the Lothas in the following words, “The hills inhabited by the Lotha tribe belong to one of the most fascinating parts of Nagaland. They are not isolated mountain peaks, but one vast sweep of rolling green ranges, separating enchanting valleys and turbulent rivers, which the ancestors of this tribe had to cross when they were driven out from their original settlement in the south by their Angami pursuers. It is said that it was such a tremendous throng of clansmen, that they were obliged to divide themselves into groups and found settlements, and bring the surrounding land under cultivation to save themselves from starvation”. (1984: 81).

Racially the Lothas belonged to the Mongoloid stock with Tibeto- Burman group of language. They are medium brown in complexion and medium statured. Like any other Naga tribes, they have mongoloid features. Unlike the Aos in the adjoining Mokokhun district the Lothas are not having any difference in language between the upper and Lower Lothas except some slight difference in dialect. (Ghosh, 1979:30). The language they speak is called ‘Kyongyi’ (Lotha language). The Lothas have an oral tradition and the facts and history are known from the stories, legends and songs passed from one generation to another orally. The Lothas, Aos and the Semas believed to have possessed in the past a Naga script which is said to have been written on dried skin of an animal and it was carried by their forefathers during migration through the Patkai ranges. Written on such skin, it was convenient enough for the purpose of rolling. But as this script was not kept under proper custody, time came when it was eaten up by a dog. According to tradition, all the elderly people who had written them had died by that time and owing to the loss of memory, the script could not be written again. (Ghosh, 1979:31). With the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries towards the end of the 19th century, the Lotha language was reduced to writing in the Roman script.

Wokha was made the district headquarter of the Naga Hills under Assam by the British in 1876. When the head quarter was shifted to Kohima in 1878, Wokha remained as a
sub division. In 1889, due to administrative convenience, the sub divisional headquarter was shifted to Mokokchung. After Indian independence, Wokha became a sub division in 1957 under Naga Hills Tuensang Area, and remained so till she became a district of Nagaland state in 1973. At present, the district has four Assembly constituencies and 125 recognized villages. It is divided into 13 administrative units and 7 rural development blocks. (Wokha district human development report 2013)

ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

Tradition says that the Nagas migrated to the present habitat in different waves and from different directions. They have no written records, therefore our basis of information is the oral traditions, no matter how vague or illogical they may sound. T. Kikon, traces the series of migration of the Lothas as follows: Mongolia, Mansora (Manchuria), China, inner Burma (now Myanmar), Manipur, Mao, Kezhakenoma, Kohima, Tseminyu and finally the present Wokha.(1998:8-9). All the traditions points to the East as their origin of migration, as can be seen from one of the prayers of the Lotha Pvuti (priest) to the Ronsu God which says:

Oh Mansuri – a vanathung ronsu,
Oh Kutcha vanathung ronsu,
Oh Thungpocheura vanathung Ronsyu.

When translated it means “Oh harvest God that has been with us since our days in Manchuria, Burma and Manipur, etc. (Murry, 1995:51).

Oral tradition says that the ancestors of the Lothas came to this Earth from the underworld. There is a legend about Rankhandan which literally means the oldest, and possibly a totem. When the tribe moved from Manchuria (or Mongolia), the priest of the tribe Rankhandan (The oldest) prepared a pack of rituals to take himself and follow the tribe.
Unfortunately he could not cross the hole due to his stag-like horns and so he was left behind. He requested the brothers to observe the rites and rituals of the old world and to give him yearly offering in remembrance. Therefore, the primitive Lothas observed the “Epo Etha” ceremony every year in remembrance of Rankhandan. This is supported by another tradition of the Lothas, according to which the Lotha ancestors, three brothers, Limhachan, Ezonmontsu and Rankhandan, the ancestors of the three phratries of the Lothas came out of a hole which they saw while chasing a porcupine. According to J. P. Mills, this “hole” as mentioned in the traditions may not be a hole, but it might be a narrow passage somewhere in the Himalayan region through which they came out. (Mills, 1922:03).

