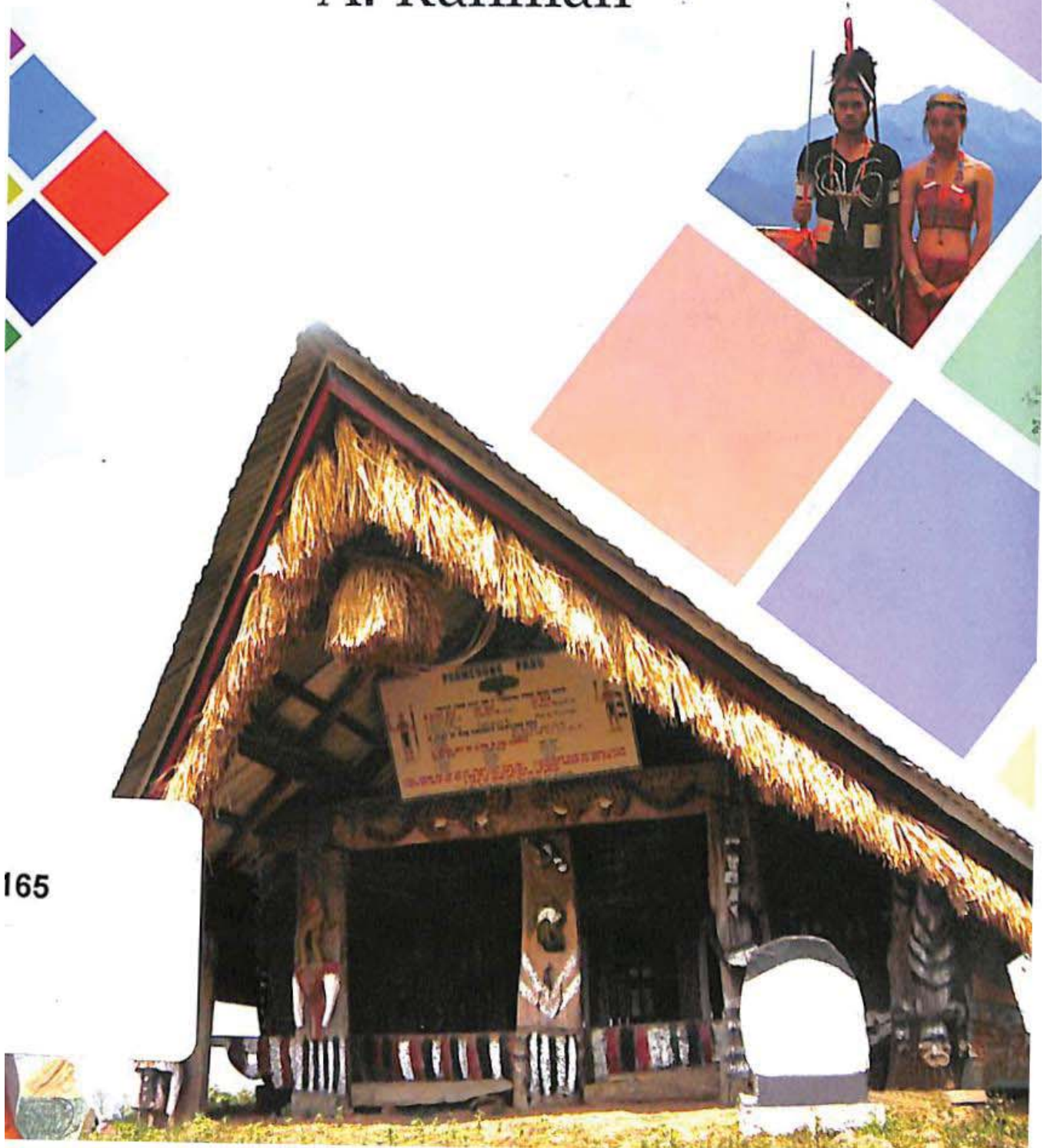


Change and Development *in* PHOM NAGA SOCIETY

A. Rahman



165

'Change and Development in Phom Naga Society' is a comprehensive book which describes the various socio-political aspects of the Phom Naga Tribe of Nagaland. The book throws light on the topographical and demographic character of Longleng district, the home of the Phoms, along with their traditional beliefs, customs and institutions, and also their stages of migration to the present domicile. The study highlights the emergence of the Phom identity and their relations with the neighbours. Elaborate discussions are made, especially on the social change, economic transformation from traditional to a modern economy, administrative and political development of the people with references to their role in the political process of the state since independence. Assessing the pace of development that has been witnessed in the Phom inhabited areas over the bygone decades, the author tries to trace the internal and external challenges which the society has been facing. The book will definitely be useful to researchers, planners, policy makers and social workers.

About the Author

A. Rahman (b. 1970) took his M.A. degree from Gauhati University in 1995 and later obtained his Ph.D. degree from Dibrugarh University in 2008. He has been teaching in the Department of History at Yingli (Govt.) College, Longleng since 1996. Before joining Yingli College, he was working as a lecturer at Swami Yogananda Girl College, Saktiashram, Kokrajhar. He is a life member of the North East India History Association and has published a few research papers. He also organised and conducted two regional seminars under the sponsorship of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

Change and Development in Phom Naga Society

A. RAHMAN



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Preface

Change is the law of nature. No society remains static, though the pace of change and development may differ from region to region. Many of the regions have made rapid progress while some others are advancing only slowly. In pre-independence times the Colonial Government paid little attention for development of the Phom-Naga inhabited areas for poor prospect of revenue collection. Despite this the feeling of tribal solidarity began to develop in the minds of the people of the areas as early as the first half of the twentieth century. The Christian missionaries who were playing a significant role in bringing a major change in other areas of Nagaland, made little breakthrough in the Phom areas. The continuation of age-old practice of head hunting among the people was another deterrent factor which slowed down the pace of development in the area. It is only after 1947 that the government of free India initiated multifaceted development activities in most of the tribal areas of the north-east. As a result strong winds of change and development began to blow over the Phom-Naga areas along with the other tribal areas of the state. An attempt has been made in this volume to critically analyse and assess the pace of development in the Phom-inhabited areas of Nagaland since independence, and to highlight its impact on the people. Since, the spellings of names of the villages, mountains and rivers differed from writer to writer and in official records, an attempt has been made to maintain a uniformity in accordance with the 2011 Census with the exception of the Bhumnyu village whose residents recently changed the name of their village from Mongnyu to Bhumnyu with the consent of the Home Department of the Government of India.

In recent years a number of books have been written and published on various aspects of Nagaland in general by scholars, Indian and

foreign, but no in-depth study has been made on the Phom-Naga tribe. Until now one or two monographs have been published by the Phom scholars and of course, sketchy information on the tribe is available in the form of tour diaries, booklets and paper published on different occasions. Although the Phom is one of the major Naga tribes of Nagaland and has rich cultural heritage, yet the tribe is still known little to the outside people. All these created an enthusiasm in me to undertake and carry on a comprehensive study and prepare an authentic volume on the tribe. My long stay at Longleng, the district headquarters of the Phom tribe and my close relation with the people have enabled me to understand the society from grassroots level.

In the course of my study I was fortunate to receive support, help, encouragement and cooperation from quite a few persons. I thank them all. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor late Prof. S.D. Goswami, Department of History, Dibrugarh University for his inspiring guidance and invaluable help which I received throughout the period of my study. I wish to place on record my deep sense of gratitude to late Prof. K. Borgohain, former Joint Director of Nagaland Higher and Technical Education, and Principal, Yingli College, Longleng for his encouragement to undertake my research work at Dibrugarh University. I am thankful to Dr. Alempa Ao, retd. Principal and all other faculty members and staff of Yingli College for their encouragement and cooperation in completing my work. I am highly grateful to one of my close friends Dr. B. Henshet Phom, Vice Principal, Yingli College, who never hesitate to share my problems and spare his valuable time to discuss on various issues regarding the people of his own tribe. My sincere thanks go to the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi for providing financial assistance to me to visit various libraries, archives, etc. My sincere thanks are also due to the Directors and staff of the Archives at Kohima and New Delhi and the Librarians and support staff of the Libraries at Kohima, Guwahati, Kolkata, New Delhi, Dibrugarh University and Longleng where I worked for my research. I shall fail in my duty if I do not acknowledge the cooperation I received from all those whom I interviewed. I am also grateful to my family members for their inspiration and encouragement at every stage of my study. Lastly, no one other than me is responsible for the mistake, if any, found in this humble work.

