

Val II, Issue:VIII, Sept 2012

ISSN : 2230-7850

# **Indian Streams Research Journal**



**Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal**



**Executive Editor  
Ashok Yakkaldevi**

**Editor-in-Chief  
H.N. Jagtap**

## Welcome to ISRJ

**RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595**

**ISSN No.2230-7850**

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

### **International Advisory Board**

Flávio de São Pedro Filho Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	Mohammad Hailat Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken SC 29801	Hasan Baktir English Language and Literature Department, Kayseri
Kamani Perera Regional Centre For Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka	Abdullah Sabbagh Engineering Studies, Sydney	Ghayoor Abbas Chotana Department of Chemistry, Lahore University of Management Sciences [ PK ]
Janaki Sinnasamy Librarian, University of Malaya [ Malaysia ]	Catalina Neculai University of Coventry, UK	Anna Maria Constantinovici AL. I. Cuza University, Romania
Romona Mihaila Spiru Haret University, Romania	Ecaterina Patrascu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest	Horia Patrascu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania
Delia Serbescu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania	Loredana Bosca Spiru Haret University, Romania	Ilie Pinteau, Spiru Haret University, Romania
Anurag Misra DBS College, Kanpur	Fabricio Moraes de Almeida Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	Xiaohua Yang PhD, USA Nawab Ali Khan College of Business Administration
Titus Pop	George - Calin SERITAN Postdoctoral Researcher	

### **Editorial Board**

Pratap Vyamktrao Naikwade ASP College Devrukh,Ratnagiri,MS India	Iresh Swami Ex - VC. Solapur University, Solapur	Rajendra Shendge Director, B.C.U.D. Solapur University, Solapur
R. R. Patil Head Geology Department Solapur University, Solapur	N.S. Dhaygude Ex. Prin. Dayanand College, Solapur	R. R. Yaliker Director Managment Institute, Solapur
Rama Bhosale Prin. and Jt. Director Higher Education, Panvel	Narendra Kadu Jt. Director Higher Education, Pune	Umesh Rajderkar Head Humanities & Social Science YCMOU, Nashik
Salve R. N. Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur	K. M. Bhandarkar Praful Patel College of Education, Gondia	S. R. Pandya Head Education Dept. Mumbai University, Mumbai
Govind P. Shinde Bharati Vidyapeeth School of Distance Education Center, Navi Mumbai	Sonal Singh Vikram University, Ujjain	Alka Darshan Shrivastava Shaskiya Snatkottar Mahavidyalaya, Dhar
Chakane Sanjay Dnyaneshwar Arts, Science & Commerce College, Indapur, Pune	G. P. Patankar S. D. M. Degree College, Honavar, Karnataka	Rahul Shriram Sudke Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore
Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya Secretary, Play India Play (Trust),Meerut	Maj. S. Bakhtiar Choudhary Director,Hyderabad AP India.	S.KANNAN Ph.D , Annamalai University,TN
	S.Parvathi Devi Ph.D.-University of Allahabad	Satish Kumar Kalhotra

**Address:-Ashok Yakkaldevi 258/34, Raviwar Peth, Solapur - 413 005 Maharashtra, India  
Cell : 9595 359 435, Ph No: 02172372010 Email: ayisrj@yahoo.in Website: www.isrj.net**



## Traditional Administration In A Tribal Setting: A Contextual Discourse On The Tangkhul Naga Tribe

BARNALI SARMAH

DEPTT. OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
L.G.B.GIRLS' COLLEGE, TEZPUR (ASSAM)

### Abstract:

*The administration in the tribal areas is unique in its place. Its historicity reflects a system where democracy existed in its purest form. In the past the tribes in the North-East India had efficient system of administration. A system so suitable to them lasted through centuries and formed an integral part of their life. There were villages entirely governed by this traditional system of administration, and till the present day many tribes have retained to a considerable, their traditional laws, customs and village organisations. I have made an attempt to discuss the dynamics of the tribal administration of the Tangkhul Naga tribe in its historicity and also to understand the continuation of the same in some form or the other in the midst of the modern system of administration.*

