

# **TRADE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NAGA AND AHOM**



**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY TO NAGALAND UNIVERSITY**

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**I dedicate this work to Almighty God**

**My Father Shoshumo Enie and Mother Amhono Enie**

**My wife Dr Hannah Enie and Son Mhajamo Enie**

**My pillars of strength**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Shri. Lichumo Enie (PhD/433/2011) do hereby declare that the thesis entitled '*Trade Relationship Between Naga and Ahom*' submitted by me under the guidance and research supervision of Professor N.Venuh, Department of History & Archaeology, Nagaland University is original and independent research work. I also declare that, it has not been submitted in any part or in full to this University or institution for the Award of any degree part or in full to this University or institution for the award of any degree.

The thesis is being submitted to Nagaland University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History and Archaeology.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis '*Trade Relationship Between Naga and Ahom*' bearing Regd. No. 433/2011 has been prepared by Lichumo Enie under my supervision. I certify that Lichumo Enie has fulfilled all norms required under the PhD regulations of Nagaland University for the submission of thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of History & Archaeology. The thesis is original work based on his own research and analysis of materials.

To the best of my knowledge this work has not formed part of any such work for award of any research Degree of any other University or Research Institute.

Prof. N.Venuh

Supervisor

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Nagaland is situated on the far eastern edge of North East India with an area of 19,527 sq.km bordering Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Myanmar on the east, Manipur on the south and Assam on the north and west. Nagaland lies approximately between 25° 6' and 27° 4' latitude north of equator and between the longitudinal lines of 93° 20'E and 95 °15' E. The Naga Hill rise from Brahmaputra valley in Assam to about 2000 feet and rise further to the southeast, as high as 6000 feet. The Naga Hills merge with the Patkai range in Myanmar. Rivers such as the Doyang and Dikhu to the North, the Barak river in the southeast and Chindwin river of Myanmar in the Southwest, dissect the entire state. Its mountainous terrain also has a profound effect on the state climate. The monsoon season sees heavy rains and temperature slightly cooler. The average rainfall ranges from 200 to 280 cm (Venuh 2005:1)

Nagaland is inhabited by 14 major tribes along with other sub tribes. Each tribe is distinct in character from the other in terms of customs, language and dress. The Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race speaking the dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family (Tibeto-Burman) of languages. The major tribes that constitute the people of Nagaland are the Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungam, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchunger, Zeliang, and Pochury. These tribes inhabit the eleven Districts in Nagaland, namely, Kohima, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Phek, Tuensang, Mon, Kiphiri, Peren and Longleng.



In the pre-colonial days the Naga tribes occupied its own specific territory and each tribe was grouped into a number of villages and each village occupied a well marked area (Venuh, 2005: 5). The Naga villages were self-governing units and ruled by hereditary or elected chiefs. The Nagas are freedom-loving and war like people. This also brought them into conflict with Ahom power and often became constant (Alemchiba 1970: 36). In the earlier stage communication and trade relation between the Naga villages were minimal as a result each village grew in isolation. Agriculture was the main economy of the Nagas. The Nagas were self sufficient people living within its own demarcated locality as a community. There were many things the Nagas produced from their land but at times they were in need of some raw materials which were not available or grown in the hill terrain. They went down to the valley to get the raw materials and other resources. This need gradually resulted in the contact between the Nagas and the Ahoms.

The Nagas came in contact with the Ahoms as they are their immediate neighbor. Historical records like the Buranjis give us an insight about the relationship between the Nagas and Ahom. The Ahom Kings who ruled in the Brahmaputra valley for almost six hundred years seems to have been endowed with a very strong sense of history and so they were particular in getting the important happenings during their reigns recorded by official scribes. These official records called the *Buranji* provide us very useful information about various aspects of Ahoms (Sharma 2006: 3). According to the *Buranji* there was trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms as early as the thirteenth century.

The nature of trade involved the ownership of goods and services either through exchange of goods or for money. Trade is the activity or process of buying, selling or exchanging goods or services. Throughout the human history there are records of trade taking place

everywhere. It originated from the moment humans began communicating with each other for their needs. According to Sharma the concept of an integrated economic history that accepts the view that people “engage in producing or procuring goods and services in order to support themselves; however, the frame work within which they engage in such activities is provided by the society and policy they live in” (2006: 7).

The trade history between the Nagas and Ahoms started very early but the two communities took time to reach a comfortable level. Initially there was no trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom as the two communities were separated by the different geographical locations. The various features of the two communities like habits, cultures, traditions and customs also did not encourage exploring each other. There was no effort on each other’s part to develop any friendly relation between them. However the regular contacts that existed between the Naga hills and the rest of the Assam introduced new need into the Naga life and to some extend modified the daily round. Further, the introduction of a monetary medium of exchange, which has been going on for a century, has tended to alter the indigenous standards of wealth and to shift to some extend the enjoyment of wealth from those with plenty of land and cattle to those in receipt of wages earnings in cash (Joshi 2001:54). The contacts developed into new ways of progressive thinking, habits and relationship among the Nagas and Ahom.

By the time contacts on trade line between the Nagas and Ahom began, Ahom kingdom was already prosperous. The soundness of the economic position of the country may be further gleaned from the fact that the Ahom Kings could pay heavy tributes to the Mughals, Burmese and the British. This would not have been possible if the resources of the country were meager (Gait 2008: 277). Basu’s works contains a chapter on the economy of the Ahom Kingdom where he discusses various important economic aspects of the Ahom state like agriculture and the

management of land, non-agricultural occupations of the people, and the existing trade and commerce of the time. In the chapter succeeding the one on economy Basu describes the people, their religion and the status of education, all under the general heading “Society”. From the economic information provided by Basu it is quite possible to construct an account of the kind of surpluses generated in the Ahom state and the nature of distribution of that surplus or in a more simple way who got what share of the resources and production of the state (Sharma 2006: 9).

In an entirely different way some of the Naga tribes had friendly relations with the Ahom rulers. This was mainly due to the far sightedness of King Pratap Singha (1603-41 A.D) (Ramunny 1983: 6). Naga chiefs were allotted plots of revenue free lands. This was done for the benefits of the Naga tribes of the area (Mackenzie 2004: 6). The revenue free lands allotted to the Nagas were called Khats. It was a centre where the Nagas from one end and the Ahoms from the other come and meet to do business transactions based on barter system. The khats were like a demarcation for the Nagas where they can set their foot on Ahom soil without any restriction. It was also a way of protecting themselves from the Nagas who would often come down to raid the plains. The Khats apart from serving as a market place consisted of a number of allotted lands for farming and fisheries for the Naga tribes who had a friendly relation with the Ahoms also known as Bori or the submissive Nagas. Some of the Naga tribes like Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Phom enjoyed such privileges. They were distinguished from the non-submissive Nagas or the Abori. The Bori Nagas carried out trade relationships with the Ahoms. There were care takers for the khats, fishery ponds and farms so that the Nagas will not venture beyond the khats for food nor cause trouble in the neighbouring village when they come down from the hills for trade.

In the initial stage there was very little trade contact between the hill and the plain people. The Nagas took down to the market commodities like cotton, petal nuts, chilies, ginger,

ivory, palm-leaf mats, gourds and beetle leaves, pan leaves, fresh and dried vegetables, agricultural products, salt, Naga daos, spears and different medicinal herbs to the plains and exchange with commodities like salt, dried fish, other food stuffs, medicines, beads, cowries, brass wire and metal sheets, cotton and silk cloths etc from the Ahoms. Salt appears to have been the most important commodity and was traded in a circular way. In the Naga hills, tribes like the Konyaks traded salt from their salt wells to the plains and this salt was then brought back into the hills by the Aos and Lothas who then sold it to other neighbouring Nagas. The Nagas continued their trade relation with the Ahoms and to a certain level even between the different Naga tribes.

The frequent clashes between the Ahoms and the Nagas is indicative of the fact that the Ahoms were very much interested in keeping their rights over the land around the salt mines situated in the interior of the Naga Hill. There were as many as twenty one salt mines. In some of the wells the Ahoms obtained a joint right for a fixed numbers of hours and the Nagas for an equal period. The salt mines were mostly in the Naga territory and the Ahoms needed them. This was another reason for the continued hostility between the Ahom rulers and the Nagas in the earlier part of the Ahom and Naga contact. Thus the later history of the Ahoms shows a sort of mixed relation with the Nagas, but the relations were mostly confined to the Nagas occupying the low hills south of Sibsagar and the Lakhimpur districts (Alemchiba 1970:36).

Before the advent of the British, most of the goods were exchanged through the barter system. There were some items, however, which more resembled money type objects. Brass discs, Cowries or bone strings, wooden or metal spear-shaped objects called *Chabili* served the function of the widely recognized standard medium of exchange. The proper use of money as a medium of exchange was introduced only by the colonial administrator and hence, there was no significant monetized system of trade in the Pre-British period (Sema 1991:133). Trade and

commerce which were insignificant during the Pre-colonial period received impetus with the introduction of British administration.