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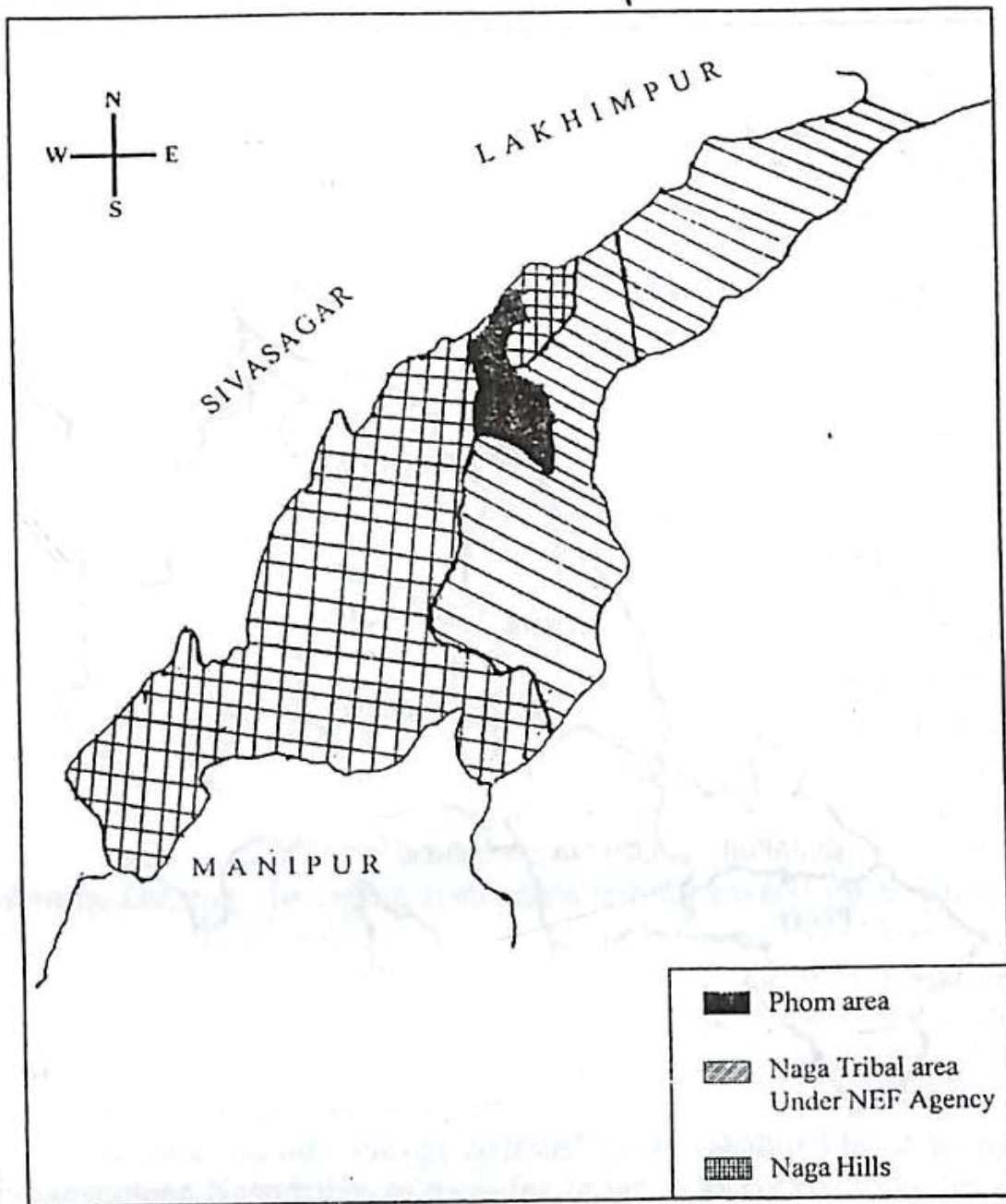
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Source: Population and Economic Map Census of India, 1951

Map 1: Nagaland State during NEFA Period (1951-57)

1

Land and the People

Nagaland, the easternmost state of India, lies between 25.60' and 27.40' north of equator and between the longitudinal lines of 93.20' and 95.15" with a population of 19,78,502 as per 2011 census.² The state which was born on 1 December, 1963 as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union covers an area of 16,579 square kilometres³ and shares its border with Assam in the north and west, Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh in the east and Manipur in the south. The topography of the state is very peculiar; full of hill ranges with narrow defile between mountains having terrifying steep terrains full of grass and thickly wooded evergreen forests. Doyang, the largest river navigable for several miles within the state, enters the valley and joins the Brahmaputra river.⁴ The state has some other important rivers, namely the Dikhu, the Milak (Jhanzi), the Dhansiri, the Tizu, the Yungnyu (Yangmun), etc. Numerous rivulets drain the hills and usually flow between parallel mountains and also serve as tributaries of various rivers.

The state has now eleven districts⁵ in all, inhabited by as many as seventeen Naga tribes as recorded in the 1991 census.⁶ The Phek district is the home of the Chakhesangs, the Pochuris and a group of Sangtams. The Mokokchung district is inhabited by the Aos, its headquarters Mokokchung is one of the most important business centres of Nagaland. The Lotha tribe resides in Wokha district and the Semas in Zunheboto district. The Mon district, home of the Konyaks, constitutes the largest single percentage of the total population of the state.⁷ The Phoms live in Longleng district. The Sangtam, the Tikhir, the Yimchungre, the Khiemnungan, etc., are found in Kiphire district. Saramoti, the highest peak in Nagaland is situated in Kiphire district and its height is 3,840 metres above sea level.⁸ The Tuensang district is inhabited by the Changs, the

Khiemnungans and the Sangtams, the Peren district by the Zeliangs and the Kohima district by the Angamis, the Rengmas, etc. Kohima, the state capital, is an important commercial and transport centre. Japfu is the highest peak of the district. The Kohima town and its suburbs are historically known for one of the most decisive and bloody battles of Second World War fought between the Allies and the Japanese and the INA army in April 1944. The British and their allied forces were victorious in this battle. Some of the legacies of the War are still found here.⁹ The Dimapur district, which is situated on the bank of the Dhansiri river, is inhabited by the mixed Naga tribes. A considerable number of non-Naga people, i.e. the Kacharis, the Assamese, the Bengalis, the Kukis, etc., are also found in this district. Dimapur was once the capital of the Kachari rajas, which was sacked by the Ahoms in 1536. The capital was then abandoned, but its ruins are still found here.¹⁰ It has communication and transport links with all the important places of North-East India besides the whole state. The state has only one airport and a rail station situated at Dimapur itself. The town is known as an important commercial centre of the entire state and of the neighbouring state of Manipur.

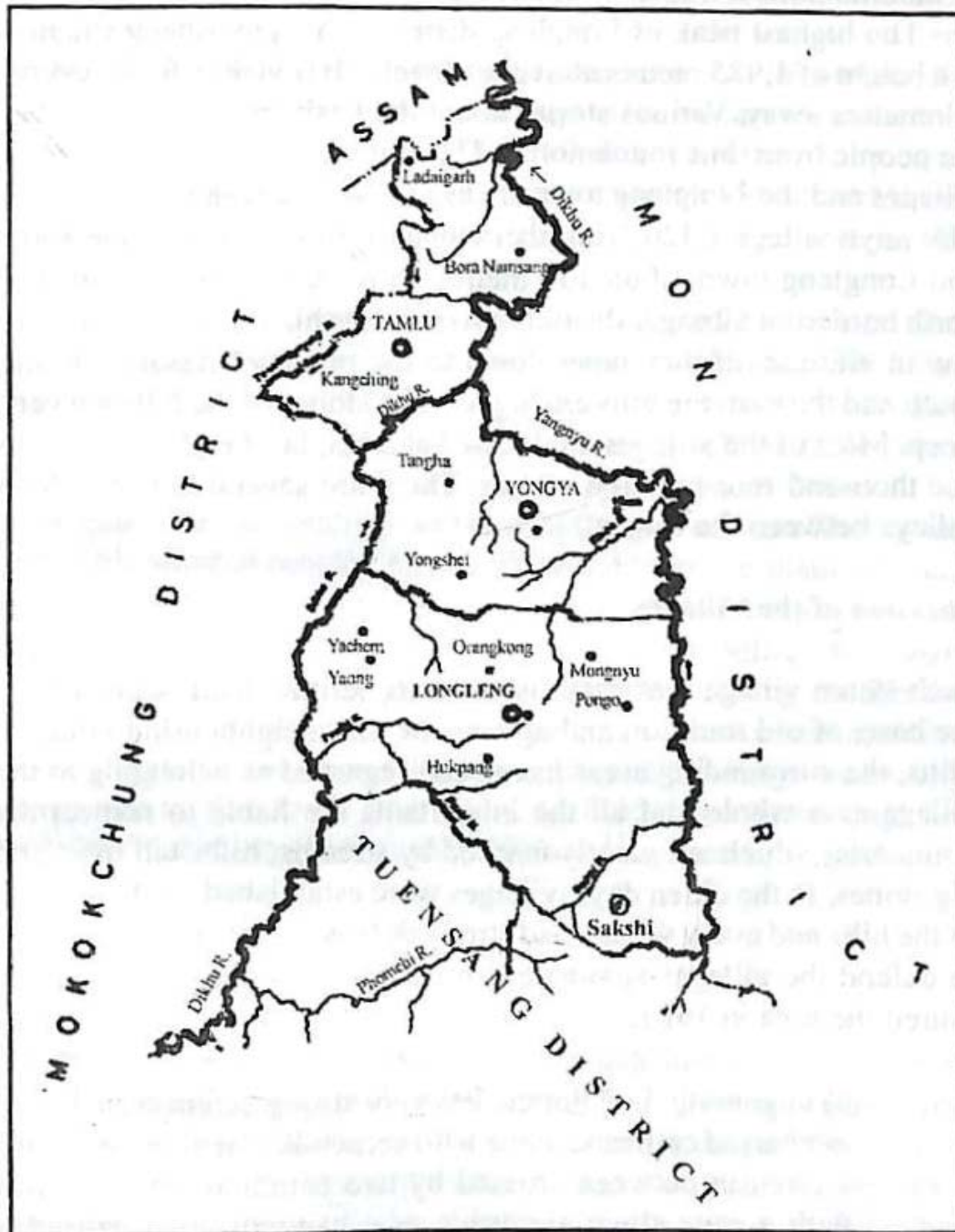
Over and above Nagaland, various other Naga tribes live outside the geographical boundary of Nagaland. For example, the Tangkhul, the Mao, the Maram, the Kabui, the Zeliangrong, the Maing, the Anal, the Mayan, the Monsang, the Thangal and the Kacha Nagas live in Manipur;¹¹ the Nocte, the Wancho and the Tangsa Nagas in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh; the Rengma and the Zemi Nagas in the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam. The Naga tribes of Burma are the Haimi, the Rangpan, the Htangau, the Tsaplau and the Somra Nagas.¹² Though the Naga tribes differ from one another in physique, culture and language, yet many things are ubiquitous in them making it possible for us to group them under the generic name of Naga.¹³ There were, in the past, some characteristics which were common among the various Naga tribes, viz. headhunting, bachelor's house, trial marriage (premarital relationship), aversion to the use of milk, absence of any powerful political organisation, use of double-cylinder wooden vertical forge, the loom, the shield, the practice of tattooing, etc.¹⁴

Area and Location of Longleng District

The Longleng district, the home of the Phom Nagas, is situated on

the north of Nagaland and lies between $26^{\circ}17'30''$ and $26^{\circ}47'15''$ north of equator and between the longitudinal lines of $94^{\circ}33'25''$ E and $94^{\circ}48'15''$ E.¹⁵ It covers an approximate area of 566 square kilometres with picturesque mountains and vast fertile land in the foothills.¹⁶ Roughly, the district covers 3.38 per cent of the total land area of the state.