### NAGAS IN THE NORTH-EAST INDIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Nagas are a mongoloid race living in the heart of the rightangular centre of China in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the south and India in the west. No legend, tradition and history tell that land had been inhabited by any other people or race before the advent and settlement of the Nagas in the area. Thus, the Nagas are the most ancient people in the area they inhabit. Although the Nagas do not have a written history of the past, especially their origin, migration and settlement in their present habitation, their rich culture, traditions, folksongs, etc, proved to be the most important sources of information for the construction of the early Naga history. Another important source of the Naga history is the oral tradition handed down from generation to generation. The study of the physical feature of the Nagas is another determining factor of the origin of the Nagas which resembles with the Mongoloids. The fact cannot be denied that people of the same race have similar physical characteristics such as colour, facial features and perhaps, some culture, custom and tradition. In this context, Sipra Sen stated—

“.....The Naga tribes of Manipur has all the affinities with the Naga tribes of Nagaland and have some affinities with the tribes of South East Asian countries.”  
Thus, the Nagas belong to Tibeto—Burman family of the Mongolian race in course of time, during their migratory stage, they came to China. In search of suitable settlement, at

Please cite this Article as : BARNALI SARMAH , Traditional Administration In A Tribal Setting: A Contextual Discourse On The Tangkhul Naga Tribe : Indian Streams Research Journal (Sept. ; 2012)



last they moved out of China and came to India, their present homeland. The migration could have taken place due to the pressure of increasing population and the inability of the land to sustain the population. Migration might be due to oppression by certain sections of the community on others. According to Horam, there were four waves of migration of what constitutes the Naga tribe. The first wave of migration was that of the Konyaks, being the oldest settlers came from South West China passing through Tibet, Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh. The other three waves of migration of different period of times entered into the areas dominated by the Nagas through Burma.

The group which followed north-east direction occupied present Ukhrul district, popularly known as Tangkhuls, and those who went straight towards the north, later dispersed from the historical place called Maikhel, three miles east of Tadubi Sub-Divisional Headquarters, in the Senapati District of Manipur State. Before their dispersal from Maikhel, they were only one Naga group, the Tangkhul tribe. But when they got separated and scattered at different places, different Naga tribes emerged out of different groups and clans. This is what we see several Naga tribes today. The migration of the Nagas to present Naga Homeland, thus, took place over a period of times by different waves of migration and from different direction. Vizier Sanyu stated, "We have seen over a period of time, more fertile land and the subsequent growth of population, and search for sustenance split the early Naga tribes into various settlements of Semas, Lothas, Rengmas, Tangkhul, Zeliang, Chakhesang, etc.

However, although the Nagas are divided into several tribes and sub-tribes with its occupied region, they have their own compact area of settlement covering a vast territory. But Naga inhabited territory had been divided into small administrative unit, first by the colonial rule for the administrative convenience to serve the purpose and interest of colonialism. The creation of an administrative unit by the name of Ukhrul was exclusively the work of the British colonial power. a good number of Tangkhul villages have been merged to present Senapati District of Manipur, and still a greater part of Tangkhul area remains in Burma. Again, some portions of Naga inhabited areas are portioned into different states of India such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur.

At present, regarding the habitation of the Tangkhuls, Ukhrul District in the north-east of Manipur State is regarded as the only area where the Tangkhuls are living. According to 1971 Census, Ukhrul District has an area of 4,409 sq. Km. with the population of 51,101. But the Tangkhuls living elsewhere in Manipur came up to 57,851. There were 168 Tangkhul villages in Ukhrul District alone. And if the Tangkhul inhabited area of Manipur state area of Manipur State and Myanmar (Burma) are amalgamated together, it will, perhaps, be the biggest area of all the Naga tribes.

#### **THE PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM AMONG THE NAGAS: A TRADITION OF HILL-TOPS' CIVILISATION**

There are as many as 32 known tribes distributed in the territories of Nagaland state, the hills of Manipur state, Tirap Frontier in the NEFA, parts of the Cachar Hills and also on the western border of Burma. Each of the tribes has its own norms and system of administration. A system so suitable to them has lasted through centuries which formed an integral part of their life. Among these tribes, the Tangkhuls are a major tribe of the Nagas occupying a compact area of some portions of Sadar Hills District, eastern Senapati District, the whole of Ukhrul District and north-western parts of Burma (Myanmar). The formation of the early Tangkhul village states were based on the



territorial divisions which by the division of village territory became village states. In early days, every Tangkhul village big or small was an independent state and exercised its independent power. A Naga village actually was a “Village State” perched on a hill-top, a feature which can be stated as the “Hill-tops’ Civilisation”. The village was the real political unit. The Nagas were freedom loving people and loved their village and land more than anything else. Most of the villages lived independently while some villages enjoyed autonomous powers to legislate, judicate and execute within their respective jurisdictions.