Though language was a hindrance in the market but it never posed as a barrier for communication between the Nagas and Ahoms. The traders applied systematic means of communicating in the market by way of conventional actions, signs, sounds, expressions, pronunciations, meaningful sounds or even tunes produced from the vocal organs in a way that could be understood by all, even marks on items having meanings to understand and their own dialects to express their thoughts to each other. The methods of combining the gestures could be followed by the people in the markets.

A kind of bilingualism was in vogue amongst the hill tribes of Naga, especially among those of their members who had to maintain contacts with the plains-folks and carry on their business. The later too learnt the tribal dialects, sufficiently enough to be able to carry on conversation with the hill people. So knowledge of Assamese had to be acquired by the visiting tribesmen by way of necessity and the same case with the people of the plains who had to carry on trade or transact business of the state. There were also tribal experts in the court of the king and their services were utilized (Bhuyan 1965: 53).

The trade relationship between the Nagas and Ahom in the initial stage was not on a large extent and not regular either. It was a weekly affair and carried out with much caution but with honour and integrity. Trade became a regular activity with consistent development in the later part of the market. Trade was carried out in a wide-range with varieties of commodities making a mark in the market. By the time trade activity was monitored and assisted it has become an important occupation and an essential activity for the two communities. However, trade relation

between the Nagas and Ahom received a set back with the introduction of the British administration in the North East India. The nature of the trade activity between the Nagas and Ahom was changed. The time honored system of trade was replaced by more systematic and controlled manner of trade dealings. In a way restrictive activity was enforced with limited movements between the two communities. More restriction was imposed on the Nagas by way of protecting them but in reality it hampered their chances of enhancing further communications with the Ahoms. The situation forced them to either seek out for alternative means or be contended with their own resources.

The purpose of this work is to make a comprehensive study about the four Naga tribes – Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Phom trade relation with the Ahoms. From among the Naga tribes Ao, Konyaks, Lotha and Phom share common boundaries with Assam and have rich historical association with the Ahoms politically and economically. Trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom is a fascinating matter to ponder upon. An intriguing relation linking diverse group of Naga tribes who made contacts with different group of community leading entirely an unfamiliar traditions and culture began a prosperous communications through trade. It was to a certain extent the requirement for their subsistence which led them to make contact with each other. Some of the commodities like salt was in high demand as it was not obtainable in abundance within the hills region or the dried fish which can be preserved for longer period of time. Hoes made of superior wood for long-lasting use was in demand from the plains people or the betel nuts and pan leaves. All these requirements fashioned a call for the two communities to draw closer with each other and initiate trade relationships. The communications once in progress could not be abandoned even though at times there were hostile situations involving the Nagas and Ahoms since the society became more complex and adaptive to the changing environment

similarly the requirements and necessities from each other too grew further. They became ever more interdependent on each other and the trade relationships went on expanding to a larger prospect.

For ages these Naga tribes had mutual economical ties between themselves but for the first time they began to venture to the valleys and got acquainted with the neighbors living in the plains. It was not for hunting expedition neither for raid purpose but in an entirely different ways and very much unfamiliar to the Nagas made contacts with the Ahoms for trading intentions. Trade which began just to meet up their necessities soon became a full fledged activity. The market place for promoting trade flourished and groups of people from the vicinity and from far-flung areas gathered to these market places. The market places granted by the Ahom kings on good faith to the Nagas continued to prosper unhindered despite the ever presence of threat from the Nagas who did not seem to control themselves from making raids and plunder in the plain areas. It rather developed their favorite hunting ground for their own satisfaction best known to the Nagas. The khat became a centre for trade activity for a long period of time. Few Nagas began to inhabit close by the khats and have continued to reside there ever since. In particular there is Konyak tribes who has stayed in the midst of the Assam populace in Sibsagar and have adopted the later life style. They observe the bihus celebrated by the Assamese where as their manners and behavior continue to be Konyak Nagas.

The main objective of this research is to analyse and comprehend the nature and extend of economic relation between the Nagas and Ahoms. The nature of trade was not extensive but it was a continuous and consistent process that went on uninterrupted with exception during the monsoon times when traders took a break due to the weather factor. The manner in which two different communities came in contact and carried out the transaction to meet their requirements

is remarkable. There are narrations about the Ahoms avoiding from any physical contacts with the Nagas during the business transactions as they considered the Nagas to be more on the violent nature. The Ahoms usually took delivery of any commodities with a piece of cloth wrapped around their palm so that they do not contaminate their body. Operation of the business between the Nagas and Ahom was simple and fruitful. Both parties returned home much satisfied with the transactions when the day ended. From time to time the Nagas on their way back to the hills after the business deal would ruin their own reputation and the trust of the Ahoms by indulging into raids around the plains areas or even to the extent of cutting the heads and in doing so put their relations with the Ahoms into more complications. In spite of the difficult times compromise would be made as the two parties sought neither to dominate nor to control the other. The trade relationship was one of the most significant features between the Naga and Ahoms as it not only maintained friendly relation but gradually traditional and cultural acceptance was initiated. The hostility between the two was replaced by recognition and the acknowledgment of each other's identity. An interesting relationship which recognized the coexistence between the two had sustained till to date.

This Research gives a broader understanding to the economic relations that have led to many developments between the Nagas and Ahom. It allows understanding of any argument and any additional factors that contribute to the topic. This research work helps us to know up to what extend the trade relations had an impact on the Nagas and Ahoms and the economic relations which had developed into a continuing process. This work help to know about the trade system based on barter that was carried out and up to what level it was initiated. What type of commodities they traded and with whom they dealt in the events of the trade. Whether the market seasons coincided with any particular occasions or marked time. Through this work, we



are able to analyse the factors that were responsible for changes and development in the trade system and beyond those.

Initially the trade relation was not on a large scale and not a regular activity. It was only in the later part that trade became active and carried out in an extensive manner. With the introduction of the British administration, the traditional trade system was replaced by an efficient and systematic trade system in a restrictive manner.

## **1.2 STUDY AREA**

The area of study is on Nagaland state at large and among the Naga tribes study will be made on the Nagas inhabiting the Nagaland-Assam boundary like the Aos, Konyaks, Lothas and Phoms. (Fig 2. Map of Nagaland)

### **1.2.1 MOKOKCHUNG**

Mokokchung is a district of Nagaland state in India. The Mokokchung town is its headquarters. It is the home of the Ao Naga tribe. It covers an area of 1,615 km<sup>2</sup>. It is bounded by the state of Assam to its north, Wokha district to its west, Tuensang and Longleng district to its east, and Zunheboto district to its south. According to the 2011 census Mokokchung district has a population of 193,171. Mokokchung has a sex ratio of 927 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 92.68%.<sup>[1]</sup> . The district lies between 94.29 and 94.76 degrees east longitude and 26.20 and 26.77 degrees North latitude. The entire district of Mokokchung is conveniently subdivided into ranges (<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/nagaland/districts/mokokchung.html>).

The territory occupied by the Ao Nagas is located in the North-Eastern part of Assam between 26°12' and 26°45' North latitude and 94°18' and 94°50' east longitude. On the North-West it extends to the plains of the Brahmaputra valley, where it touches the Sibsagar district, on

the South the boundary is the territory of the Lotha and Sema Naga tribes: while on the East and North are the lands of various Naga tribes, collectively called “Miri” by the Aos (Smith, 2002:1).

Mokokchung has three dialectical groups, Chungli, Mongsen and Changki. Agriculture is a major part of the economy of the district of Mokokchung. A variety of crops are cultivated in this part of Nagaland. Some of the most important crops of this place are rice, maize, tuber, soy beans, Naga dal, mustard and pea. The main cash crops that are grown in this place are orange and tea.

### **1.2.2 MON**

Mon is one of the major districts of Nagaland. This district is the dwelling place of the Konyak Nagas. Mon district is situated in the north eastern part of Nagaland surrounded by the plains of Assam in the north, Arunachal Pradesh in the north east, Myanmar on the south east and Tuensang and Longleng district of Nagaland in the south. Mon district is inhabited by the Konyak tribe, one of the major tribes of Nagaland.

The district is located between 94°49' East longitude and 26°45' North latitude. Mon has an area of 1,786 sq km with a density of 145 persons per sq km. The population of Mon is 250,260 with 131,753 males and 118,507 females according to census of India 2011. The rural population comprises of 93.79 percent of the total population in 111 villages and a total of 34,922 households. The sex ratio is 881:1000. The district has the lowest literacy rate of 42 percent and life expectancy of 75 years. The altitude of the district varies from 100 meters to 1,050 meters above sea level. The average humidity is 76 percent and the average temperature is 24.4°C. It has an average rainfall of 200 to 300cm occurring between April to October. Mon district is under the jurisdiction of the tribal leaders referred to as '*Anghs*'. The Anghs are in

charge of the villages that come under their jurisdiction. Anghs have almost absolute authority in this part of the state of Nagaland. Mon is the only district where one can see the *Anghs*. Anghship is hereditary post. The main source of income for the Konyaks is agriculture. Tea is the major crop that is grown in the district in abundance. Mon district is rich in mineral resources such as coal and oil. The land is rich in flora and fauna. The Konyak Nagas are well reputed craftsmen and artisans. Some of the popular items created by them are daos, wood carvings, guns, gunpowder, head brushes, headgear, and necklaces. One of the most important segments of the cultural life of the people of this district is the festival called 'Aoling Monyu'. This festival is celebrated in the first seven days of the month of April. (<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/Nagaland/district/mon.html>)

There was Socio-Economic relationship between the Ahoms and the Konyaks living on the border. But the relations were confined mostly to the villages occupying the low land. These people carried on considerable trade.