LONGLENG DISTRICT IN 2007



Map 3: Longleng District in 2007

Source: Census of India, 1991, District Census Handbook, Tuensang.

The boundary of the Longleng district touches Assam on its north on a narrow strip between Mon and Mokokchung districts. The other three sides of the district are bounded by the Tuensang district on the south, the Mokokchung district on the west, and the Mon district on the east. The whole area falls on north-western sub-ranges of the Patkai hills comprising three hilly terrains along with deep valleys.¹⁷ Yungnyu, Shemong and Chingmei are the three mountain ranges of the region.¹⁸ Almost the entire land area of the district is composed of mountainous terrains.

The highest peak of Longleng district is Yingnyushang situated at a height of 1,985 metres above sea level.¹⁹ It is visible from several kilometres away. Various stories about the peak are in vogue among the people from time immemorial. The altitudes of some of the Phom villages and the Longleng town are as follows: Tangha village 1,220, Bhumnyu village 1,320, Yongshei village 1,390, Tamlu village 800²⁰ and Longleng town 1,066.30²¹ metres above sea level. Towards the north bordering Sibsagar district of Assam, the hills are comparatively low in altitude till they taper down to the plains of Assam. On the south and the east, the hills are higher. The slopes of the hills are very steep. Most of the villages are located at a height of eight hundred to one thousand four hundred metres. There are several hundred deep valleys between the ridges.

Location of the Villages

Each Phom village was established with definite land boundary on the basis of old tradition and agreement with neighbouring villages. Thus, the surrounding areas have been regarded as belonging to the village as a whole and all the inhabitants are liable to respect the boundaries which are clearly marked by streams, hills, tall trees and big stones. In the olden days, villages were established on the summit of the hills and every village had strong defensive barrier easy enough to defend the villages against enemy attacks. To quote Hutton who toured the area in 1923:

“Yungphong, like Pongu, has very strong defences, a double rampart of earth and stone with perpendicular sides, a “Panji” – ditch in between crossed by two bamboos for a footway with a cane slung alongside as a handrail, then palisades, ladders and a wooden door. In addition to this, the paths to

the village were all blocked with branched stumps, sometimes with rows of them, which would entirely prevent anyone from running down the paths."²²

In the bygone days, the Nagas were known for head hunting and the inter-village feuds were a common practice among them. It was under these prevailing conditions every individual had to lead a life of apprehension of surprise enemy attack. Therefore, the first choice of the founders of a village was the defence of the location where the village was built, while the cultivable land was secondary for them. They also allowed the surroundings of the village to be covered by the dense forest. In case, a village failed to resist the incursion of the enemy, the villagers mostly the women and children took shelter in these jungles in order to save their lives from the hands of the raiders.

Although headhunting is now a matter of the past, village sites have not been abandoned. The people love their ancestral home intensely and do not give it up easily. However, nowadays educated people have started to set up colonies downwards in suitable places around the main villages. Even two or three villages are found on the same spur. The surrounding land area of the two villages Shetap and Ladaigarh, situated near the Assam-Nagaland border, is plain, whereas the land of Ngetchungching is equally flat and hilly. The geographical area and population of the Phom villages vary from village to village. Villagers use the forest products, practise shifting or terrace cultivation, catch fish in the rivers or *nullahs* and use common water sources located within their village boundary. Each village has usually from three to five *khels* and again, each *khel* has a *morung*, i.e. bachelors' dormitory.²³ Many of the Phom villages have well adorned village entry gates.

Soil

The soil of Nagaland is tentatively grouped into four categories, namely entisol, oxisol, mollisol and spodosol. The land bordering Assam is classified as entisol but the major portion of the land of Longleng district is oxisol and a little portion mollisol.²⁴ Entisol is an important class of soil for cultivation of rice and also for other agricultural crops as the *pH* level of the soil is less.²⁵ In the higher altitude hills where the *pH* level of the soil is comparatively high,

people practise *jhum*, i.e. shifting cultivation.²⁶ The fertility status of the soil of Longleng district is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Fertility status of Soils of Longleng Rural Development Block

pH	Organic Carbon %age	Average		Fertility Rating		
		Phosphate Lbs/Acres	Potash Lbs/Acres	Nitrogen	Phosphate	Potash
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.30	2.760	18.0	437.5	High	Low	High

[†] Source: Report on Census of Minor Irrigation Schemes in Nagaland, 1987-88, p. 8.

Soils in Nagaland are generally fertile but soil erosion that occurs during the rainy season often affects the people and creates hurdles for farming and also transport system. The land having steeply slope hills is more prone to soil erosion. There are other factors like torrential rain, exclusive practice of *jhum* cultivation, haphazard construction of roads and houses which cause frequent land erosion.

Climate

The climate of the state varies according to season, namely the cold weather season or winter season (December to February), hot weather season or spring season (March to May), the south-west monsoon or summer season (June to September) and retreating the south-west monsoon or autumn season (October to November).²⁷ In the months from February to April, the sky ordinarily remains clear with the exception of occasional cloudiness and showers. Strong wind blows generally from the south-west during February and March almost throughout the day and occasionally in the night too. Velocity of the wind is so strong that sometimes tall trees are uprooted and thatched leaves or CGI sheets from house roofs are blown away. Rain starts in advance in April but more regularly from May. Monsoon sets in June and continues upto the middle of September.²⁸ Temperature gradually rises but goes down at once when it rains. Monsoon brings heavy rain and it rains almost every day that makes the *kacha* roads muddy and slippery. The average temperature of the district in summer is 30 degree. During summer the climate is warm rather than hot due to

heavy rain. In summer and autumn the sky remains mostly cloudy and the mist rising from the deep valleys often envelops the mountains. The average rainfall of Longleng district is 2500 mm. while the rainfall at Tamlu alone exceeds 100 inches.²⁹ The temperature of the district starts to come down from September and from November it is severe cold. The sun is scorching in the higher altitude hills because the air is thin.³⁰ In the foothills bordering Assam temperature is higher than Yongnyah, Longleng and Sakshi areas because of lower altitude of the area. December and January are the coldest months. The average temperature of the district in winter is 17 degree. The sky becomes cloudy at times with smoke in various parts of the district in the months from December to March due to burning jungles for preparing the *jhum* fields.

Drainage

There are two major rivers, viz. the Dikhu and the Yangmun (Yungnyu) which flow through the Longleng district. The Dikhu rises from the north flanks near Nurato Mountain in the Sema territory and turns westward and enters the Ao area, then it flows further northward forming a traditional boundary between the Ao and the Phom areas³¹ of Yongnyah and Longleng administrative circles. After that it flows north-eastward across the northern part of the Longleng district marking the natural boundary between Tamlu and Yongnyah administrative circles and finally meets the Yungnyu river near Tamlu. From there it turns towards Assam and once again acts as the natural boundary demarcation between Tamlu subdivision and Mon district. Then it flows north and west through the Sibsagar district of Assam and finally falls into the Brahmaputra river. Its total length before merging with the Brahmaputra river is about 200 kilometres.³² The river is navigable for a short distance from the confluence of the Dikhu and the Yungnyu rivers to Assam.

A number of tributaries which rise in the north flanks of the Tuensang district and also the southern part of the Mon district ultimately form the Yungnyu river. The river turns northward, then north-westward and ultimately joins the Dikhu river. The river flows past the eastern border of the Longleng district and acts as the natural border between the Longleng and the Mon districts. Both the Dikhu and the Yungnyu rivers are difficult to cross during the rainy season due to the strong current of the water.³³

Several rills, or *nullahs* passing through the Longleng district act as tributaries of either the Dikhu or the Yungnyu rivers. The ridges separated by deep valleys produce various *nullahs* like Supai, Pochi, Tsubu, Sisha, Tsusangyayung, Phengla, etc. Many of these dry up during the lean season but cannot be crossed without bridge due to strong current during the rainy season.

The springs around the foothills of the Phom villages serve the various needs of the people living in the villages. They catch fish in the rivers and rills with the help of hooks and nets or by the traditional method of using the substances of poisonous plants.³⁴ Nowadays fish is also caught by throwing and blasting powerful cracker into the water. Community fishing is also done in the rivers and rills in which people of two or more villages take part.