Another important tradition connected with the migration story is the miraculous stone called by the Lothas as Phitssonlong, (Dry- increasing- stone) at Kezhakenoma which has the magical property of doubling up the paddy basked on it. Other tribes such as the Angamis and Maos also have a similar tradition of such a magic stone at Khezhakenoma in Mao area. In course of their migration, the Lothas homesteaded at this place called ‘Phitsson’ . The Lothas are believed to have marched from this place to Rerang (Ghosh, 1979:19) in Mao and travelled along the foot of the Japfu Mountain. On their Northward trail, they halted at Khayima( kohima). Khayima in Lotha means unable to count or uncountable. According to Pvukhomo Humtsoe of Pangti, at this place, the Lothas were many in number that the chief could not enumerate them and so they called the place “Khayima” or miscounting or unable to count. (The kohima people have their own version of the meaning of the word). The Lothas then left Khayima and marched to a place near Tsenza Lake and from there they again marched to Nerhema. From there they proceeded to Honohoyunton, somewhere in the present Rengma area. Moving on northward, they came to Tiyilongchum, at the foothill of Mount Tiyi where they settled and stayed for many years. At this place the Lothas assembled and counted the number of people. . In Lotha dialect “wo” or “owo” means number of people.
“kha” means counting the number of people. So the place in which the Lotha ancestors had assembled and counted themselves of their number was named as “Wokha”. Perhaps, during the long course of their migration the Lothas might have lost count of their true number and so they collected in one place and counted themselves.

But finally this site was abandoned on account of several reasons. According to T. Kikon, Tiyi Longchum was abandoned due to over population, scarcity of water and infertility of the soil. Besides these the menace of the tiger which killed nine women of the village prompted them to abandon the village. The Lothas then spread to villages like Longsa, Longsachung, Zukhumki, Hayimong, Longidang, Umhor josu, Wokha, Yikhum, Elumyo, Tsungiki and Koio etc of the present district. (1993:8)

Another tradition says that the ancestors of the Lothas and the plainsmen of Assam were once brothers. This tradition is also supported by J. P Mills, who wrote that the Lothas and the plains men were once one people who migrated from a place called Lengka in the North West of Naga Hills. They split up into two bodies, one of them was the plainsmen of the Brahmaputra valley and the other the hill men. (Mills, 1922:4-5 ). According to P. E. Ezung, the evidence of their oneness is a Long Knife or dao (Machete) called Yantung which is still kept in Okotso village, which was given by the plainsmen, their brothers. (1992: 15).

NOMENCLATURE

Like the word ‘Naga’ the derivation of the word ‘Lotha’ is obscure. It has been interpreted in various ways. According to Zanao Mozhui, ‘Lo’ means sacrifice or offering, ‘Tha’ means fully or satisfactorily. (2004:04). Therefore Lotha means people who fully sacrificed to the satisfaction of the Gods. Another interpretation is that the word came from the Khuza language ‘Latha’ which means ‘gone to a far off place’ or ‘gone ahead’. This
theory is postulated because the British first encountered the Khuzas and Angamis in the 1930s and they might have acquired the name Lotha from the Khuza word *Latha*. Another interpretation is that their original name was ‘*kyong*’ which means human. J. P. Mills mentions that the Lothas called themselves as *kyon*, meaning simply Man. (1922: 01). In the absence of written sources, several attempts has been made by intellectuals and scholars to retrace the origin of the generic name ‘Lotha’ through probable dimensions. However, it is not the intention of the present study to argue or postulate any hypothesis on this subject nor does it consider it a purpose here.

**PRE-COLONIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOTHAS**

In this sub-section focus is made on the question of how the Lothas lived, subsisted, organized themselves into groups, socialized and governed themselves before they were resettled, modernized and converted to Christianity.