### **1.2.3 LONGLENG**

Longleng district is one of the eleven districts of the Indian state of Nagaland. Carved out of Tuensang district, Longleng is the tenth district of Nagaland. The district's headquarters is Longleng, which is at an altitude of about 1,066 m above sea level. Tamlu and Longleng are the major towns in the district. Its main river is Dikhu. According to the 2011 census Longleng district has a population of 50,593. Longleng has a sex ratio of 903 females for every 1000 males,<sup>[1]</sup> and a literacy rate of 73.1%. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longleng\\_district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longleng_district)).

Longleng District is located between longitude 94°E - 95°E and latitude 26°N - 27°N of the Equator. Longleng District has a total area of 885 Sq. km. The altitude of the District varies from 150 Meters to 2000 Metres above the sea level. Longleng Town, the Headquarter is around

1100 Metres above sea level. The population of Longleng District is entirely tribal. The main inhabitants of Longleng District are from the Phom Tribe of Nagas. Phom is the main language spoken here. Longleng District is a strip of mountainous territory having no plains. Longleng District have One State and 3(three) District boundaries. On the East it shares boundary with Tuensang and Mon district of Nagaland. On North it has Nagaland's Inter-State boundary with Assam. On the west it shares boundary with Mokokchung District of Nagaland. On the South it shares boundary with Tuensang district of Nagaland. There are 38 recognized villages. It occupies the elongated Northern part of Nagaland State.

The district can be divided into three regions topographically, namely:

- a) Chingme Range in the Northern part
- b) Shemong Range in the Middle part
- c) Yingnyu Range in the Southern part.

Rice is the staple food and Agriculture is the main stay of the people of Longleng District. Jhum cultivation is the most common form of agriculture, though wet paddy cultivation is seen practiced by a few in recent times. Some of the agricultural products include rice, maize, varieties of vegetables, horticultural crops etc. The low lying foothills of the district bordering with Assam is fertile and has the potential for wet paddy cultivation. Majority of the people are agriculturists. The Inhabitants of the District indicates Promising future in Industry in handicraft and handloom (<http://longleng.gov.in/profile/geography.html>).

The Phom are a notified tribal community of Nagaland. The Phom area always remains enveloped by clouds. The cloud in local dialect is called Phom. Therefore the neighbouring communities such as the Aos and the Konyaks called them Phom. Their legend narrates that their

ancestors had migrated from Burma. The whole area falls on the north-western sub ranges of Patkai. This area comprises of three hilly terrains along with deep valleys, ranging from 650 to 2000 meters. The Dikhu and the Yangnon rivers approximately make western as well as the eastern boundaries of the area, which is densely covered with sub-tropical vegetation. The Phoms have mongoloid features and speak the Phom dialect, which is one of the Naga dialects of Tibeto-Burman group. The dialect slightly varies from village to village.

#### **1.2.4 WOKHA**

Wokha district is in the Indian state of Nagaland. It is the third largest town in Nagaland. Wokha is inhabited by the Lotha Nagas. The word 'Wokha' is derived from the Lotha language word for census. It is the district headquarters of Lotha Nagas, who commonly call themselves Kyong. Wokha is situated below the legendary Mountain peak called Mount Tiyi (elevation 1968 m). Wokha is located at 26.1°N 94.27°E<sup>[2]</sup> at an average elevation of 1,313 meters (4,793 feet). The average annual temperature in Wokha is 17.8 °C. The average annual rainfall is 1940 mm. The summer temperature of Wokha district is between 16.1°c and 32°c. The winter temperature is a 2°c minimum. The rainfall of Wokha is between 2 and 2.5 meters per year.

According to the 2011 census, the population is 70,004. Wokha has an average literacy rate of 85.67%; male literacy is 86.98%, while female literacy is 84.26%. Kyong (Lotha) is the most widely used language for communication, while Nagamese (broken Assamese) and English are also used with non-locals (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wokha>).

The Lotha Nagas are one of the major Naga community found in Nagaland. The Lotha tribe belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid race, speaking the dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family (Tibeto-Burman) of languages. They lived in Wokha district which is bounded by the

districts of Mokokchung in the North, Zunheboto in the East, Kohima in the South and the state of Assam in the West. In the pre-colonial days each Lotha Naga occupied its own specific territory and was grouped into a number of villages and each village occupied a well marked area. There are no land records but boundary disputes are extremely rare (Ramunny, 1988: 2).

### **1.3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Birendra Chandra Chakravorty (1964) in his book, '*India Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam Since 1858*' said that the Sibsagar Nagas inhabiting the low hills to the south of the Sibsagar district used to maintain a constant intercourse with the plains through a number of Duars (passes) to each which was attached a Kotoki or clan representative to serve as the go-between the government and the tribe ordinarily using that Duar.

Surya Kumar Bhuyan (1965) in '*Studies in the History of Assam*' said that the hills men and the plains men were interdependent on each other from the economic point of view. Despite the geographical barrier they managed to keep in touch with each other. Though there was a language barrier it was never an obstacle for the two communities to develop friendship and established diplomatic relations.

Lakshmi Devi (1968) in her book '*Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*', states that the Nagas were known by different names usually originated from the names of the duar or passes they use while coming down to the plains for trade with the Ahoms. They were spread out to the different part of the hilly terrain. Some of the Nagas resided in the foothills and contacted the Ahoms. The Buranjis gives us information of how the Ahoms under King Sukapha conquered the Nagas as they proceeded to their present territory.

Lila Gogoi (1986) in her book '*The Buranjis*' discusses the importance of the salt well and its significance to the Nagas and the Ahoms. What impact it had on the trade relation. The salt quality produced by the Nagas and the Ahoms. The Ahoms could produce salts much superior to the Nagas. How the salt wells were the bone of contention for both the communities and it served as the major economy.

Surendera Kumar Goswami (1986) in his book '*A History of Revenue Administration in Assam (1228-1826) (a detailed history of the revenue system of the Ahom Rulers)*' States that the Nagas exchanged commodities like rice, opium, cotton, cloths with salt from the Ahoms. The salt wells derived the main source of revenue for the Ahoms and the Nagas but it also resulted to wars. The two communities often clash for the salt wells beside the Nagas habit of plundering on the Ahoms heightened the tension.

S.C.Sardeshipande (1987) in his book '*The Patkoi Nagas*' clearly talks about background of the Konyak Nagas. How they originated, their economy and food habits. It brings the age old head hunting practice and its significance into light. How the society was based on the patriarchal system with the eldest male member being the head of the family. The types of food habits the Nagas indulged with for survival.

Pratap Chandra Choudhury (1987) discusses about the political and cultural life of the Assamese people and their deeds within varieties of topics on a comparative prospective. It covers all important topics on the early history of Assam and North Eastern India as a whole.

Murkot Ramunny (1988) in his book '*The World of the Nagas*' explains about the society and economy of the Naga community. The pre and post harvest Naga festivals have direct connection to the economy of the community. How each festival and their day to day activities are related to

their self sufficient economy. All the splendor and colour of the Naga cultures that are exhibited in the festivals forms an important feature of the traditional Nagas. The society that is characterized by cultivators, farmers, craftsmen, artisans plays a big role in the economy of the society.

Julian Jacobs (1990) writes in '*The Nagas, Hill People of the North East India*' the political relation between the Nagas and Ahoms. The Nagas had political and commercial relations with the Ahom kings for a very long time. The Nagas fought for the Ahoms and defended them. The Ahoms even took refuge in the Naga hills when fleeing from enemies.

Hargovind Joshi (2001) in his book '*Nagaland Past and Present*' states the nature of trade the Nagas carried out. How the standard of wealth was recognized by the amount of cattles and land one had. However the introduction of the monetary medium of exchange changed the course of trade.

H.K. Barpujari (2004) in his book '*The Comprehensive History of Assam Vol-III*' illustrates the artistic skill of the Assam people. The Ahoms rulers favoured artistic sculptures. Self-sufficiency of the Ahom economy is mentioned here. The products both agricultural and non-agricultural were discussed. Trade was carried on by barter system. There is mention about Cowries as an integral part of the commercial transactions. He discuss about the process of assimilation between the tribes men and the Assamese people and also their conservatism, superstitious beliefs, customs and usages, food habits, articles of common use and luxury. Radical change in the Assamese language.

Edward Gaits (2008) in his book, '*A History of Assam*' refers to the Ahom kingdom as economically very sound. The kingdom was prosperous and enjoyed stability with large tracts of



lands. Agricultural was the backbone of the economy but trade and commerce also existed side by side as industry was highly developed with many skilled artisans and workers. The Ahoms carried out trade relations with the neighbouring people. There are references of weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in Ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. They made their boxes, trays, stools and chairs by carving them out of a single block of wood.