The Konyak system of administration is the monarchical form of government with a very powerful religious and secular chief, called as Angs, which also existed in the Manipur valley, and in few villages of the tribes—Sema and Tangkhul. Whatever he said was the law for the people and his decision could not be questioned by the bravest of the men.

Every Naga village was and is ruled by a chief assisted by a council of Elders. Some Nagas like the Aos and Angamis have a republican form of government, whereas some other tribes like the Konyaks and Tangkhuls have a form of government akin to monarchical form of government. In this regard, we can quote J. Roy,

“Hill-men have their indigenous tribal polity which varies from tribe to tribe. The variation ranges from despotic chieftaincy of the Thadous to the democratic village council of the Maos, from semi-republic gerontocracy of the Kabuis to the limited chieftainship of the Tangkhuls.....are strictly observed. In some cases, the democratic institutions work as a check on the autocracy of the chief”.

Here, I have made an attempt to discuss the traditional administration of the Tangkhul village state along with its polity in details

### **VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION AND THE TANGKHUL NAGAS: TRADITION AT ITS BEST**

As stated above, the early Tangkhul village state were formed on the basis of the division of village territory, and every Tangkhul village, big or small, was an independent state and exercised its independent power. The Tangkhul village state was a monarchical type of state ruled by a chief called Awunga who had divine sanction, and therefore his position cannot be challenged. However, the monarchical government of the Tangkhuls is essentially democratic despite the hereditary post of the chief, Awunga.

The Awunga has dual functions as the head of the Village State—secular and religious.

The secular duties of the Awunga are manifold that includes the erection of village gates with a constant vigilance by village force, to ensure peace, prosperity and defence of his subject people. He also ensures that every family of the village gets sufficient land of cultivation for their sustenance for the entire year. It is the responsibility of the Awunga that no stranger is maltreated and to feed him if required.

Regarding the religious functions of the Awunga, he enjoys several religious rights and duties along with the village priest. This includes to take care of the life and welfare of his subject people, to put himself under strict religious discipline and village taboos and live a holy life. All village festivals, social and religious functions and solemn days are to be opened with the performance of rites and sacrifices by the Awunga. Although the village priest performed all the rituals, yet the presence of the Awunga in religious ceremonies was important.

The Tangkhul Awunga also enjoys certain other rights and privileges. Being the head of

the village, he is the “first among the equals”. It is a Tangkhul cultural trait that a man should not speak to the Awunga in his face.

Along with the monarchical form of government, we find the presence of democracy in the village sates of the Tangkhuls which made it a popular government. The presence of Hangva, the most important organ of the government machinery of the Tangkhul village state, was a council of elders, which carries the administration of the state. The Hangva was composed of the membership of the Awunga as head, clan heads and some selected or nominated members of the village. This enabled to the establishment of a strong and stable government of the village state and no room for corruption as the state was run by efficient village statesmen. The functions of the Hangva can be divided into three categories—

- Executive Function: The first important function of the Hangva was to formulate policies on war, peace, economy, social activities, etc, and to execute them effectively. All the rules and regulations and decisions made in the Village Council or in the General Assembly of the village were implemented by the Councilors. Also the Council awards punishments if any of the member found to violate the law according to the Convention and practices of the ancestors depending on the nature and conditions of the case.

- Administrative Function: The administrative function of the Village Council was very important and prominent. This includes the construction of village, defence, village gate, village compound, water supply, footpath, inter-village footpath, construction of bridges and many more. Village mass-hunting and mass-fishing, village festivals and fairs were fixed and arranged by the Council. The Hangva also forwarded aid to the poor, widows and orphans without leaving at the mercy of misfortune.

- Judicial Function: The judicial function was the most important function of the Village Council. The Awunga and the Councilors constitute the highest constitute the highest Court of Justice above there was no other court of appeal, the arbitration of the council is final and binding. At the initial stage, the court tried to solve the disputes peacefully in the form of conciliation and compromise, but if it fails, the matter was settled according to customary laws.