Mineral Resources

Coal and limestone are the two important mineral resources of the district. Coal is found in the areas west of Namsang Chingchang (Bura Namsang). A small quantity of secondary limestone is found at a place 3.2 kilometres to the south-east of Tamlu³⁵ and also in the areas nearby the Sakchi village. Oil seepage has been reported from the Tamlu-Mon border of Bura Namsang village.³⁶

In the olden days the Phom people used to make salt and lime by the indigenous methods of production. After collecting the saline water from brine sources the water was boiled and then stored in the *chunga* (bamboo piece) for a day or two after which a small quantity of salt was found stored at the bottom of the *chunga*. The people also made lime by burning a particular kind of tree or by burning and cooling down the limestone.³⁷

Flora and Fauna

The district is almost entirely covered with hills and receives heavy rainfall in the monsoon. The climate is suitable for the growth of various crops. The villages are situated at a distance of four to ten kilometres from each other and the intervening parts are covered by thick jungles. The forest of the lower ranges of Tamlu-Bura Namsang areas is classified as subtropical moist deciduous forest and a small portion as subtropical evergreen rain forest, whereas the rest parts of Longleng district are under degraded regrowth forests (*jhum*).³⁸

The wood gathered from the forests is used by the Phom people for construction of houses and furniture, and also as firewood and charcoal. Cane, stone, *agor* wood, bamboo, *dalchini* and varieties of medicinal plants are some of the important forest products of the district. The forest is also the home of different species of wild animals and birds like the tiger, panther, jungle cat, Himalayan bear, bison, *sambar*, barking deer, wild pig, Indian hornbill, jungle fowl, pheasant, green pigeon, doves, etc. Among the reptiles the python is the most important one. Hunting of wild birds and animals is quite common among the Phoms as the Government of Nagaland bans killing of such animals and birds only during the period from 1 March to 31 October.

The Phom Tribe

The Phom is a hospitable Naga tribe scattered over different villages in the Longleng district of Nagaland. Longleng is a new district which was created by carving out the northern portions of the erstwhile Tuensang district. It was inaugurated in January 2004. Milada Ganguli wrote while visiting the Phom villages, "With no other Naga tribe did I experience such a ceremonial welcome and on the other hand such a cold send-off as with the Phoms."³⁹ The district is now administered by a Deputy Commissioner with the help of a host of other officers. With a view to governing it more conveniently the district has been divided into five administrative units, namely Tamlu, the sub-divisional headquarters, which is looked after by an Additional Deputy Commissioner, and Yongnyah, Sakshi, Kongshong and Yachem the four other administrative headquarters headed by one Extra Assistant Commissioner each.⁴⁰ Longleng, the administrative headquarters, is an important centre of commerce and education for the people of the district. Longleng town is situated at a site full of hills, ridges and narrow but enchanting valleys. It is situated in the middle of three Phom villages, viz. Bhumnyu, Hukpang and Orangkong. There are thirty-seven government recognised Phom villages⁴¹ under the Longleng district, namely Alayung, Amosen, Auching, Aboiche, Bura Namsang, Chingong, Dungkhao, Hongnyu, Hukpang, Kangching, Ladaigarh, Lingtak, Bhumnyu, Mongtikang, Namhaching, Netnyuching, Ngetchungching, Nian, Noksosang, Orangkong, Oushok, Pongching, Pongo, Sakchi, Shamnyuching, Shetap, Tamlu, Tangha, Yachem, Yangching, Yaong (Yimchan),

Yimchong, Yongam, Yonglok, Yongphang, Yongshei and Yongnyah.⁴² According to 2011 census Longleng district had a total population numbering 50484 souls.⁴³

A considerable number of people belonging to other Naga tribes also live in the Longleng district. The Konyaks live in a separate *khel* of Tamlu village and the Aos, among other notable tribes, are engaged in government service and also in business sectors. Ladaigarh, a village on the Assam-Nagaland border, is the only village of the district which has the smallest number of scheduled tribe population.⁴⁴ In recent years the village has become an issue of border dispute between Assam and Nagaland. Besides, the Naga people, a small number of non-Naga people from different parts of India as well as from Nepal are residing in this district. Similarly, a few thousand Phom people are currently residing outside the district, in places like Anaki, Tuensang, Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Dimapur, Naginimora, etc.⁴⁵ Except in Anaki village⁴⁶, these people are engaged either in government service or in business. The tribe has been recognised as one of the backward tribes⁴⁷ of Nagaland and enlisted as a scheduled tribe.⁴⁸

Migration

No written record is found as to how and from where the Phoms came to this mountainous terrain. However, there are some legends and oral histories which tell about their origin and migration. Generally, the Phom tribe is divided into two groups, each claiming different legends of their origin and direction of migration.

The first group believes that their ancestors came from a place in the east called Pongngaihong (an unknown place on the Myanmar side). They migrated from Pongngaihong to Apaihong and then to Yingnyushang Mountain.⁴⁹ While reaching Yingnyushang Mountain they crossed the Phomchi river in the Chang area to the south and the south-west of Yingnyushang.⁵⁰ Some linguistic and other evidences help us to believe in their migration from the east to Yingnyushang many generations ago. There are some linguistic similarities between the Phoms and the people of Myanmar. For instance, both the groups call the tiger as *shahnyu* and the bear as *sheptao*. The Phom males had their haircutting style the same as the Burmese while the women had common tattooing custom.⁵¹ At one point of time the ancestors of the Phoms were believed to have lived as a well settled community

at Mount Yingnyushang but afterwards they spread all over the present district and even beyond that.⁵² A popular folk tale⁵³, believed and accepted by the Phoms, tells us about the destruction of Yingnyuching and their migration to the present areas. Be that as it may, groups of families migrated and established new colonies which matured into full-fledged villages in the long run. In this way waves of migration continued till the uninhabited lands were available for resettlement. With the formation of new colony or village a close relationship was maintained with the parent village. New colonies or villages presented gifts to the parent villages from time to time. But, in course of time this proximity of relationship lapsed and the gap widened. The people of the new colonies or villages developed a dialect of their own. Yet, they never forgot the tales of their original homeland. A.E. Shuttleworth, S.D.O. Mokokchung, noted in his tour diary in 1895:

“Three years ago one *morung* left this village (Bura Namsang) and built a small village at about 5 miles away. This small village still considers itself a *khel* of this village and pays and supplies rice when required within village. There are 20 houses in the new village.”⁵⁴

A group of Phoms from Pongching and another group from the Chang tribe mingled together and founded the Mongtikang village presumably in the last part of the nineteenth century. The people of the village, therefore, can speak both the Chang and the Phom dialects.⁵⁵ The Konyaks of the Chaklangshu-Mopong group and the Longching group (Upper Konyak) believe that their ancestors migrated from Yingnyushang crossing the Yangmun river hundreds of years ago.⁵⁶ Even some families migrated to the Ao areas.⁵⁷ William C. Smith wrote that there was a village called ‘Mirinokpo’ or ‘Assiringia’ in the Ao area, the inhabitants of which had come from the Phom village of ‘Urang Kong’ (Orangkong) across the Dikhu, and settled down in the Ao territory many years ago. They largely adopted Ao customs, and most of them spoke the Ao language.⁵⁸ About the migration of the Konyak of Tamlu, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf wrote in about 1936-37:

“Two different languages are spoken in this village; two of the three *morung* speak a language particular to Tamlu, while the people of the third *morung*, whose ancestors immigrated

from Tanhai only a few generations ago, speak quite a different language. There was difficulty at first, the people told us, but now the villagers have learnt to understand each other."⁵⁹

There is still another group among the Phoms who traces the story of their origin to Longtrok (six stones), near Chungliyimti village, a place where the Ao tribe traces its origin.⁶⁰ Probably, this group of Phom people migrated along with the Aos from Chungliyimti village to the different places of Mokokchung district by crossing the Dikhu river. Afterwards being separated from the Aos they again migrated to the east of the Dikhu river in search of new settlements. Yachem and Yaong are the two Phom villages immediately east of the Dikhu and closely allied to the Ao tribe with whom they claim a common origin.⁶¹ However, this group does not reckon themselves as Ao since the bygone days.⁶²

It is supposed that among the various Naga tribes the Phoms and the Konyaks were the early settlers in this part of the land. The migration and settlement of these two groups of people might have taken place earlier than the advent of the Ahoms to Assam (1228 A.D.) because the founder of the Ahom kingdom Sukapha was believed to have encountered opposition of the Konyak Nagas while crossing the Patkai Mountains (1215-1228). There were about twenty-three Phom villages at the time of independence, but quite a few new villages came up since then mainly due to the overgrowth of population.

Thus, it goes without saying that the Phom people migrated through two different routes to the present areas. One group migrated from the east to Yingnyushang and then spread to this region while the other group possibly migrated from the Ao area across the Dikhu river. These two groups later merged together as a result of intermarriage and have been living together for centuries. This merging group of people is known as *Yingli Moihiyang*, or the generation of Yingli.⁶³ It can also be inferred from the above discussion that the Phom tribe has blood relations with the Konyak, the Chang and the Ao tribes.