#### **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Mentions have been made by several scholars about the trade relations between the Nagas and the Ahoms but detailed information has not been given on the exact purpose, nature and extends of the trade. This research work will attempt to do an in-depth study about the trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms on the following issues:

1. The circumstances that led to trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms.
2. To find out why the Nagas communicated with the Ahoms at large and not with the other neighboring areas.
3. To find out whether the Nagas ventured in the valleys only for trade purpose or for other reasons as well.
4. To find out why only few Naga tribes could carry out trade relations with the Ahoms.
5. To find out whether trade was carried out yearlong or seasonal.
6. To find out the different kinds of commodities they exchanged.
7. What were the most important commodities exchanged between the Nagas and the Ahoms.
8. To find out why trade was carried out within a definite territory.

9. Why Khats were allotted to the Nagas?
10. To find out whether any activities other than trade was carried out in the Khats.
11. Whether tax was collected from the Khats?
12. How many Khats were allotted to the Nagas?
13. Who are occupying the Khats areas now?
14. What is the impact of the trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
15. Why there are only few entrepreneurs from Nagaland and Assam to carry out the past trading traditions?
16. How the relationship between the Nagas and the Ahoms was carried out with much courtesy and honesty but now replaced by hostilities.
17. Why communication gap developed between the two trading communities?
18. Who are occupying the border areas now?

### **1.5 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

1. To study the economic relation between the hill tribes of Nagaland and the plains people of Assam in the Pre-colonial period.
2. To analyse the kind of commodities used for trade purpose and to what extent it was circulated.
3. To identify the Naga tribes and the villages involved in trade relation with the Ahoms.

4. To examine the medium of exchange (barter) and the monetary system.
5. To examine the society with the development of economy.

## **1.6 HYPOTHESIS**

1. The Nagas mostly led a secluded life till they came in contact with the Ahoms.
2. There was extensive trade between Nagas and Ahoms.
3. The Nagas took down commodities for trade with Ahoms and gained more from them.
4. Trade relationship benefited both communities.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The nature of the study was based on the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were the informations based on the oral interviews, personal observation and local sources. Open minded type of interview was conducted to gain maximum information.

The secondary sources were based on literary sources like books, publications, documents, journals records and official informations.

1. The Market places were also surveyed
2. Selected Naga villages that had trade relation with the Ahoms were surveyed.
3. Elderly persons with historical knowledge on the Nagas and Ahom relations were interviewed.
4. The material remains like the *Chabili*, brass bell etc and the khats are of immense help for the study of the trade relation.

## **1.8 CHAPTERISATION**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The general introduction to the topic is given in this Chapter. The study area is outlined in brief. Review of literature, statement of problem, objective of the study, hypothesis and the methodology followed for the study are also given. Chapterisation of the thesis is also presented here.

### **CHAPTER 2**

#### **THE FOUR NAGA TRIBES INVOLVED IN TRADE RELATION WITH AHOM**

The four Naga tribes namely – Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Phom who had trade relation with the Ahoms are described here in detail.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **EARLY TRADE RELATION BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND AHOM**

This Chapter gives a description about the early trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom. It mentions about the Khats the Naga villages that carried out trade in the foothill areas. Salt wells and a retrospect about the Ahom and Naga relation.

### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **NATURE OF THE TRADE SYSTEM**

The nature of the trade system and the course of trade are presented in this Chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

The Chapter discusses the socio-economic and political impact on the life of the Nagas and Ahoms.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The outcome of the research work is given in this Chapter. Some core issues that need consideration are also highlighted.

### APPENDIX

A sample of the questionnaires used during the interview is given here.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2.1 THE FOUR NAGA TRIBES INVOLVED IN THE TRADE RELATION WITH AHOMS**

There are different versions on how the Nagas came in contact with the Ahoms and the manner in which trade relation began between the two sections of people. According to the Ao version there was a matrimonial relation with the Ahom King. It was followed by commercial ties. The Lothas and Ahoms had contacts for trade purpose and continue their communication with the Ahoms till to date. According to N. Wokshing Phom from Namhaching village under Tamlu sub Division, Longleng, the Phom Nagas claim to have come into contact with the Ahoms when they went in search of a thick black smoke emitting from a forest. On reaching the spot they found some Ahom people floating on a banana raft. The Phom Nagas next major contact with the Ahom was during the Burmese aggression. The Phoms not only gave refuge to the Ahoms but even defended them and chased away the Burmese. The Ahom king in gratitude granted plot of land and some gifts to the Phom people, thereby, starting a new relation with them. The Konyaks believe the Ahoms to be their brother. The Ahoms went down to the valley and the Konyaks being the eldest chose to stay back and reside in the hills. The Konyaks gave protection to the Ahom Prince Godapani, while he was on a run from his enemies. The Konyaks also gave shelter to the Ahoms when they were attacked by the Burmese. The Konyaks always maintained a friendly relation with the Ahoms ever since. Relationship between the Nagas and Ahom on trade level started when they got acquainted and gradually began their contacts on regular level.

The trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom had a huge impact on the Naga economy. Only few Naga tribes could maintain close contacts with the Ahoms. Among those the

Nagas inhabiting the foothills were closer and had the luxury of reaching their neighbours much more easily than the rest of the Naga counter parts who resided far away on the hill tops. The Naga tribes that carried out regular and extensive trade with the Ahoms were the Aos, Lothas, Phoms and Konyaks. Trade was carried out at the khats allotted to the Nagas by the Ahoms. One of the main reasons behind the successful trade relations between the Nagas with Ahom was due to the accessibility of raw materials in the hill regions. The products brought to the markets differed from tribe to tribe according to their geographical locations but found favorable market. The most important commodities in demand were salt, dry fish, sesame seed, iron, cotton. The manner in which the trade was carried out by the Nagas with the Ahoms can be studied under the following.

## **2.2 AO NAGAS**

Mokokchung is a district under Nagaland state in India with Mokokchung town as its headquarters. It is the home of the Ao Naga tribe. It covers an area of 1,615 km and is bounded by the state of Assam to its north, Wokha district to its west, Tuensang and Longleng district to its east, and Zunheboto district to its south. According to the 2011 census Mokokchung district has a population of 193,171. Mokokchung has a sex ratio of 927 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 92.68%. The entire district of Mokokchung is conveniently sub-divided into ranges (<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/nagaland/districts/mokokchung.html>). The territory occupied by the Ao Nagas is located in the North-Eastern part of Assam between 26°12' and in 26°45' North latitude and 94°18' and 94°50' east longitude (Smith, 2002:1). Agriculture is a major part of the economy of the district of Mokokchung. Some of the most important crops of this place are rice, maize, tuber, soy beans, Naga dal, mustard and pea. The main cash crops that are grown in this place are orange and tea (Figure 3. Map of Mokokchung District).

According to the available sources the earliest contacts of the Ao Nagas with the Ahom is related to the two brothers from Nokpu Village, Asheimba-Yimyuba who went for fishing and encountered with the Ahoms dating back to 1335 AD. From there on the Ao Nagas and the Ahoms had a mutual understanding and developed friendly relationship on socio and political level. Economically the two communities became active when the Ahom king granted khats to the Ao Nagas and allowed them several duars for common use to reach the Khats. The history of Ahom relationship with the Ao Nagas narrates how Godapani, the Hindu name for Godapani was also known as Godadhar Singho, the greatest king of Ahom, declared about the renewed relationship between his kingdom and Assiringia Nokpu Naga when the Ahom king married the charming and beautiful girl from Merinokpu (Nokpu) village called Sentishila. She was called Talime in Assamese. On the marriage of king Godapani and Sentishila, the king made the declaration that the name of Nokpu was to be known as Assiringia in Ahom, calling the Nokpur after the name of his father-in-law. Secondly, the king declared that the Asheimba-Yimyudangba Duar was renamed as Assiringiah Duar, the path where Assiring and Nokpur moved or travelled. Thirdly, the king declared that a Naga Khat is granted to Assiringia at Naginijan and the name of the Khat was called Assiring Khat. The name Naganijjan was named after Sentishila as a “Nagini” with the meaning that a Naga girl has gone alive. During the reign of Godapani several construction works were taken up for the conveniences of the travelers like Dodhar Ali, Akar Ali and other Roads. Stone bridges and several well were also constructed as it is evident from the three tanks (wells) at Assiringia Duar. A number of Naga kotokies were posted at Assiring khat. Further, the functional part of the Khat and Duar was announced by Bargohain and said that the repairing and maintenance work of Assiringia Duar shall be usually supported by the kingdom through the ‘Chokies’ at Assiring Khat during the working days of Duar. Shades in three places



along with the resting houses were built for the travelers (Assairingias). One well each to be constructed for making potable water facilities available to the travelers. The Pokhori (well) were located in the following historical places.

- (i) Ghargaon, which was named as Assiring Pokhori
- (ii) Namti Ali
- (iii) Namsoso and Ali (Pokhori) wells were known as Assiring Pokhori.