The village polity

All Naga tribes lived in village settings. Every village was independent of one another and predominantly run on the principles of democracy, either in the form of a republic or monarchy. The primary unit of the Lotha tribe is the village. Every Lotha village is a sovereign state ruled by a chief (*Ekhung*) assisted by an informal council of elders. For selection of village chief, unlike some other Naga tribes which is based on hereditary system, the Lotha Naga is based on election system represented by whole village. (Ovung, 2012:23). Before the introduction of the British rule, the Lothas governed themselves by a set of unwritten laws called ‘*Pyimtsumotsui shikhu*’ (Customary law) which was strictly enforced by
a council of elders known as ‘Tongti chochang’. (Ngulli, 1994:17). Under them was another dimension called Pangi. These council of old men or elders are in general called Sotsoi (meat eaters) because they inflict fines of pork on cases and eat the fine. Usually the village is run as an individual whole, but where the khels are big the tendency is for the leading man of each khel to manage their affairs independently. After the establishment of the British rule, the post of the chief (Ekhung or Esapvui) was replaced by a headman selected by the government.

Like the rest of the Naga tribes, the Lothas built their villages on top of the hill. The villages were generally built on a commanding location, the selection of the site largely influenced by considerations of defensive strategy. Inter-village feuds being the order of the day, it was necessary that the village was so situated that a raiding party could not surprise it. Village is generally founded by members of several Jipo (clans) which are also divided into Mhitso (Kindred). They have exogamous system of marriage. A man marries his wife from any of the clans other than his own. This is the reason why several clans are included in founding a village. A village was usually divided into two or more ‘yankho’ or khels depending upon the size and population.

Traditionally, the citizens of a village are classified into three groups: (1) Rulers (Esopvui/Esapvui), (2) victorious and mighty men (Ekhyo Ekhung), and (3) commoners (Arushurui/kishoroe). (Ovung, 2012: 24). The elected members of the village administration constitute the first group. It includes the village headman. They are decision making body and all the disputes in the village are settled by them. The second group is those who had performed social feast of merit. They were entitled to be elected as members of village administration and had rights to participate in the debates on village issues and decision making. A man of this group can be chosen as village Pvuti (Priest) provided that he was living with his wife whom he married first, blameless and had not been anytime bitten by wild animals. The third group was the people who had not performed social feast of merit. They
are not eligible to be chosen as leaders of the village or decision making. However, they were assigned duties for religious rituals, burial rituals and all other minor domestic rituals of the village. This kind of classification does not exist anymore in the Lotha society.

The central piece in a village used to be the Chumpo (Morung), a kind of bachelor’s dormitory for the village youth. The Chumpo fulfilled a variety of functions; it was a place where human and animal skulls were kept as relics; it was a guard house where the village braves kept their daos, spears and shields; it was also a meeting place where important decisions relating to war and peace were taken. (Singh, 1972:31). For the Lothas, the Chumpo is equivalent to modern educational institution. However, it was more than that. It was a social institution. It was in the Chumpo that the young Lotha not only learnt the cultures, values and norms, and warfare tactics of their village but also provided the structure for the working principles of the village council. Chumpo are instituted in a hierarchical fashion. The eldest group took the responsibility of teaching the younger groups as well as making important decisions. The inmates were divided into different age groups, each with different responsibilities until they reached the eldest and the highest group. In this way, the Chumpo provided a system for the ‘democratic governance of the villages.

The Chumpo was the pride of the village, and it was always decorated with trophies of war and the finest wood-carvings that the villagers were capable of.

Another important characteristic of the Lotha village community was the Yingaeden, the age group working company. There were junior, intermediate, senior, women and men’s group working in each member’s house or field together in terms of the principle of synergy. The long hours of work go without exhaustion due to the singing, fun and folktales as they work in the sun and in the rain. This age group company in some way acts as the certifying body of the individual’s credibility. To be excluded from this age group company is to lose respect in the society. This system provided the group with not only an identity, but also a
sense of belonging. It tapped the energy of the adolescents and created a bond that would last for the rest of their life in the village. (Roy, 2004:46). It was an institution similar to a modern club or a youth organization in the Christian church.

Mention may also be made of the Etssikho, the khel or sector Assembly. Every sector or khel of the village has one or more open air circles where all men gather every evening for at least an hour or two relaxing and chit chatting. The subject matter of the conversation could be anything current or old, seasoned by humors and teasing when the topic is not of serious concern. These village media is attended by at least one male member of each family to have the family updated with current news. This assembly keeps the members of the sector in solidarity as it acts as the fastest channel of communication.