Origin of the Word 'Phom'

Three distinct spellings, viz. Pohum, Phum and Phom are found in

the British records which were compiled at different points of time. It is very difficult to say how the word 'Phom' originated. Firstly, it appears that the word 'Phom' originated from a village name, viz. Bhumnyu. The village was formerly known as Pohum or Phum.⁶⁴ In 1909, Chingao, a government interpreter reported to the British authority at Tamlu that the two *morungs* of Wanching (Konyak village) had gone on a raid to Phum and in the process lost 18 heads and a double-barrelled gun.⁶⁵ In 1936 Chingyang (a Konyak) reported to Haimendrof:

“The Chongwe people asked us whether we should like to buy a slave. Where did you get him from? We inquired at first. He was a boy they had captured from Mongnyu – that is a Phom village behind the mountain, and he pointed to one of the mountains to the south.”⁶⁶

Secondly, it is also widely believed that the word 'Phom' is derived from the river Phomchi which is in the Chang area of Tuensang district. When interviewed, Apisangpa, a retired *Do-Bhashi* stated that long ago a group of people crossed the Phomchi river from the Chang area and settled down near the Yingnyushang mountain. Afterwards, they moved in different directions and settled down on various hillocks. As these people crossed the Phomchi river, so the Changs called them Phom. Consequently, Pongching village was called Phomching and Hukpang village as Phom village by the Changs.⁶⁷ In a report the S.D.O. Mokokchung stated in 1910 that Nake, son of Longkhang, late *Gaon-Bura* of Yongiemdi, informed him that, “Last month the Phum village of Hukpang raided Oranging taking two heads.”⁶⁸ The name of the village Phomching is found in a report recorded on 20.7.1919⁶⁹ and the same name was repeated in the subsequent reports. It was further stated in this report: “Ourangkong, a Phom village, lies between the Phom villages of Mongyu and Hukpong.”⁷⁰ Hutton, in his report of 1916, mentioned Phom as a distinct tribe⁷¹ and repeatedly used the word 'Phom' to describe the villages of Pongo, Hukpang, Pongching, Bhumnyu and Orangkong in a map showing his tours to the east of the Naga Hills in his Report of 1923.⁷²

Thirdly, it is also believed that the word 'Phom' is a corrupt form of *Phum* which means cloud in the Phom language.⁷³ The Phom areas

always remain enveloped in clouds and for this reason perhaps the people came to be called as Phom.⁷⁴

Physical Features

Typical Mongoloid features of snub nose, fair complexion skin, straight hair and brachycephalic head, etc.⁷⁵, are found among the Phoms. The people living in the lower altitude villages where the weather is comparatively hot are, however, somewhat darker in complexion. The people are, on the average, neither very tall nor very short. The men have oblique eyes of dark brown colour, thin beards and moustaches. The Census of India, 1891 reported about the people of Tamlu and Bura Namsang as follows:

“The women, who are very fair complexioned, wear a white petticoat, in some cases striped with red . . . Both sexes chew *pan* and betel, and both have their teeth artificially blackened, a process which does not tend to enhance their beauty.”⁷⁶

Steep terrains, hard work, struggle in sunny and cold weather, traditional food habit, etc., made them physically strong and healthy. Earlier, the people had their hair cut squarely round their heads. Women tattooed their legs and wore different types of beads⁷⁷ while the men tattooed their body. R.G. Woodthorpe observed:

“The men here tattoo on the chest after taking their first head. The pattern consists of four lines which spring from the navel, diverging as they ascend, and turn off into two large concentric curves over each breast, the lines broadening out to about one inch in width at the middle of the curves.”⁷⁸

Nowadays, however, the Phom people, especially the youngsters, keep their bodies clean.

Family System

The family is an important unit of the Phom village life. They practise nuclear family system which consists of the father, the mother and their children. The father is the head of the family; he is respected and feared by other family members. Properties are divided into equal

shares among the brothers, though the lion's share is generally given to the son who lives with the parents.⁷⁹ All the sons stay with their parents till they are married. After marriage they are separated from the parental family and live in the houses built by them. After marriage the daughters go and stay with their husbands. Only the sons inherit the family descent as well as the property of their fathers. A Phom scholar, B. Henshet writes, "Phoms practise patrilocal, patrilineal and monogamous family system."⁸⁰ Joint family was maintained in some Phom villages in the past. C. Amop Noklang states:

"In certain villages there were joint families, where one or more married couples lived with their parents. This system was maintained mainly for economic reasons and sometimes because of the parents' compulsion that till they die they want their children to be with them. But nowadays this practice is declining rapidly."⁸¹

There is a custom among the people of the Phom-Nagas of observing the naming ceremonies for a girl and a boy on different dates. For instance, when a child is born in a family, the naming ceremony is observed on the fifth day for a girl and on the sixth day for a boy along with feasts for villagers and friends.⁸² On the occasion of marriage, a grand feast is generally arranged from the bridegroom's family. A married couple never addresses each other by the first name but after the birth of a child they call each other by referring to the father or mother of so-and-so. The parents while writing the name of their child generally adopt the first letter of father's first name. For example, in case of a girl named A. Alin Noklang, the letter 'A' is adopted from the father and Alin is her actual name. Noklang is the name of a clan used by her as her title here. They generally write the tribe's name and in some cases the clan name as their surname. The clan system among the Phom people is an important social entity which consists of certain families and again a few clans constitute a Phom village. Every clan is known by a common name.

Language

The Phoms have as many as five distinct dialects⁸³, which differ from village to village or area to area. The dialects vary so much so that

one group does not understand the dialect of the other group. J.P. Mills wrote about the dialects spoken by the Yaong and Yachem group in the following words:

“The Yachem dialect is spoken in the transfrontier villages of Yachem and Yong. These villages contain a large admixture of Phom and Konyak blood, and like Konyaks, their inhabitants substitute l for r in words. The dialect resembles Chongli rather than Mongsen, but it has a number of words of its own, and is quite unintelligible to an Ao who does not happen to know it.”⁸⁴

From the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century the Phom people developed one dialect out of the different dialects spoken by them as their common language which is now called the Phom language. C. Amop Noklang remarks:

“Even today, except for the younger generation, most of the older people do not speak or understand any other dialect than their own. But now attempts are being made to overcome this problem. One of the major dialects, one spoken by eight villages called ‘Yongnyah Shah’ is used as the common language of the Phoms. School text books and other books of literature are published in the common language, and used in the schools and public occasions.”⁸⁵

This common language has, however, no script of its own. So the Roman script is now used in writing the Phom language. There were 17,624 Phom speaking people out of 19,423 persons in the present Longleng district according to 1971 census.⁸⁶ Most of these people can also speak the Nagamese and the Ao languages. Some of them, especially ex-army and police personnel can speak Hindi. Nagamese is used widely as a link language while conversing with other Naga tribes or non-Naga people. English is the link language of the educated class; it is also the official language of the state of Nagaland. The Phom people living near Assam-Nagaland border can speak Assamese fluently because of the close trade relations they have had with the people of the plains for centuries.

Land Ownership Pattern

All the government recognised Phom villages have lands having boundary demarcation with neighbouring villages. The villagers follow traditional system of land ownership, which slightly varies from village to village. From field study it is found that the individual, clan, community (village), *morung* and the churches possess lands. The land ownership pattern of Sakchi, Pongo, Bhumnyu, Yongam and Bura Namsang villages shows that all these villages have both individual and clan lands, whereas some villages have *morung*, church and community lands too. Major portions of lands of Longleng town are under individual ownership. Village land whether individual or collective has no written records. It may be because of the fact that the Nagas do not pay land tax and therefore, assessment of village land is not felt necessary till now. Farm or forest lands are demarcated by fence, stone, tree, etc.

Clan and village land ownership is collective while the *morung* and church lands can be termed institutional. An individual can acquire land through his own efforts or through lineage. The senior members of a clan distribute clan lands among the needy persons through mutual discussion. A daughter cannot claim a share of her father's properties according to the customary law. If a man passes away without a male issue, all his properties pass on to his brothers or uncles.⁸⁷

Agriculture

Two types of cultivations are usually practised by the Phom people, i.e. *jhum* or shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation. In *jhum* cultivation a plot of land is selected for cultivation and it is done twice and even thrice successively. After that the land is kept fallow for several years depending on the availability of new lands. The jungles excepting the big trees are cleared in winter, then these are dried and burnt. Half burnt logs and branches are kept in lines from top to bottom of the field so that loose earth cannot be washed away by rainwater. By April seeds are sown on the *jhum* fields. In a month or two, weeding is done twice or thrice. Ripened paddy is harvested in July or August. The main crops grown in the *jhum* fields are paddy, millet, maize, pumpkin, cucumber, gourds, chilli, etc.

Terrace cultivation is done by means of irrigation. Most of these lands are steeply, so all the villages do not have abundant water and

lands for terrace cultivation. In this system of cultivation, water is channelled out from nearby streams to the terrace field. The field is prepared into several plots of flat land from top to bottom and the side of each plot is raised to retain the water. All the plots are made muddy with the help of spade and also by human feet by supplying water. As soon as the field is ready, the paddy plants are transplanted in the field. It is done in June or July. The crop is harvested in October or November. Unlike *jhum* field, only paddy is grown in terrace field. The implements used in agriculture are the *dao*, axe, spade, hoe, pick, scraper, sickle, rake, winnowing fan, basket, pounding tables, etc.

Dress

The traditional dress of the Phom people varied considerably from village to village or according to their social status. The colour and design of the dress also signified their social status. The man used to wear small waist flap, i.e. loincloth at the hips and it was generally made of woody fibre, woven into coarse cloth.⁸⁸ They used a band of cane of three to four strips at the waist⁸⁹ as belt. The menfolk left their bodies usually bare but wore cane-made belts around the waists for holding *daos* at the back and loincloths at the front when they went out of home. While visiting Pongching and Hukpang R.G. Woodthorpe recorded:

“At this village and Siphang (Hukpang) the men tie up their cloths in a most picturesque manner: they are knotted over one shoulder and cover the body, leaving the arms free; they fall to within about six inches of knee, and are tied round the waist by the belt, which carries the wooden *dao*-sheath.”⁹⁰

The ordinary cloth for rough use was either white or dark blue. A man who had taken human heads in war used to wear an attractive cowrie shawl called *fanet*. An ordinary Naga was not entitled to put on the bedecked shawl because it was considered a symbol of martial achievement. A rich man used to wear a shawl called *henyu* which was red in colour with narrow white horizontal bands at regular intervals of six cms. In between the white bands there were narrow black lines.⁹¹

The boys of Bhumnyu village had their hair cut collectively in a haircutting ceremony after they had touched meat, i.e. human flesh

taken on raid. It was only after that ceremony that they were regarded as adults.⁹² They sometimes kept locks hanging down their necks.⁹³ The Phom warriors practised tattooing customs with a view to demonstrating their social status and heroism. Many warriors recorded their hunted human heads in the shape of the figures of men roughly tattooed, for each head taken, on their chests.⁹⁴ In addition to this, the men of Pongo tattooed the upper arms with the design of buffalo heads,⁹⁵ which signified valour.