It is to be noted that if any case or problem of any form, when neither the General Assembly nor the Village Council is in a position to solve the issue, the Awunga and the clan chiefs, a body which is called Wungnaos is constituted to discuss the issue. The arbitration of the Council of Wungnaos is final and binding. No one can challenge the decision of the Wungnaos, and therefore, the seating of the Wungnaos is greatly feared and highly revered.

The Tangkhuls had an unwritten constitution known as RIYAN which is far better and effective than many of the written constitution of today. This is testified by the fact that there has been no reaction against the established government of village authorities till date. Culture, traditions, usages, customs and conventions serve as the foundation of Riyan with the religious sanction. All the constitutions and written laws are subject are subject to amendment in conformity with the changing situation. But the unwritten constitution of the Tangkhuls (Riyan) is rigid, and there is hardly any room for alteration due to their belief in the presence of divine sanction. They are in nature of standing law. Based on Riyan, certain secular laws are framed for day to day administration of the village, known as Mayorin.

**CHANGES AND CONTINUITY IN TRADITIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL PHENOMENA**

In 1881, the British took over the administration of some portion of Naga habitat. However, they did not directly rule over the Nagas. The village administration was left to the village chief and council of elders, but realising the strong arm of the British rule, the Nagas invited the British officials to come and settle their village differences. Immediately after the subordination of Manipur to the Government of British-India, their administrative power extended to the hill areas including the Tangkhul country. The British administration in Tangkhul country made some substantial contributions which is an important turning point in the history of the Tangkhuls. Before the advent of the British, no power had brought the Tangkhuls under subjugation. Life remained at its original existence. But with the coming of the Britishers, the Tangkhuls were exposed to the world outside. The isolated Tangkhul villages were connected to one another and the economic changes that came with British administration further affected the village economy. But the great achievement of the British authorities in the field of administration of justice was commendable. The British rule did not affect the original judiciary of the Tangkhuls, but those serious issues which were beyond the ability of Village Council, or the divergent customs of different villages or tribes, or customs which appeared legally unacceptable were settled by the British Officers. Also in cases where Naga customary laws were derogatory to humanism or to modern advanced culture, scientific legal system was applied. In this way the credit of the improvement of Tangkhul judicial system with modern legal system goes to the British administration. But then the spread of Christianity had also played its role which resulted in the annihilation of Naga culture, regardless of their origin and relation with the religion, among the Christian population of the Nagas.

With the passing of "The Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation, 1947, the administration of hill people, which was formerly in the hands of the British, was transferred to Maharaja-in-Council. This act was not a complete departure from the administrative system of the British in the hill areas of Manipur state. However, some modifications were made, especially in the field of administration with the inception of Village Authority. Further, the Regulation stripped them of the powers and functions of the Awunga and Hangva in the administration of justice. But this new system did not fit in the minds and cultures of the people and this was the beginning of administrative failure of the new republic of India in the Tangkhul hill country.

After the merger of the Manipur state into the Indian Union in 1950, a new Act was passed in 1956, for the administration of Hill Areas of Manipur, known as "The Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956". This Act made a complete departure from the original administrative system of Tangkhuls, except the retention of the post of the Awunga which being hereditary by nature, could not be eliminated. Again, the institution of Hangva is now replaced by the "Village Authority". Representation of the clans was ignored by the Act, and instead of the nomination system, the new Act provided election system on the basis of adult suffrage. Consequently, all the seats of the Village Authority were captured by the clan or clans having the highest majority.

Being the largest in the membership of the village and Village Authority, they started to manipulate the village affairs, and corruption set in. Gradually, favouritism and prejudice in delivering verdicts came into being. Justice was replaced by nepotism and party spirit. Customary laws were little honoured and revered, for which fear of violation of customary laws and tradition disappeared. Justice became expensive from grassroot

level of the Village Authority to the higher court of the land. Life was no more safe and secure; the result was a complete failure of the new administrative system of their ancestors—so cheap but effective, full of justice and peace, making it available to all alike regardless of rich and poor, high and low, great and small.