The socio-cultural life

The Lotha society was patrilineal and patriarchal in nature. However, by no means were women considered as second class citizens of the village. There was no discrimination against women. Lotha women had almost equal status with men in the society, because in every field of physical and domestic work they work equally. The most important dance of the women was a dance for bringing rain and to avert drought. This perhaps indicates that the women were more worried about the crop failure than the men folk. (Ghosh, 1979: 44-45). And it is a fact that women work harder in the field than the men. It was only in matters of broader social activities such as village administration, feud and peace, litigation etc that women generally did not take part. The laws of inheritance also followed the male line. Monogamy was strictly practiced. Though women were excluded from inheritance and the freedom to speak in the village council, nevertheless, they were not subordinated in any way
by the men folk who have always respected them. It was an egalitarian society where everyone lives with least botheration about class classification.

One of the chief characteristics of the Lotha culture was the practice of Osho (feast of merit). This practice provides a glimpse into the communitarian aspect of the Lothas. It fulfilled an extremely important socio-religious and economic function in the Lotha society. The Lothas were by nature fond of feasting. For every achievement like good harvest or successful raids they arranged feasts and celebrate the occasion. The celebration of any festival was considered as incomplete without a sumptuous meal. Thus, feasting of the whole community and a feast given by an individual family for the whole village were an important part of the traditional way of life, the means whereby sharing was practiced and friendships were maintained. (Pongener, 2011: 57).

This Osho was a social ceremony, in fact a series of ceremonies performed by the married man in order to uplift his and his wife’s status. Each series necessitates the expenditure of large quantities of food-stuffs. The more a man perform this feast, the more prominent his status become in the village for, among the Lothas, a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of others. Thus a man and his wife work hard in the field to store away food in order to organize such feast. The man who observe this feast was entitled to wear special dresses and ornaments and decorate his house in a particular manner, marking him out from others in the village. (Singh, 1972: 73). Even so, this feast was not an obligatory event.

As with any other Naga tribe, the Lothas also practiced head-hunting. The Nagas in general practiced head-hunting because, they believed that enemies’ heads brought prosperity to the village directly connected to the fertility of the crops. (Furer-Haimendorf, 1946:95). In the days of head-hunting, the person who could bring more heads from the enemy villages was publicly honored. They received respect, honor and prestige in the society. They were
respected because the survival and honor of the village depended on them. (Ruivah, 1993:190). The one who could kill an enemy inside the enemy’s village was regarded as the most able bodied of the village, because he could the enemy within the village which was guarded day and night. Women and children were not spared in head-hunting. As a matter of fact, a woman’s head was considered a most prized trophy. This was for a variety of reasons. Women were always given the maximum protection by the village folk, and taking a woman’s head meant penetrating deep into the adversary’s ranks with all its concomitant risks. Possibly there was also the desire to reduce the enemy population by killing their women folk. Yet another reason could be the desire for women’s hair which was used for ornamental purposes. (Singh, 1972: 37).

Among the Lothas, a woman whose husband had gone on a raid was to remain chaste, and was also forbidden to weave as it was believed that any breach of this rule would cause the husband’s feet to get entangled in creepers whereupon he would be caught and killed by the enemy. The heads were hung on the Menkitong, the sacred tree of the village. The practice of head-hunting, to a great extend conditioned the life of a village and its people. The village was always well defended, women and children were guarded, the villagers went to fields in groups so that they might be able to face any sudden threat and some persons were assigned on guard duty. Head-hunting ended among the Lothas in the 1880s with the establishment of the British administration in the area.

The Lothas are known for their colorful dances and songs. Like the other Naga tribes these cultural aspect are exhibited in their festivals and celebration which mainly revolve around agriculture, their main economy. The Nagas are admired for their rich repertory of folk dances and songs. In spite of the tremendous advance of modernity into their lives, the Naga people have a penchant for vibrant dances and songs praising the brave deeds of ancient warriors and folk heroes, love songs that immortalize tragic love stories, gospel songs in folk
tunes. Festivals are celebrated by the various tribes year round during which villages become most lively. (Lanunungsang & Ovung, 2012:14). The festivals are marked by thanksgiving, prayer for blessings, sharing of joy and happiness, forgiveness, reconciliation and friendship.