The women of Pongo, Yongphang and Yangching used to wear a very narrow *petticoat* which can be called waist wrapper, some five inches deep, and above it a belt, or a series of belts, each made of separate threads made up into a bound loop at each end and fastened in front.⁹⁶ The women of Tamlu and Bura Namsang generally used to wear white glass or crystal clear ornaments. The breasts were left bare. They wore waist wrapper in some cases with red stripes. The width of this wrapper was only about 12 inches but was long enough for both ends to meet when tied together.⁹⁷ Ladies of rich families were entitled to wear a white skirt called *shaka*, although various other skirts were also in use.⁹⁸ The women of a few lower Phom villages used to wear a piece of cloth as bodice to cover their breasts.⁹⁹ The shawls and short skirts were used not always but on rare occasions. Some women of a few villages including Bhumnyu cut their hair as short as possible, but plucked out the hair from the forehead and also from both sides of the ears by rubbing ashes.¹⁰⁰

The women tattooed the legs elegantly while many of them tattooed their chins too.¹⁰¹ They tattooed legs below the thighs before marriage on the belief that they would not be able to bear child if they failed to do so.¹⁰² Tattooing was done either by gashing or pricking with needles to introduce dye. The people of Yachem had a custom of wearing boar's tusk through the pierced lobe of the ears.¹⁰³ The people of both sexes wore cotton, brass or cane rings in their ears. A drastic change came off in their attitude towards dress in the post-independence period when they came in contact with the outside world.

Woodcarving

The Phoms were experts in woodcarving art in the bygone days. Verrier Elwin wrote:

“Some of the finest woodcarving in the entire frontier area is to be found among the Wanchos, Konyaks and Phoms, tribes living close to the Burma border who until recently were engaged in constant inter-village feuds.”¹⁰⁴

This art had close connection with headhunting, the decoration of the *morungs* and the funerary images erected for warriors and other important persons.¹⁰⁵ Much attention was paid to the head while carving the human figure because the importance given to the head was usually out of all proportion to the rest of the body. The *morung* was an important woodcarving centre of a village where all young warriors slept at night. They decorated their *morungs* with various images. The posts, horizontal beams and the wide benches on which the young unmarried men used to sleep were covered with figures of tigers, monkeys, lizards, conventional human heads, deer, birds, fish, gongs, snakes, elephants, etc. The woodcarvings were painted with white, black and brick-red colours. They carved the *mithun*'s (*Bos frontalis*) head which was a symbol of wealth and the hornbill's head which was considered a symbol of beauty. Elwin observed:

“At Sakchi, a Phom village, I saw in 1954 a carving of two dogs chasing a tiger; at Pongu there was a tall warrior leading a boy by the hand – I was told that this commemorated an incident when a boy was captured and, after being led through the village, decapitated.”¹⁰⁶

They produced effigies roughly carved out of bits of wood in honour of the dead warriors and rich men. These effigies were ornamented with traditional dress and appropriate tattoo marks, and then placed in front of the tomb.¹⁰⁷ To indicate the *mithun* sacrifices, wealthy villagers set the forked posts in the ground close to the fore walls of their houses,¹⁰⁸ where they carved the figures of hornbill and *mithun*'s head. They made *shem*, or log drum hewn out of a single gigantic log, the two ends of which were decorated and carved with figures of hornbill, buffalo horn or elephant teeth. They also made another instrument called *bushong*, which was carved out of a huge log, upper side of which was made flat but hollowed inside for producing varied notes by kicking it. Both the *shem* and *bushong* were kept in *morung*. In addition to these, they made wooden utensils for cooking and dining purposes, smoking pipe, pounding table, etc.

Regarding the instruments used by the Phom woodcarvers, Milada Ganguli wrote:

“I was astonished to see how the craftsmen of this tribe managed just with a heavy *dao* and crude mallet to produce such magnificent sculptures of animals, warriors with captured heads in their hands, even whole panels with animal scenes carved in high relief.”¹⁰⁹

With the cessation of headhunting and their aversion to *morung* life, woodcarving skill among the Phoms began to decline.

Traditional Religion

Before embracing Christianity, the Phoms had their own way of life. They believed in different malevolent and benevolent powers of the Almighty, but they had neither worshipped idol nor had a place of worship. The Supreme Being is called *Kahvang* in Phom dialect; a word believed to have originated from two separate words, namely *Kah* and *Vang*. The word *Kah* is derived from *Kahdok*, which means the earth and *Vang*, derived from *Vangsho*, meaning the sky or the heaven. So, the literal meaning of *Kahvang* is “heaven and earth”.¹¹⁰

And again, the Phoms believed in two other gods, namely *Shang Kahvang* which means the celestial god and *Chong Kahvang* or *Chong Sheb* which means the terrestrial god. They believed that the natural phenomena such as rain, lightning, thunder, sunshine, etc., were the works of the *Shang Kahvang*.¹¹¹ The happenings on the earth were believed to be the grace or curse of the *Chong Kahvang*. That was why more attention was paid to the *Chong Kahvang*. Sacrifices were offered to please both the *Shang Kahvang* and the *Chong Kahvang*. Besides these gods, they also believed in other deities like god of home, god of paddy field, god of forest, god of river, etc.”¹¹²

They believed that the heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon were the symbols of god and therefore, they took vows in the event of disputes referring to these heavenly bodies as their witnesses.¹¹³ The Phom people believed in life hereafter. They believed that the souls of the deceased go to a place called *Yimching* where all souls meet one another.¹¹⁴ After an interval, the souls would be transferred to *Chongching* and again after a long break the souls are finally

transferred to *Shiching* where the souls melt away with the dew and vanish.¹¹⁵

The Phom people believed in evil spirit which they thought could bring disaster to a family or village in the form of epidemic or other misfortunes. While visiting some Phom villages in 1875-6, R.G. Woodthorpe found bunches of leaves being tied to the door-posts which he believed was done to prevent evil spirit accompanying a stranger from entering a house.¹¹⁶

The Priest

Divine rites were performed in the traditional Phom society by the priests, but these practices no longer exist now. The duties of the *thibu* (medicine-man) and the priest overlapped at times in some cases. Divine rituals were performed by means of slicing ginger, making fire by pressing rope, slicing twigs or shrubs or broom, slicing betel or plantain leaf, looking at the intestine of pig or fowl, etc. A priest could tell a person the kind of sacrifice to be offered to God or the spirits through such rites. They were to offer sacrifices like egg, fowl, dog, goat, pig, *mithun* etc., for remedy from natural distresses and diseases. For the inauguration of *morung* human sacrifice was usually recommended.¹¹⁷ Looking at the sun and the moon and observing other formalities, they used to make prediction about rain, crops, festival, natural calamities, conjugal life, etc.¹¹⁸

Healing of Diseases

Before coming in contact with modern medical sciences, the *thibu* played the role of a physician for the treatment of diseases in the traditional methods. The Phom people used to consult the *thibu* regarding their physical, moral and material problems. He followed various methods to cure the disease or alleviate other worries. For example, after studying the nature of ailment the *thibu* would suggest the kith and kin of the sufferer to make sacrifice of certain animals or birds to appease the spirit of *Shang Kahvang* who had allegedly withheld his soul.¹¹⁹ When the sacrifice was made he would appeal to the evil spirit to set free the soul of the sick man in lieu of the sacrifice.¹²⁰ In some cases while performing his duty the *thibu* himself lay on a bed keeping a helper, or the *Yiupa* nearby. He then slowly started shaking his whole body and raised his hands indicating his

journey to *Yimching*. There he would consult the departed souls about the sufferings of their sons or daughters who are alive. After that he would come down and disclose the message to the *Yiupa* who then would pass on the same to the sick man's family members. The *thibu* would normally inform that the parents of the sick man had committed wrongs to such and such persons when they were alive and their souls now desire that the wrong committed be rectified.¹²¹ The people offered him *laya* (brass plate), leg of a pig, rice, etc., for his service. A sick man or a child was given indigenous medicine prepared by the *thibu*. A *thibu* could be either a man or a woman. It was believed that he had the spirits of tiger, eagle, cat, etc., and a powerful *thibu* had more number of spirits in him.¹²² The popularity and status of the *thibu* began to wane with the spread of modern medical sciences and more particularly with the arrival of Christianity.

Taboo

The Phom people were highly superstitious in nature and practised taboos before embracing Christianity. Taboo is called *genna* in Nagamese, which means forbidden from doing certain works.¹²³ It was observed in the form of ceremony by the individuals, groups or the whole village. Some of the regular *gennas* had connection with agriculture, which was their chief means of support from time immemorial, whereas some other *gennas* were observed only at times. During community taboo days the village gate was closed and every member of the village spent the day at home without doing any manual work.¹²⁴ A six-day taboo was observed by a village when there was an occurrence of an accidental or unnatural death like falling from tree, suicide, drowning, killed by animals, etc. Moreover, one day as a religious day, a day for *Pangmo* festival and eight days for *Monyu* festival were observed by the villagers at different times in a year. When a child was born in a family, six days rest for father and five days rest for mother was observed.¹²⁵

In addition to the above, some other taboos were: women were not allowed to touch or handle the war or hunting weapons; a man would not sleep with a woman before going to war, the husband of a pregnant wife would not kill any animal and the pregnant women or children would not eat cross-bred fruits. In Phom society exchanging drink or other things with the members of an enemy village, cutting hair in the evening and grabbing the property of a person who died in

an accident were considered highly immoral.¹²⁶ The people also strictly followed the food taboo for certain reasons. Villagers would not take food for a fixed period of time in the house of a person who got injured accidentally or committed suicide. Moreover, it was considered improper to take food in the houses of a murderer's clan for a definite period of time. Some people even did not take a particular fish or animal's meat, and except the owner other people would not take the meat of the animal killed by a tiger. Needless to say that all these taboos were observed either due to ignorance or the belief that similar occurrence might take place in their own family or that they might fall sick or misfortunes might occur in case they violated the taboos. Many of these superstitious beliefs and practices have faded away as a result of the spread of Christianity and modern education although a few are still practised.