Among the important passes Assiringia duar served as one of the most important passes for the Ao Naga villages. The Assiring Khat was established along the road side of the Dodhar Ali, as one of the boundary line. Three groups of people of Ahom were posted to the Assiring Khat at Naginijan as under (i) Cultivator (ii) Blacksmith (iii) Trader. All the three section of people carried out their respective duties successfully. They were known as Chokies (Rattan 2004:44).

The three set of people under the three Kotokies were assigned for different nature of duties as such:

### **2.2.1 CULTIVATORS**

Their duties are to cultivate paddy and other vegetables and to provide the same of all items at the time of repairing and construction of Assiringia Duar in the form of posa (revenue) to Assiringia Nokpu. The cultivator group occupied the prime land of the khat. They supply the best seed of the paddy to the Nokpur at a concession rate every year.

### **2.2.2 BUSINESSMAN**

In the middle of the khat, business centre was organised manned by the traders to regulate trade exchange between the Nagas and Ahom. A regular market was maintained for exchanging agricultural and the industrial products of the Nagas and Ahom.

### **2.2.3 INDUSTRIALIST**

The sector of industrial production was manned by group of blacksmiths and craftsmen whose skill were for making dao, spades, spears, sickles of all size and designs preferred by their immediate Naga customers to use it for security measures, agricultural tools for farm development and kitchen purposes. The Nokpu Naga called the location as Alimenyinsem because it was set up along the roads of Dodhar Ali.

### **2.2.4 KOTOKI**

There were Naga kotokies with the consent and approval of Naga chief, who were appointed by the Ahom king and posted to the Naga khat to look after the mutual interest of the two people and act on behalf of the Nagas. So also the Assiring khat kotokies were posted from time to time after consultation with the Nokpur as Khat owners.

### **2.2.5 POSA**

The free of cost ration paid to Assiringia (Nokpur) at the time of repairing the Duar was called as posa. Posa was paid regularly twice a year, once in the month of May-June and once in the month of November at the time of repairing of Duar. Regularity in payment of posa became a traditional contribution to the Naga village and the practice was followed for centuries. It established the right of the Nagas to the end and it has become a source of revenue.

The Assiring Khat became popular and renowned with all Boragoan (Debuia), Khar, Mongchuk (Mongchen), Laso (Nokpuyimjen), Gampoongia (Lirmen), Changdang, Longjang, Waromong with some other upper range of Ao villages. (Rattan,2004: 56).

The Ao Nagas were allotted three Nagakhats by the Ahoms from which they maintained all the commercial transactions.

1. Dopdarduar/ Dobuka Duar.
2. Assiringia Duar with Assiring Khat at Naginijan.
3. Hatiguriah Duar (Bardobia) had two numbers of Nagakhats for Samsa and Bordobia khat.

The distribution of the three khats and the duar/pass used by the Ao Nagas were as follows:

#### **2.2.6 Dopdarduar/ Dobuka Duar**

1. Dekhahaimong, Borahaimong
2. Merangkong, Yaongyimsen
3. Changtongya, Akhoia
4. Unger Chuchuyimlang
5. Mongsenyimti, Sangratsu
6. Mopungchuket (Molutobia)
7. Ungma, Chuchuyimbang
8. Mokokchungyim
9. Longsa, Longmisa

#### **2.2.7 Assiringia Duar or Charingia Duar**

1. Kampongiah
2. Lasso
3. Assiringia
4. Boragoan
5. Mongchen

6. Kharee
7. Longjang
8. Changdang
9. Waromong
10. Some more other villages from the upper region of Ao country also sometimes travelled in the Assiringia Duar through Nokpu village.

#### **2.2.8 Hatiguria or Bordobia Duar**

1. Bardobia (Changki)
2. Samsa (Longjemdang)
3. Japu
4. Lakhuni
5. Chugliyimsen
6. Chungtia
7. Aliba
8. Kineonger
9. Khensa
10. Mekuli
11. Longkhum
12. Kubza
13. Mangmetong.

The commercial sector of the Assiringia khat gradually developed into Saturday market places nearby tea factory in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this was used for the better interest of tea garden labours of Naginijan and for the customers and it has no relation with the

objective of the Ahom Kings (Rattan, 2004:54). Posa (revenue) was paid in kinds during the Ahom kings and British Administration but it was converted into the payment of cash during the last part of the Britishers regime and the first collectors of posa (revenue) in cash during the 1922-23 by the Nagakhats owning villagers were Changki, Longjemdang and Nokpu (Rattan, 2004:49).

### **2.2.9 COMMODITIES**

Agriculture being the main economy of the Ao Nagas they took down items like Chilies, maize, yum, pulses, rice, mustard, sweet potato, ginger, cotton, gourds, mats, gum of liyang tree pan leave, betel nut, tea, pottery to the Khats. Among the Ao Nagas, Changki village was popular for making earthen pottery and found a favorable market. Some Ao villages grew cotton in surplus and traded with the Ahoms. The Aos were also very fond of metallurgy and often exchange majority of their products with iron and in the later part of the trade transaction they introduced a metal currency known as *Chabili* (Plate 5). They were experts in producing earring and bangles made out of ivory, stones, quartz and wood. The Ao Nagas traded their products with the items like salt, dried fish, silk, iron from the Ahoms. The Ahoms were also experts in producing readymade clothes with silk and cotton threads. Their products were marketed at the Khats. They also produced gold dust and molded it into fine earrings and bangles. There were groups of blacksmiths settled along the roadside of Dodhar Ali at the Assiring Khat. They produced weapons for war and the agricultural tools and appliances for domestic use. They were known as Alimenyinsem by the Ao Nagas. In the Ao Naga dialect, Alimen means Road side and the Yinsem means blacksmith at the Dodhar Ali road side. It took one to two days for the Ao Nagas to reach the khat depending on the location. They would return that day itself and sleep on the way where they have prepared a resting place. The Ao Nagas usually went down to the market in

groups. At least five persons would go down to the khats for security reason. Sometimes the women accompanied the men group. The group did not require any kind of permission to visit the khats. A regular and friendly trade relation between the Ao Nagas and the Ahoms developed into mutual respect and proper set of administrative structure on equal terms. The Ao Nagas benefited both ways from their contact with the Ahoms. There was socio and cultural ties which was further strengthened by the intermarriages encouraging the two communities to learn each other's life style. The objectives for trade also led to the development of learning each other's language especially of the plain people. Among the Ao Nagas the rights and privileges of the Nokpur prevailed at Assiring Khat whereas, industrial products and Agricultural products were given special privileges to its selection of item to Nokpur before any other customer from other Naga Villages or so followed by the Debuia and Khar villages in queue as a matter of respect in merit. It was only after the selection of weapons by these three villages in orderly, others were allowed to purchase of their liking. (Rattan,2014:56). The Ao Naga khats became so popular that even the other Naga tribes from neighbouring villages like Phom, Chang, Sangtam and Khamniungan traded with the Ao Nagas in exchange of pigs and fowls.

One of the main drawbacks of the trade relations between the Ao Nagas and Ahom was the on and off disputes arising from marketing issue and demarcation areas. These issues would often bring the trade relations to a grinding halt and would take time to continue the trade pattern which they have put so much work to develop. It always took time and a lot of negotiations to start all over again besides it required a lot of trust and co ordinations from both sides. In the later part of the trade relationship some of the Ao Naga villages made an effort to strengthen the ties between the two communities. Meeting was held and a resolution passed to maintain a peaceful coexistence between the Ao Nagas and the Ahoms. They also agreed to maintain a

common market and agreed to foresee any issues arising during the marketing. They two communities decided to take up development projects like buildings in the Khats and care taker or chowkidar was to be kept and paid for maintenance. The fund was to be raised from house hold tax.

#### **2.2.10 IMPACT OF THE TRADE RELATION**

The efforts to strengthen the ties between the two communities had a positive impact. There were many changes and steps taken to usher in new and safer relation. Some of the main outcome as a result of the activity to strengthen the relation between the Ao Naga villages and the Ahoms were:

1. The Ao villages decided to maintain a friendly relation with the Ahoms and meet the Ahom representative on behalf of the Ao Nagas whenever required. They decided to have a meeting with the Ahom people every now and then.
2. The Ao villages comprise of 6 ranges and from among the 6 ranges *Asetkong* have a good relation with the Ahom king. To strengthen the relation *Asetkong* village invited *Kensa* and *Mongsingyimti* villages to extend their friendship with the Ahoms.
3. The other Ao Nagas trading with the Ahoms had to pass the villages like *Yimchenkimong* and *Molongyimsen* therefore, the two villages were invited to be friends with the Ahoms so that the other Ao villagers could walk freely without any threats.
4. The king opened a road between the Ao nagas and the Assam in his daughter's *Lashai* name known as *Lashai Ali* presently known as *Latai Ali* in *Sibsagar*.
5. According to the sources Mr. *Mongden* from *Mopungchuket* was the oldest person to have relationship with the *Sibsagar* king. This fact indicates the lasting relationship between the

Ao Nags and the Ahoms till the Burmese invasion followed by the coming of British Raj in North East.