In the olden days, the Lothas celebrated a number of festivals in a year. The most important among them is the *Tokhu Emong*. The word *Tokhu* means ‘feast’ and *Emong* means ‘rest’ or ‘holiday’. It is the biggest festival observed by the Lothas at the end of the agricultural year following the harvest. It is a festival of thanksgiving to God for bumper harvest and blessing throughout the year. Besides, it is a festival where past enmities are forgiven, new friendships are forged, and where villagers exchange gifts and presents. It also grants permission for courtship and marriage and for construction of new houses. With the harvest finally done, the people take respite from the sweating toils and settle down to enjoy the fruits of their hard labor. It is also called *Vami Tokhu* by the people which means a leisurely winter feast, as it was held during the month of *Chopuk*, corresponding to November. Spreading over nine days, the festival has each day having a significance of its own with specific rituals to be observed.

The hallmarks of the festival are the colorful dances, traditional games, folksongs, folklores, feasting, drinking of *Soko* (rice beer) and merry-making. It was also a time to don and display the traditional attire. Age-old values such as generosity, hospitality, valor, communitarian spirit are passed down through the festivals. The entire villagers participate in the preparation and celebration of the festival. During this period, the village gates are renovated, wells are cleaned and purified, roads are cleaned and houses are decorated, displaying proudly their prizes and achievements in full view. It is also a time for thanksgiving, reconciliation, sharing and accommodating each other. The most beautiful aspect is that, the past raucous are forgiven, friendships are renewed, new ties are established and bonds of close intimacy formed. (Lanunungsang & Ovung, 2012: 69). After the
observance of the *Tokhu Emong*, new houses are constructed, old ones are renovated, the *Chumpo*, the boys’ dormitories are repaired, marriages are held and new cultivation are contemplated. The essence of this festival is that everything old is gone and now all is new, ushering in a new life that may be interpreted as the beginning of a new year in its broader sense.

The economic life

During the head-hunting days, every Naga village was a sovereign state. Each village was more or less self-sufficient. Villages had their own cultivable land, sufficient to support its population. There were livestock for use as meat and a wide range of forest around each village, for getting building materials, firewood, food and it also serves as hunting ground for them. For their survival, the villagers were not required to go to another village. (Thong, 2012: 12). This was true for the Lotha villages too. Since time immemorial the Lothas were hardworking people. Though they were keen fishermen and skilled hunters, yet they used agriculture and animal husbandry as their basic occupation. The Lotha region being hilly, the most common practice of agriculture was Jhum cultivation i.e, shifting cultivation. The people were self-sufficient in food grains. Since the olden days the people cultivated rice, maize, beans, peas, yam, brinjal, chilly, pumpkin, ginger, tomato, bitter-guard etc,. Rice is the staple food of the tribe and the most important crop grown.

The forest land and water bodies constitute important economic resources of the Lothas. The Doyang River benefited the people with its great wealth of fish. The Lothas were passionate fishermen and expert swimmers. They are also the only tribe in the Naga Hills that make dug-out boats, which they use on the Doyang. (Ganguli, 1984:82). Fishing rights over
any particular stretch of the river was governed by the local customs. They are usually held by one village or group of villages which guard their valuable rights jealously. Each of them could set trap only in certain parts of the stream. The most interesting fishing activity is the community fishing organized by the village or groups of villages who hold the fishing rights over a certain part of the river. The most effective method proved to be the poisoning of the river by using the root of a highly poisonous plant called Notsu but its use was prohibited by the then British administration. The juice of the creeper Niro is also used to stupefy the fish. The most treasured catch is the enormous cat-fish Zhumyvu. (Bagarius yarrellii or Silundia gangetica).