Funeral Ceremony

The traditional funeral rituals of a rich man, a warrior and a commoner varied in the Phom society. The corpse wrapped up inside mats was placed about three metres above the ground either in the branches of banyan trees or on platform inside small house within the village precincts, close to the dwelling.¹²⁷ In order to obviate any unpleasant odour arising from the corpse, fire was lit in front of the corpse and a plentiful supply of smoke was produced by burning chaff, paddy-straw, etc., which mouldered slowly.¹²⁸ The corpse, after being smoked for 10 to 20 days, was put in a wooden coffin and placed in the forks of big trees just outside the village gate. But in case of a distinguished man the body was allowed to rot thoroughly, then the head was wrenched off and placed in an earthen pot which was deposited at the foot of the tree in which the coffin was placed.¹²⁹

They used to make wooden effigies for their dead warriors and rich men. These effigies were placed in front of the tombs but in case of the death of a famous warrior, a row of small figures was made besides his own more imposing image to suggest the number of heads he had cut during his life time.¹³⁰ In some cases, the images were not made of wood, but these were of bamboo frames, covered with cloth, decorated with bead and other ornaments, and placed in an open thatched hut.¹³¹ They made wooden or bamboo images probably to please and flatter the ghost or there were some associations between the figures and the soul. As soon as the rites were performed the

images could be abandoned there or bundled together and placed beneath a tree.¹³² Verrier Elwin mentioned about the prevalence of another practice in the following words:

“In the Phom country immense bamboo horns, fifty feet or more in length, are erected on a hillside in honour of a dead warrior who had taken many heads.”¹³³

The erections were made probably with the intention to attract the eye from long distance.

In case of the death of a man, the animals owned by him were killed to arrange a feast and one of the relatives was asked to narrate all the courageous deeds, achievements, etc. of the deceased.¹³⁴ Following the death of a warrior or a rich man log drum was beaten to convey the message to far-flung areas; brass plates, i.e. *laya*, *langnyu*, *langha*, *langla* and also the *mithun*'s horns were beaten.¹³⁵ Villagers abstained from work for a few days. The people of Yongnyah, Tangha and Tamlu buried the hunting dogs by constructing sheds over their graves and offering meat, etc., on the belief that if they did not do so the surviving and the other dogs in future would not hunt well.¹³⁶ With the acceptance of Christianity, the Phom people have started burying the dead bodies in the graveyard according to the Christian faith. They now erect memory stone in memory of the near and dear ones.

Feast of Merit

In the olden days a rich man had to give ‘feast of merit’ to the villagers. The wealth of a person was estimated by the quantity of paddy, the number of *mithuns* and the brass plates he had possessed. When a person produced surplus paddy he used to give a grand feast to his fellow villagers because it was believed that if a person accumulated more wealth without hosting the feast of merit, he might suffer from a dreaded disease known as *Nukdin Nyiamdin* or die untimely or misfortunes might descend on the family.¹³⁷ The writings of Verrier Elwin about the Nagas in general are also valid for the Phoms. He wrote,

“The Feasts bring the donor honour both now and after death and he can henceforth wear special clothes and ornaments, and decorate his house in a special way.”¹³⁸

While hosting a feast, the donor killed a *mithun* or, failing that, killed other animals and the heads of the slaughtered animals were kept hanging outside the front wall of the house. On such occasions *mithuns* were usually killed by fastening them at fork posts which were generally kept standing outside the houses in the villages. The posts were decorated with the carved figures of sacrificed animals' heads. While visiting Kamahu (Yongshei) R.G. Woodthorpe observed,

“Many of the verandahs contain a number of Y-shaped posts, carved with human figures, *methna* heads: these signify that the occupant of the house has been the giver of a big feast.”¹³⁹

He was entitled to wear a shawl called rich man's shawl, different kinds of helmets, etc., and anyone could recognise him by looking at his apparels. The age-old feast of merit no longer exists in the Phom Naga society as this custom has faded away under the impact of Christianity.

Slavery and its Abolition

Slavery, a social evil, was prevalent in the Phom society till the middle of the twentieth century. A person of either sex could be a slave. The slaves of the Phom areas can be classified into two categories. The condition of slaves of first category was horrible and they were mostly used for sacrifice. On the other hand the status of the second category of slaves was better than the former but they were usually engaged in manual works or otherwise well treated by their lords. Slaves were purchased by the rich people in exchange of brass discs (traditional coins), animals, etc., in order to enhance their social status. It was up to the lords whether their grown-up slaves would enter into conjugal lives or not.

There were various causes of the existence of slavery in Phom society. Firstly, being unable to bring up the children or orphans due to acute financial difficulty or failure to repay the debt, forced some guardians to sell their children or orphans to rich men.¹⁴⁰

Secondly, two belligerent villages could arrive at an agreement by delivering slaves.¹⁴¹ Here the slaves were used to settle the village disputes. If two villages, involved in a prolonged head hunting war, desired to make peace, the village which lost more heads would formally demand one or more slaves from the other village in order

to compensate the more heads they lost. Thus, the village which collected more heads would hand over a slave or slaves who were usually decapitated in triumph by the other village.

Thirdly, war prisoners were taken as slaves who were mostly either slaughtered as war trophies or sacrificed for other ritual purposes. Instances of purchasing slaves and beheading them to propitiate the gods were not uncommon among them. People preferred to sacrifice human beings for the inauguration of *morungs* and the sacrificed person was generally a slave.¹⁴²

Thus, the slaves of the Phom areas were born as if with their lucks either for sacrifice or throw themselves on the mercy of their lords. However, this obnoxious practice of slavery gradually came to an end from the Phom region with the introduction of British administration, spread of Christianity and the cessation of head hunting. Steps were taken by the administration to eliminate the practice of slavery and human sacrifice, and punished those who were associated with this cruel practice secretly.¹⁴³

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Singh, R.D.N. and Zeliang, T. (ed), *Development Profile of Animal Husbandry in Nagaland*, p.19.
2. *Primary Census Abstract – Nagaland 2011*, Directorate of Census Operations in Nagaland, Kohima.
3. *Basic Facts 1999, Nagaland*, p.1.
4. Saleh, Swabera Islam, *Nagaland's Economy in Transition Since, 1964*, p.2.
5. The eleven districts of Nagaland are Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Mon, Phek, Wokha, Zunheboto, Dimapur, Kiphire, Longleng and Peren.
6. *Census of India 1991, District Census Handbook, Tuensang*, p. 2. The Naga tribes of Nagaland are the Angami, the Ao, the Chakhesang, the Chang, the Chirri, the Khiemnungan, the Konyak, the Lotha, the Makware, the Phom, the Rengma, the Sangtam, the Sema, the Tikhir, the Yimchungre, the Zeliang and the Pochury.
7. Ao, A. Lanunungang, *Rural Development in Nagaland*, p. 50.
8. *Basic Facts 2000, Nagaland*, p. 3.
9. Barch, H. (ed.), *Nagaland District Gazetteers, Kohima District*, pp. 52-53.
10. Allen, B.C.; Gait, E.A.; Allen, C.G.H. and Howard, H.F. (ed.), *Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India*, p. 585.
11. Horam, M., *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas (the Tangkhul Nagas)*, p. 21.
12. Kumar, B. B., *An Introduction to the Naga Tribes*, p. 1.
13. Devi, Lakshmi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations: A Political Study*, p. 19.

14. Horam, M., *Naga Polity*, pp. 37-40.
 15. The figures were worked out from records available in the Office of the Directorate of Soil and Water Conservation, Government of Nagaland, Kohima.
 16. *Census of India 2011*, Directorate of Census Operations in Nagaland, Kohima.
 17. Bareh, H., *Encyclopaedia of North-East India*, Vol. VI, *Nagaland*, p. 214.
 18. Noklang, C. Amop, *Phom Day: A Basis for Peace in Nagaland*, p. 11.
 19. The information was collected from the Directorate of Soil and Water Conservation, *op. cit.*
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. *Basic Facts 2002, Nagaland*, p. 4.
 22. Hutton, J., *Report on Naga Hills*, pp. 14-15.
 23. Henshet, B., *The Phom-Naga Indigenous Religion: A Socio-Philosophical Perspective*, p. 11.
 24. Imnayongdang, *Levels of Rural Development in Nagaland: A Spatial Analysis*, p. 23.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 28. Ghosh, B. B. (ed.), *Nagaland District Gazetteers, Tuensang District*, p. 12.
 29. *Souvenir 1980-2005, Commemorating 25 Years of Village Development Boards*, p. 102; Allen, B.C., Gait, E.A., Allen, C.G.H. & Howard, H.F. (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 469.
- Tamlu is the only subdivision of the Longleng district headed by an ADC (Civil).
30. Ghosh, B.B. (ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
 31. *Ibid*, p. 5.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. Michell, John F., *The North East Frontier of India*, pp. 223-224.
 34. Bareh, H.M., *Op. cit.*, p. 218.
 35. Ghosh, B. B. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.
 36. *Ibid*, p. 6.
 37. Interview held with T. Ponglong Phom (52), Chairman of Subdivisional Chamber of Commerce Unit, Longleng, at Longleng on 12-10-2003.
 38. *Nagaland Forest Statistical Book, 1979*.
 39. Ganguli, Milada, *A Pilgrimage to the Nagas*, p. 212. Milada Ganguli, a native of Czechoslovakia was married to a member of the family of the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore.
 40. *Basic Facts 2004, Nagaland*, pp. 15-16.
 41. According to the Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act, 1978, village means and includes an area recognised as a village as such by the Government of Nagaland. An area, designated as a village under this Act, shall fulfil the following conditions, namely:

- (a) The land in the area belong to the population of that area or given to them by the Government of Nagaland, if the land in question is a Government land or is given to them by the lawful owner of the land, and
- (b) The village is established according to the usage and customary practice of the population of the area. 'The Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act, 1978', *Nagaland Gazette*, 31 March, 1979, Part-V, p. 45. Every government recognised village has a Village Council and a Village Development Board.
42. This information was collected from the DC Office, Longleng in 2012. Village names have been mentioned here in accordance with the spellings recorded in the *Census of India 2011*. Some of these Phom villages were formerly known by other names. For instance, Bura Namsang was known as Namsang Chingchang or Resong or Namsang, Hukpang as Siphang, Ladaigarh as Borhola, Orangkong as Wankhong or Rangkong, Pongching as Phomching, Shitap as Moichangching, Yaong as Chihu, Yongam as Shemmong, Yongphang as Chamba, Yongshei as Kamahu. Mongnyu is presently known as Bhumnyu.
43. *Primary Census Abstract – Nagaland 2011, Op. cit.*. Although Longleng was upgraded to a district in January 2004, for convenience of the study the name of the Longleng district has been used now and then by referring to the years prior to 2004 instead of mentioning as Longleng subdivision.
44. *Census of India 1991, Op. cit.*, pp. 35 and 155.
45. Each of the places mentioned above has a Phom Baptist Church, *Phom Baptist Christian Association, Golden Jubilee, 1953-2003, Bushah Laitap (History Book)*, p. 12.
46. The village Anaki is under Mokokchung district and one of its *khels* (subdivision) is dominated by the Aos and another by the Phoms.
47. Government Notification No. OM No. AR/8/9/79 (PT-II), dated 16-8-1979, collected from the Additional Deputy Commissioner's Office, Longleng.
48. 'The Constitution (Nagaland) Scheduled Tribes Order 1970', in Atsongchanger, Mar (compiled), *The Historical Memoranda of the Nagas and Their Neighbours*, p. 120.
49. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 9.
50. Interview held with Apisangpa (70), retired *Do-Bhashi*, at Bahok Colony, Longleng on 20-05-2004.
51. *Phom Day, Golden Jubilee, 1952-2002, 5-6 June, 2002, Bushah Laitap (History Book)*, p. 11.
52. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 10.
53. The folk tale runs as follows: Once upon a time, there was a well organised village named Yingnyuching. After some time, the village started missing children one after another. The villagers had become anxious and held a meeting to trace out the miracle. The youth of each *morung* started to keep a close watch on the happenings in the village. Once by chance a youth on duty saw an animal coming towards him and he at once cut the head of the

- animal with his *dao* (a large multipurpose chopping knife). The animal was unknown to the villagers and the meat of the animal was distributed among all the villagers but a widow was accidentally left out. That very night the earth of the village started cracking and heavy erosion followed. In panic the villagers began to run in different directions but the abode of the widow remained intact which is presently called Yingnyushang. *Phom Day, Golden Jubilee, 1952-2002, Op. cit.*, p. 12.
54. Diary of A. E. Shuttle Worth for the month of October 1895, Secret Department, file no. 439.
 55. Interview held with Apisangpa (70), *Op. cit.*
 56. Sardeshpande, S.C., *The Patkoi Nagas*, pp. 112-119; Konyak, A. Yanang, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 2.
 57. Alemchiba, M., *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, p. 21.
 58. Smith, William C., *The Ao-Naga Tribe of Assam*, pp. 52-53.
 59. Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph von, *Return to the Naked Nagas*, pp. 44-45.
 60. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 10. The place Longtrok is situated near Chungliyimi village and occupied by the Sangtam tribe of Tuensang district.
 61. 'Slavery in the Unadministered Area between Assam and Burma', 1916, General Department, file no. 324.
 62. Mills, J.P., *The Ao Nagas*, p. 6.
 63. *Phom Baptist Christian Association, Golden Jubilee, 1953-2003, Op. cit.*, p. 11.
 64. 'Note on including the Trans-Dikhu tribes within an area of Political Control', 1889-90, Political Department, file no. 14; Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 8.
 65. 'Angpan and Totang VS Phum', 11.6.09, General Department, file no. 269.
 66. Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph von, *Op. cit.*, p. 107. The Konyaks called the village Phum or Phom probably because the village was formerly surrounded by banyan trees which are called *Bham* in the Phom language.
 67. Interview held with Apisangpa (70), *op. cit.* Apisangpa also stated that sometime after the establishment of Longleng administrative centre, the elders of the Phomching renounced the name given by the Changs and renamed the village as Pongching. *Pong* in Pongching dialect is man and *ching* means village, which can be stated as man's village.
 68. 'Raid by the Phum village of Hukpang against Orangkhung', 1910, General Department, file no. 290.
 69. 'Raid on Ourangkong', 20.7.1919, General Department, file no. 333.
 70. *Ibid.*
 71. 'Slavery in the Unadministered Area between Assam and Burma', 1916, *op. cit.*
 72. Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, M.A.S.B., Plate 16.
 73. Rahman, Abdur, 'The Place of Female in Phom Society', paper presented in a Seminar entitled 'Socio-Educational Status of Phom Community', held at Yingli College, Longleng on July 9-10, 1997. The Phom people write the word '*Bhum*' to mean cloud but pronounce it as '*Phum*'.
 74. Bareh, H.M., *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

75. Ghosh, B.B. (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 34.
76. Davis, A.W., *Census of India, 1891*, Assam, Vol. I, quoted in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 398.
77. Hutton, J.H., *The Angami Nagas*, p. 383. This custom was popular more among the non-Christian people which continued till about the third quarter of the last century.
78. Woodthorpe, R.G., '*General Report of the Topographical Surveys, 1875-76*' quoted in Verrier Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 385.
79. Bareh, H.M., *Op. cit.*, p. 216.
80. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
81. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*, p. 29.
82. Bareh, H.M., *Op. cit.*, p. 217.
83. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.
84. Mills, J.P., *Op. cit.*, p. 333. There are some groups of villages among the Aos, whose dialects and pronunciation differ. Among the distinct dialects Chongli and Mongsen are remarkable.
85. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*
86. *Census 1971, District Census Handbook, Tuensang District*, pp. 26. and 74.
87. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
88. Woodthorpe, R.G., *Op. cit.*, p. 382; Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 17.
89. Ghosh, B.B., *History of Nagaland*, p. 212.
90. Woodthorpe, R.G., *Op. cit.*, pp. 390-391.
91. Ao, M. Alemchiba, *The Arts and Crafts of Nagaland*, p. 44.
92. Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 9.
93. Hutton, J.H., *Op. cit.*, pp. 382-383.
94. Davis, A.W., *Op. cit.*, p. 398.
95. Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 10.
96. *Ibid*, p. 21.
97. Davis, A.W., *Op. cit.*, p. 398.
98. Ao, M. Alemchiba, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.
99. Interview held with L. Shaupang Phom (78), retired government employee, at Longleng on 01-12-2003.
100. Hutton, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 9.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
102. Interview held with Anyak Phom (79), retired *Do-Bhashi*, at Longleng on 11-04-2001.
103. Mills, J.P., *Op. cit.*, p. 47. The custom was probably in vogue in a few villages only.
104. Elwin, Verrier, *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India*, p. 135.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
108. Ganguli, Milada, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
109. *Ibid*, p. 216.

110. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 29.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
114. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*, p. 36.
115. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 37.
116. Woodthorpe, R. G., *Op. cit.*, p. 382.
117. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 46.
118. Interview held with Kongyan Phom (40), Medical Officer, at Longleng on 05-02-2003.
119. Noklang, C. Amop, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36; Interview held with Kongyan Phom (40), *op. cit.*
120. *Ibid.*
121. Interview held with Anyak Phom (79), *op. cit.* The interviewee informed that he himself attended many such functions.
122. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 50.
123. Hutton, J. H., *Op. cit.*, p. 3.
124. Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 41.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 42. The tribe has four major festivals including *Monyu* which is celebrated in April and the *Pangmo* that falls in November.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
127. Ganguli, Milada, *Op. cit.*, p. 214. Woodthorpe, R.G., *Op. cit.*, p. 384. Woodthorpe stated about the practice referring to the 'Yajim' (Yachem) and 'Chihu' (Yaong) villages.
128. *Ibid.*, pp. 384-385.
129. Davis, A.W., *Op. cit.*, pp. 399-400. Davis wrote about the funeral practice of Tamlu and 'Resong' (Bura Namsang) villages.
130. Elwin, Verrier, *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India*, p. 142.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
132. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
134. Bareh, H.M., *op. cit.*, p. 217.
135. Interview held with Y.B. Angam Phom (47), ex-President of PPC and public leader, at Longleng on 10-04-2003.
136. Hutton, J., *op. cit.*, p. 7.
137. Henshet, B., *op. cit.*, p. 40.
138. Elwin, Verrier, *Nagaland*, p. 10.
139. Woodthorpe, R.G., *op. cit.*
140. 'Slavery in the Unadministered Area between Assam and Burma', 1916, *Op. cit.*
141. 'Angpan and Totang VS Phum', *op. cit.*; Foot note by J.H.H. in J.P. Mills' *The Ao Nagas*, p. 279.
142. Noklang, C. Amop, *Op. cit.*, p. 40; Henshet, B., *Op. cit.*, p. 46.
143. Interview held with L. Shaupang Phom (78), *op. cit.*