The commercial interaction between the Ao Nagas and Ahom led to a joint commercial venture and a deeper friendly relation. The plains were opened to the hills and the hills were easily accessible to the plain people. The Ao Nagas gave shelter to the Ahoms when the Burmese aggression took place. The Burmese mayhem affected even the khats, where popular Assiring khats were reduced to shambles and disorder by the Burmese force. The market place was abandoned and the Kotoki and Chokies fled to the nearby forest escaping the merciless acts of the Burmese. Thousands of Ahoms fled the Burmese invasion and took refuge in the hill areas of the Ao Nagas. They were given full protection by the Ao villages and fought against the Burmese on their behalf. There is a wonder as to how the advent of alien rulers stopped this act and sowed the seeds of estrangement and misgivings. Also as to how those comfortable Naga villages at the frontier became so poor and backward than its counterpart relatively are few questions to be answered (Rattan, 2004:56). Relation between the Aos and Ahom was effected to some extend during the Burmese invasion but it became worst after the coming of the British.



## **2.3 KONYAK NAGAS**

Mon is one of the major districts of Nagaland. Mon district is situated in the north eastern part of Nagaland. It is surrounded by the plains of Assam in the north, Arunachal Pradesh in the north east, Myanmar on the south east and Tuensang and Longleng district of Nagaland in the south. Mon district is inhabited by the Konyak tribe, one of the major tribes of Nagaland. The district is located between 94°49' East longitude and 26°45' North latitude. Mon has an area of 1,786 sq km with a density of 145 persons per sq km. The population of Mon is 250,260 with 131,753 males and 118,507 females according to census of India 2011. The rural population comprises of 93.79 percent of the total population in 111 villages and a total of 34,922 households. The sex ratio is 881:1000. The district has the lowest literacy rate of 42 percent and life expectancy of 75 years. The altitude of the district varies from 100 metres to 1,050 metres above sea level. The average humidity is 76 percent and the average temperature is 24.4°C. It has an average rainfall of 200 to 300cm occurring between April to October (Fig 4. Map of Mon District).

Mon district is under the jurisdiction of the tribal leaders referred to as 'Anghs'. The Anghs are in charge of the villages that come under their jurisdiction. Anghs have almost absolute authority in this part of the state of Nagaland. Mon is the only district where one can see the Anghs. Anghship is hereditary post. The main source of income for the Konyaks is agriculture. Tea is the major crop that is grown in the district in abundance. Mon district is rich in mineral resources such as coal and oil. The land is rich in flora and fauna. The Konyak Nagas are well reputed craftsmen and artisans. Some of the popular items created by them are daos, wood carvings, guns, gunpowder, head brushes, headgear, and necklaces. One of the most important segments of the cultural life of the people of this district is the festival called 'Aoling

Monyu'. This festival is celebrated in the first seven days of the month of April. (<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/nagaland/districts/mon.html>).

There are different versions about the originality of the term Konyak. According to Sardeshipande (1987:112) when long ago the foreigner first chanced on these people he supposedly asked as to who they were. Their reply was “Khonyaak” (human beings), and hence the tribal name Konyak. According to Thanglong Yanlem Konyaks come from four words

- a) Khaonyak
- b) Shunyak
- c) Shaonyak
- d) Kitunyak

Another version is that most Konyaks have a linear tattoo on the nose bridge extending to the forehead: Kuong=nose; Nyak=black nosed people- Konyaks. The term Konyak is believed to have derived from the word ‘*Khao*’ meaning ‘head’ and ‘*Nyak*’ meaning ‘*black*’ translating to ‘men with black hair’. Like most Naga tribes, the Konyaks strategically live on mountain top. A variety of rituals used to be observed before choosing a village site. The konyaks have vibrant life. They assign special importance to dress and ornament. A person’s position in the society is identified by the kind and number of dress he or she wears. Festivals occupied a place of importance in the lives of the konyaks. Taking of heads was associated with politics, social status, religion, fertility and economic growth. A unique feature of the Konyak tradition is the practice of the *Angh* system. It is an autocratic system of governance. Under the *Angh* system several subject villages pay tax to him. Agricultural is the main source of livelihood of the rural population consisting more than 90 percent of the population of the Mon district. Rice is the

main crop followed by maize, yam, pulses, varieties of vegetables and other crops (District Human Development Report Mon 2009:7).

Konyaks and Ahoms believe that they are brothers from the same parent. The elder one was known as 'Deilok' the ancestor of the Konyaks and the younger one was known as 'Naoman' the ancestor of the Ahoms. In due course of time 'Naoman' separated from the elder brother 'Deilok' and set out towards the plain area (present Assam) to settle there.

The Konyaks and the Ahoms have some similarities in their legendary tale, customs, traditions and cultures. They have similar characteristics and are defensive in nature but not offensive. Maybe this similarity of temperament has enhanced the bond of relationship between the two communities. Both the Konyaks and the Ahoms had the monarchical system of self-governance prior to the emergence of British rule in India. So reasonably reflecting to one another's way of life, the two communities maintained a relationship to accelerate in times of need. Most importantly the matrimonial alliances between the Konyaks and Ahoms strengthened their friendship both in the social as well as in individual existence. The historical record also tells us that, with the restoration of exiled Raja Godadhar to the throne, the Ahom Empire was re-established. The Place Naganimorah testifies to the relation of the Ahoms with the Nagas, particularly with the Konyaks (Ghosh 1982:31).

It is said that the Konyaks rescued the Ahom Raja from the hands of Laluk Burphukan who was claiming the Ahom throne. The Konyaks gave shelter and refuge to Prince Godapani. When the exiled Raja was restored to the throne as their king and re-established the Ahom kingdom the Konyaks were presented gifts and revenue free land called Naga Khats as a sign of gratitude and to honour their friendship. The Konyaks and the Ahoms maintained mutual understanding and a tribal loyalty system existed between the two communities. The system of

tribute was paying Khat money to the neighbouring Konyak Angh/wang in kind and later in cash by the Ahoms was continued. The relation between the Konyak Nagas and the Ahoms was further tested when the Burmese invasion took place. Many Ahom people fled from the enemies and took shelter in the Konyak hills. The Konyaks even fought with the Burmese to protect the Ahoms. There are also stories of how the Ahoms under the leadership of Sukapha entered the Naga territory and fought with the Konyak Nagas. As the Konyaks had their own king (*Angh*) the Ahoms faced difficulties in suppressing one village after the other. So the King Sukapha decided to make a friendly approach and brought a brass bell “*Namnyu*” as a gift to all the Konyak king. Thus peace prevailed between the Konyak Nagas and the Ahoms for a long time. Boundary demarcation, which is now known as *Lodaigarth* was made and the Ahoms were to construct the boundary wall while the Konyaks agreed to supply food for the labourers.

### **2.3.1 VILLAGES HAVING TRADE RELATIONS WITH THE AHOMS**

The Konyaks carried out trade with the Ahoms but since they were economically self sufficient therefore, they did not do trade with the Ahoms to a larger extend. Some of the Konyak villages that carried out extensive trade with the Ahoms were from Phongon, Wakching, and Wangching villages. Other villages like Jaboka village under Tizit area. The actual Konyak name is *Yansha* but the Ahoms called it as Jaboka village. Buragoan village as addressed by the Ahoms. The actual name in Konyak dialect is Pongkong village. Konngan village under Naganimorah area or as called by the Ahoms as Lekan addressing the village inhabited by the Konyaks. The Konngan village was under the Anghship of Wakching village. According to J.H. Hutton (1995:20) “When the Ahom Kings succeeded in extracting tribute from certain villages they gave names of their own”. The other Konyak villages near by the border areas might have carried out trade relations with the Ahoms but their names are not mentioned by the Ahoms. Among the Konyak villages

the Wakching Village has clearly been at the centre of trading relations with the Ahoms for a very long time. It was earlier known as Jaktoong situated on one of the duar leading to the Nagakhats. Wakching village was involved in a number of trading activities like producing iron tools to make daos, spear heads, spade and chisels for at least few villages that were without their own smiths. They received payments of salts that had their own brine wells. Wakching village played an important role in terms of trade and giving protection to the plains people from the interior tribes who would often be a threat to the people residing in the plains and that would create tension in the trade relation between the Konyak Nagas and the Ahoms.