An interesting aspect of the flora of the area is the abundance of edible wild plants and fruits. The number of edible plants found in the wild far outnumbered domesticated vegetables. Rice, the main staple food is kept in the Oson (granary) outside the village to ensure that the food supply is saved even if the village is burned. Animals like dogs, cows, pigs, Mithun (Bos Frontalis), fowls etc were domesticated for food and trade. There were exchanges of things like salt, dry fish, cotton, ginger etc with the plainsmen of Assam. After the harvest, women were engaged with weaving for the whole family whereas men engaged in bamboo works, cane works, blacksmith, wooden works etc. (Mozhui, 2004:15). They were self sufficient and self reliant.

Thus the Lothas, before the advent of British colonizers and Christian missionaries were self- sufficient, independent, colorful people. Their society projected a great sense of community- based approach and a deep co-operative relationship among themselves. In every sphere of their life, be it political, social, economic and religious, they had the concept of togetherness and oneness. The society reveals elements of egalitarian social condition. It follows a democratic form of government, where the power of people is not in the hands of a
single group but with the whole community. And yet, one could also imagine the dreadful environment of head-hunting in which they lived.

During the colonial period, along with the coming of the British rule, Christianity was introduced. As a result, the population is now predominantly Christians, though some of the inhabitants of the villages still follow the old religious practices. The first contact of the Lothas with Christianity started about 1885, with the arrival of W.E.Witter. Once the missionaries started the work among the Lotha people, not only Christianization but also social transformation was aimed at. The tribe’s religious customs and practices were considered superstitious and devil-dominated, which they had to abandon when they accepted the Christian faith. From the very beginning the American Baptist Missionaries saw the value of education to serve the purpose of evangelization. What this pre-literate tribe needed first of all was a written script that the Bible might be translated to their own language. The next task was to start schools to educate the people in order to make them understand the Bible. Although the missionaries originally started schools in order to help with the missionary work, eventually these institutions benefited the region in many areas. An important aspect was the significant transformation of the Lotha society which was brought about by the new faith and modern western education.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This thesis makes a comprehensive study of the traditional religion of the Lotha, the rites and rituals associated with it, the introduction of Christianity and the impacts brought to the Lotha society and culture in its wake. It investigates and identifies the areas in which changes were brought and the role of Christianity in those changes. Two reasons which gave
impetus to this research study are firstly, no adequate research study has been done so far on the traditional Lotha religion. Secondly, no in depth and objective study has been done on the role played by Christianity and modern education in the cultural change of the Lothas. Moreover, it will be timely record of their past and fast vanishing tradition.

Both available primary and secondary sources are consulted. However, the main sources are drawn from personal interviews and first hand inquiries with the surviving village elders, who still hold on to the old faith, or those converts who still remembers the past experiences. Field studies have been based upon carefully selected respondents, representative of the different ranges inhabited by the Lothas to reflect the cultural variations, the different denominational allegiance of Christians and also of the followers of the traditional religion. Attention is paid to the rich oral tradition associated with the religion and culture of the tribe. It is apt here to agree with Dr. Visier Sanyu when he said that “reconstructing the history of societies dispossessed of any written records is an extremely difficult task requiring unique and unconventional methodology geared to meet this particular problem” (2008:02). Dr. Sanyu further recommended the methodologies such as that developed by Jan Vansina by quoting him thus; “whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation. How is it possible for a mind to remember and out of nothing spin complex ideas, messages and instructions for living which manifest continuity overtime is one of the greatest wonders one can study, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral tradition should be central to students of ideology, of society, of psychology, of art, and finally, of History”. (1985: 11).

As a member of the same community, it is possible to access more insight into the grass root people and into their beliefs, practices, customs and aspirations and have better understanding of the changing mode of every aspect of their life. I have tried to present the
facts and chronology as authentic as possible and analyzed them objectively. Many of the facts are established facts which are just reproduced. I have tried my best to use all the available used and unused data to make this work as authentic as possible. For the chapters on the history of the introduction, growth and impact of Christianity sources such as local church publications, church records, jubilee souvenirs etc are consulted extensively to piece together information and reconstruct it based on these.