Realising the serious failure in the administration of justice in the Tangkhul villages, the expensive litigation in the courts of modern established government and also improper adjudication of the cases according to the taste of the people, the Tangkhul Long (Tangkhul Tribal Council) felt the necessity of establishing a court of justice (Tangkhul Tribal Court) to try and settle cases pertaining to Tangkhuls based on the customary laws of the people. The Customary laws of the Tangkhul Long is known as “Shiyan-Tanza”, collected and compiled in 1988. Since then, it exists parallel to the established courts of Sub-Deputy Collector, Sub-Divisional Officer and the Deputy Commissioner of Ukhrul District. Most of the appeals from the decisions of the Village Authority approach this court. It has both original and appellate powers of cases. The Tangkhul Long serves as Commonwealth of Tangkhul villages to see for the betterment of the Tangkhul villages and the people. Further, it does not override the powers and functions of the Village Tangkhul Awungas as they form the General Assembly of the Long. This Assembly has an elected president and other office functionaries who hold office for the term of five years.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is found that the original Tangkhul administration was successful to a greater extent, except the fact of exclusion of women in the administrative affairs. It is to be noted that the Tangkhuls never allowed the Naga women to take part and represent in the administration of the village, which reflects the existence of a dominant patriarchy in the Naga society. According to Naga oral tradition, “A woman has no real place”, therefore they have no role in the village traditional administration of the Nagas.

The traditional system of administration encountered innumerable challenges from various various quarters from time to time. The system of modernity engineered by a process of western education along with its thrust on universalism had posed a threat to the traditional base of Naga administration to a large extent. The homogenisation thrust which also came from an imposing Nation-State created instability in the traditional system of administration among different tribes of North-East India. The Naga, on this occasion, responded vehemently by rejecting this homogenising thrust. Therefore, the need of the hour is to give emphasis to the traditional of the tribes along with modern elements. The Central Government recognised its folly and made attempt to create a balance between modernity and tradition, thereby, retaining some elements of tradition in the present system of administration in Nagaland. The existence of Tangkhul Long and its court based on the customary laws is a testimony to the fact that the Nagas still respect their tradition in spite of modern changes and modern innovations, and confirm the Tangkhul Naga's desire not to make breach from the past.



**REFERENCES:**

- 1.Horam, M, "Naga Polity", Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1992.
- 2.Samanta, R. K. (ed.), "India's North-East—The Popular of Change and Development", B.R.Publishing Corporation, 2002.
- 3.Shimmi, Y.L.Roland, "Comparative History of the Nagas from Ancient Period Till 1826".

---

<sup>1</sup>Shimray, A.S.W., "History of the Tangkhul Nagas", Akansha Publishing House, N. Delhi, 2001, p4

<sup>2</sup> Horam, "North East India, A Profile", pp162-164

<sup>3</sup> Sanyu, Visier, "The History of Village Formation Among the Angami Nagas", p57.

<sup>4</sup> Shimray, A.S.W., op. Cit., pp32-33

<sup>5</sup> Roy, Jyotirmoy, "History of Manipur", p193, cited in A.S.W.Shimray, op. Cit., pp160-161.

<sup>6</sup> Shimray, A.S.W., op. Cit., pp245-246

<sup>7</sup> Horam, M, "Naga Polity", Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1992, as mentioned in Shimray, op. Cit., pp186-187

<sup>8</sup> Shimray, A.S.W., "op. Cit., pp246-247

## **Publish Research Article**

***International Level Multidisciplinary Research Journal***

### **For All Subjects**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We invite original unpublished research paper. Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Books Review of publication, You will be pleased to know that our journals are..

#### **Associated and Indexed, India**

- OPEN J-GATE
- International Scientific Journal Consortium Scientific

#### **Associated and Indexed, USA**

- Google Scholar
- DOAJ
- EBSCO
- Index Copernicus
- Academic Journal Database
- Publication Index
- Scientific Resources Database
- Recent Science Index
- Scholar Journals Index
- Directory of Academic Resources
- Elite Scientific Journal Archive
- Current Index to Scholarly Journals
- Digital Journals Database
- Academic Paper Database
- Contemporary Research Index



Indian Streams Research Journal  
258/34, Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra  
Contact: 9595359435  
E-Mail: ayisrj@yahoo.in / ayisrj2011@gmail.com  
Website: www.isrj.net