### **2.3.2 COMMODITIES FOR BARTER**

The Konyaks sold in the Khats Pan Leaves, betel nut, ginger, yam, Mustard, millet, beans, maize, chilli, garlic, pulses, tea leaves, ginger, tobacco, cotton, yam, potatoes, iron implements and other forest products. One interesting and unique feature from the bartered commodities in the markets by the Konyaks was the pig hair. It was in demand in the market from the Ahoms to make brush. The Konyaks bartered their commodities from the Ahoms with items like salt, iron, cattle, fowls, etc. dry fish was not in demand as it was with the other tribes like the Lotha Nagas. Betel nut was an important commodity for the Konyaks. They exchanged betel nut with salt from the Ahoms. Betel nut per bunch was equivalent to 1 kg of Salt also known as *Choba*. Earlier Konyaks did not have the knowledge of using salt in powder form so they used salt water locally known as *humto*. It was only after coming in contact with the Ahoms that they were introduced to the use of salt in the powdery form or dried salt. Saraideo was the market place where they bought the Salt. Betel nut was also collected from the khats as tax. Though there is controversy regarding the first use of tea among the Konyaks it is generally accepted that Phongon Angh first discovered the tea seedling and started drinking tea among the Konyaks when the Phongon Angh

allowed the other neighbouring villages to cultivate. Later on tea became an important commodity in the market. The Konyaks were not new to Iron smelting and traded with iron implements in the khats. Irons found in abundance at the upper and lower *Tiru* and *Yonhon* enabled the konyaks to produce which could be traded with the Ahoms. The Konyaks cultivated cottons also known as *kobar/Bai* mainly for domestic purpose and rarely sold in the markets (Khats) but sometimes it was found in the market among the other commodities sold in the khats.

The konyaks carried out trade with the Ahoms in the following Markets (Nagakhats):

1. Naganimorah
2. Saraideo
3. Meothrabor
4. Singmu
5. Sonari
6. Hapakati

### **2.3.3 MEDIUM**

Trade was based on barter system but at times a kind of a medium like money was used to transact trade.

1. Brass in the shape of a knife called *laya* was used as a medium.
2. Cup made of brass with a cock imprint.
3. Vessel made by copper with emblem picture of cock imprint.

4. A big brass bell made of bronze also locally known as *Nyam* was used as a medium of exchange. It was mostly brought from Myanmar. One *Nyam* would fetch 2-3 mithuns. The bell or the gong was regularly used as a monetary value in the later part. One stretch of a finger was Rupees 1000 and two stretches means Rupees 2000 (Plate 6).

The konyaks being self sufficient and self supporting tribes were never in need of outside commodities other than some few essential commodities like salt. Betel nut and iron implements formed an important commodity for the konyaks while carrying out trade with the Ahoms. Generally villages under the big Anghs were very prosperous. When the Britishers came to these areas terms was made whether to cultivate tea or pay tax.

## 2.4 LOTHANAGAS

Wokha district is in the Indian State of Nagaland. It is the third largest town in Nagaland. Wokha is inhabited by the Lotha Nagas. The word Wokha is derived from the Lotha Language word for census. It is the district headquarters of Lotha Nagas, who commonly call themselves Kyong. Wokha is situated below the legendary Mountain peak called Mount Tiyi (elevation 1968 m). Wokha is located at 26.1°N 94.27°E<sup>[2]</sup> at an average elevation of 1,313 metres (4,793 feet). The average annual temperature in Wokha is 17.8 °C. The average annual rainfall is 1940 mm. The summer temperature of Wokha district is between 16.1° c and 32° c. The winter temperature is a 2° c minimum. The rainfall of Wokha is between 2 and 2.5 meters per year. According to the 2011 census, the population is 70,004 (Fig 5. Map of Wokha). Wokha has an average literacy rate of 85.67%; male literacy is 86.98%, while female literacy is 84.26%. Kyong (Lotha) is the most widely used language for communication, while Nagamese (broken Assamese) and English are also used with non-locals (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wokha>).

The Lotha Nagas are one of the major Naga community found in Nagaland. The Lotha belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race speaking the dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family (Tibeto-Burman) of languages. The Lotha lived in Wokha district which is bounded by the districts of Mokokchung in the North, Zunheboto in the East, Kohima in the South and the state of Assam in the West. In the pre-colonial days each Lotha Naga occupied its own specific territory and was grouped into a number of villages and each village occupied a well marked area (Ramunmy 1988: 2).

The Lotha Naga villages were self-governing units. The Lothas were known for their hospitality, uprightness, bravery and superior war skills. They were never dominated by any



native tribes or the civilizations from the plains. The Lothas however maintained cordial relationship with her neighbours and exchanged trade and commerce with the Ahom Kingdom in Assam and other Naga tribes (District Human Development Report Mon 2013:8).

The Lotha Nagas living in the border areas had economic links with the Ahoms. Historical records like the Buranjis also give us an insight about the Naga history. According to the sources there was trade and commerce relation between the Nagas and the people of the plains as early as the thirteenth century, as the Buranjis mentions of the Ahom Kingdom that started in this century.

The Lotha villages that ventured to the foothills to trade with the Ahoms were as follows:

1. Akok
2. Chamgpang
3. Tsuroi
4. Yingsung
5. Bhandari
6. Yanmhon
7. Longchum
8. Pangti
9. Lakhuti villages

Sometimes the Lotha Nagas after carrying out their business with the Ahoms on their way back home would commit plunder and took whatever they could collect with them apart from their regular raids. Due to this reasons the Ahom King granted plots of land to the Lotha Nagas at the foot hills so that trade can be carried out under their survey and also provide security to the

Ahoms. The plots of land allotted to the Lotha Nagas came to be known as khats and later became the permanent market place for the Lothas. The Lotha Nagas ventured in the common market place like Rajapar, Furkating, Borholla, Titapur, Tokenegara and later Merapani. Merapani was earlier known as Maraju to the Lothas. Initially it was not a market place but rather a land mark and used as a resting place for the Lothas while travelling to the Ahom valleys. Merapani developed into a full scale market place only in the later years. At present the place is thickly populated by the Muslims (Plate 2: Merapani Market).

The Lothas took one to three days to reach the Khats depending on the location of their settlements. There are times when the Lotha men going down to the plains for trade in the khats were accompanied by groups of women. The Lothas usually carry the commodities on their heads in different baskets made of bamboo and cane. They are *Pharu*, meant for carrying vegetables and firewood, *Okhyak* meant for carrying rice, *Yenpha* meant for journeys especially on marketing. They carried their commodities on these baskets to the Nagakhats granted to them by the Ahoms. The lands granted to the Lothas were accorded with the condition, that the Lotha would not raid the plains and they would have the right to collect tax from the Nagakhats. Thus, trade was carried out under the Ahom king survey and also provide security to the Ahoms as well. From among those places Furkating was important for iron smelting. The Lothas bought the iron utensils like curry pots and iron implements from this market. They also brought their machete and spear heads to temper or sharpen it. It took two to three days to reach Furkating.

The Lothas did not inhabit the allotted place. They kept the place to carry out trade only, therefore, the Ahoms were allowed to maintain the area and occupy it by paying tax. Tax was in cash or in kind. If they fail to pay money it was compensated with three and half kg of rice, a pot of local drinks or a cock. Apart from maintaining the marketing places the Ahoms also cultivated

the land. The Lothas came down to collect the tax annually and stayed for eight to nine days. The market places were gradually occupied by the Ahoms because the Lothas could not go down to the areas regularly and in the later years the British stopped the Lothas from venturing into the valleys for six months during the monsoon months due to the harsh weather and diseases. Therefore, in a year the Lothas were allowed to venture into the valleys for six months only.

#### **2.4.1 COMMODITIES**

The Lothas cultivated varieties of crops and depended on the forest products to sustain their economy. They cultivated crops like rice, cotton, sesame, yam, jobs tear, brinjals, maize and other forest products. Cotton and black sesames were the main products with which the Lothas carried out trade with the Ahoms. They also traded with products like ginger, dried chilies, brinjals, betel nuts and pan leaves, yam, wet and dried bamboo shoots and at times Ivory but it was on a limited scale and only few people did business with ivory products as it was hard to come by. The Lothas took down their commodities to the foothills and did business with the Ahoms. Since the Lotha did not use any kind of medium therefore, they usually exchanged their commodities with salt, iron, dried fish, duck, hen, cows, coal, jute etc from the Ahoms. But on the other hand the Ahoms were using money so at times the Lothas sold their commodities and with the money they bought their daily requirements. The Lothas also collected rice from the Ahoms in exchange of their commodities. Salt was the most important commodities to the Lothas. The Lothas carried the salt to their villages and sell it to the other neighboring Naga villages thus deriving benefits from it. They even bartered cattle which they acquired from the plains to the neighbouring Ao and Sema Nagas. The main purpose for the Nagas to venture into the foot hills was to do collect salt as it was an important commodity for the Nagas. Only in the later part the Nagas started trade with the Ahoms on a large scale.

## **2.4.2 VALUE OF COMMODITIES**

1. 1 kg of cotton was exchanged with 15 kg of salt.
2. 10 kg of black sesame was exchanged with 30 kg of salt
3. 1 kg of chilies was exchanged with 3 kg of dry fish.

## **2.4.3 VALUE OF MONEY**

The Ahoms used money which was made of brass

1. 1 kg of cotton is equivalent to 5 shorota or 5 kg of salt.
2. 1 kg of black sesame is equivalent to 3 shorota or 3 kg of salt.
3. 1 kg of dried chilies was 8 moya.

The basic unit of the Lotha family was based on the patriarchal form of society where the male is the head of the family and women were subordinate to man. Customary laws also permitted man to have rights and freedoms from which women was excluded. But the women taking part in the economic life of the society was unique. Women broke through their restrictions from the society and ventured to the plains as far as taking them three to four days to reach a certain Naga-khats. It was never because of the poverty that the women accompanied their men to the Naga-khats facing dangers from head hunters and wild animals but it was a natural urge and their adventurous nature that led to an astounding development not new to the men folks. It is interesting to note that when the researcher left the field work from Rajapar market the Lothas from the neighbouring areas like Akok, Bhandari, Champang Tsuroi came down to the market early in the morning with their commodities to sell in the market. By midday the traders especially the women were returning back in queue with their basket after shopping in the Rajapar market (Plate 3: Rajapar Market).

## 2.5 PHOM NAGAS

Longleng district is one of the eleven districts of Nagaland. According to the 2011 census Longleng district has a population of 50,593. Longleng has a sex ratio of 903 females for every 1000 males,<sup>[1]</sup> and a literacy rate of 73.1%. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longleng\\_district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longleng_district)). Longleng District is located between longitude 94°E - 95°E and latitude 26°N - 27°N of the Equator. Longleng District has a total area of 885 Sq. km. The altitude of the District varies from 150 Meters to 2000 Metres above the sea level. Longleng Town, the Headquarter is around 1100 Metres above sea level. The population of Longleng District is entirely tribal. The main inhabitants of Longleng District are from the Phom Tribe of Nagas. Phom is the main language spoken here. Longleng District is a strip of mountainous territory having no plains. Longleng District have One State and 3(three) District boundaries. On the East it shares boundary with Tuensang and Mon district of Nagaland. On North it has Nagaland's Inter-State boundary with Assam. On the west it shares boundary with Mokokchung District of Nagaland. On the South it shares boundary with Tuensang district of Nagaland. There are 38 recognized villages. It occupies the elongated Northern part of Nagaland State. (Fig 6. Map of Longleng).

The District can be divided into three regions topographically, namely:

1. Chingmei Range in the Northern part
2. Shemong Range in the Middle part
3. Yingnyu Range in the Southern part

The Phom Nagas are a notified tribal community of Nagaland (they are also called Kabha). The Phom area always remains enveloped by clouds. The cloud in local dialect is called Phom. Thus, the neighbouring communities such as the Aos and the Konyaks call them Phom. Their legend

narrates that their ancestors had migrated from Burma. They first settled in Chenjongliha area. From this place, their increasing population spread all over the Longleng district. This area comprises of 36 Phom villages in three circle area. The whole area falls on the north-western sub ranges of Patkai. This area comprises of three hilly terrains along with deep valleys, ranging from 650 to 2000 meters. The Dikhu and the Yangon rivers approximately make western as well as the eastern boundaries of the area, which is densely covered with sub-tropical vegetation. The Phoms have mongoloid features and speak the Phom dialect, which is one of the Naga dialects of Tibeto-Burman group. The dialect slightly varies from village to village (Singh. Et al 1994:120).

According to the Namsang Phom sources they settled at a place call Yingnyushang for many years. They finally left the place due to volcano eruption. The Phoms were of two brothers. Long came from the Ao side and Ying came from the Phom side. They came and settled at Namsang. The Phoms would often venture into the valley to collect vegetables and hunt animals. On one of such ventures Namsang people saw smoke emitting from a distance. They went to investigate the smoke and found two Ahoms floating on a banana raft. They met the Ahoms for the first time and later develop cordial relation with the Ahoms. The Namsang Phom addressed the Ahoms as Ahomba. When the Phom Naga came in contact with the Ahoms they exchanged gifts and gradually started barter system between them periodically. The Phoms did not carry out any business with others before their contact with Ahoms.

The first genuine relation between the Ahoms and the Phom Nagas took place during the Burmese aggression. Some Ahoms went to seek refuge from the Aos and Konyaks and some came to Namsang for refuge when Burmese aggression took place. The Namsang Phom was the largest and the most powerful villages among the Phoms Nagas. The Namsang Phoms defended the Ahoms and fought against the Burmese. Namsang Phom killed Manshingpho a fearsome

Burmese warrior and chased the Burmese till Dikhumuk-Sibsagar. They captured the land between Dikhu and Jhanji River up To Dikhumuk. They collected from the Manshingpho dead body two guns, numbers of swords, match box and a chili seed also known as Mans chili presently know as Rajamircha. According to the historical evidences each Ahoms returning from Namsang land after the Burmese war carried one pebble to count the head of those returning safe to their homeland. The pebbles were deposited at Bihubor which piled up to four feet in height and covered an area of 10 square feet. After the Burmese aggression the Namsang Phom Naga developed a good relation with the Ahom king Sukapha and several other Ahom Kings with some few minor incidents since 1228. The Namsang Phoms became good friends with the Ahoms from Rongpur or Sivasagar and gradually develop economic ties based on barter system. The word Shiva means God and Sagar means Ocean. In other words it means God Shiva Ocean. The Ahoms called the Namsang as Namsangia and the Phoms called the Ahoms as Ahomba.

In gratitude to the Namsang people the Ahom king made a friendship pact with them. The Ahom king as a sign of a goodwill gesture presented to the Namsang people betel nut and Pan leaves saplings to the Namsang people so that they would plant it and serve their purpose. They also gave buffalo while making Morung. Those Ahoms who returned safe after the Burmese aggression and settled down within the land now occupied by the Namsang Naga were made to pay the following items as land tax.

1. One basket of rice per house hold
2. One hen or duck per household
3. Two bunches of betel nuts per household
4. A cash of rupees two per household
5. One male buffalo collectively and annually

The Phom Naga also has a history of giving shelter to the fugitive Godadhar Singha who fled to Namsang for safety. He stayed in Namsang for two years and went back to become the king of Ahom. In return for saving his life the Ahom King presented several materials to the Namsang Phom as a token of love and friendship.

1. Solgen Idol
2. One Drum
3. Necklace
4. Betel plant for plantation
5. Agriculture seedlings.

#### **2.5.1 GELAGI KHAT**

Lahngoan also known as Geliki was four buras reserved by the Namsang Naga used as a resting place while coming down to Ahom plains to collect the annual taxes. Gelagi khat is considered to be the first market thereafter it was the market in Sibsagar. Facilities were provided for the Namsang Naga when they come down to collect the annual taxes for the land.

The following facilities in Lahangoan (Geliki) are.

1. One fishery pond with a fisherman name Moni Ram
2. One Blacksmith named Hari Koma
3. Three number of jack fruit trees
4. Three number of bamboo groves
5. One Kotoki to look after theses welfares.

All the tax was collected with the help of Kotoki. They collected the tax from the allotted land up to Nagajila or Nazira also known as Henghibal or Gelagi. The marketing place for the



Namsang Naga and the Ahom was Nagajila (now known as Nazira) and Hatnyu (big market). The commodities were exchanged on barter system (Plate 4).

Trade between the Phom and Ahoms were carried out regularly totally based on confidence. It was especially for the need of salt that the Phom Nagas went down for trade. The Phoms never showed any aggression towards the Ahoms nor cut their heads as it was reported with the other Naga tribes that carried out trade relation with the Ahoms. The khats were like a demarcation for the Namsang Phom where they can set their foot on Ahom soil without any restriction. It was also a way of protecting themselves from the Naga raids. Besides serving as a market place, the Khats consisted of a number of allotted lands for farming and fisheries for the Phom Nagas who had a friendly relation with the Ahoms also known as Bori or the submissive to Nagas. There were fishery ponds and farms for the khats care takers so that the Nagas will not venture beyond the khats for food nor cause trouble in the neighbouring village when they come down from the hills for trade. It was customary for the Phom Nagas to keep their spears and machete in the Khats and venture to the plains for trading expeditions as a sign of good faith. The Khats were also a resting place for the other Phom Nagas coming down from far-flung villages. The exhausted traders spent the night here and depart the next day. Apart from trading purposes, the khat also served as a refuge for the criminals, robbers or murderers who would take shelter in the khats for safety and protection. As long as they remained in the khat they could not be harmed by any one.

### **2.5.2 COMMODITIES**

Namsang was the biggest village among the Phom Nagas. It was the first village which carried out trade relations with the Ahoms on a wide scale. Other neighboring villages like Tamlu, Bora Namsang, Yongnya, Tangha, and Yongshei also started trade activities with the Ahoms however,

Namsang remained the chief village to have major contacts with the Ahoms. The Phom Nagas took down the following items for barter in the Khats – Pan leaves, Yam, Chili, Naga chili (even to this days), ginger, bamboo mat, broom, baskets, straps for the baskets made out of tree bark, sweet potatoes, tapioca, and black rice. They exchanged their goods with Salt, Sugar, Potatoes, white rice, mustard oil, jute mats and bags. Manufactured goods which were not available in their villages were mainly exchanged with their commodities. Cows and buffalos were among the two most important cattle bought by the Phoms in the market especially during the festive seasons. Oil and salt were an important commodities collected by the Phoms. Pan was the most important commodity in the Gelagi market. Wood from the Phoms areas was in demand since the quality of wood was better in order to make hoe.

The Phom Nagas did not take any permission to go down to the market from the village chief or the village head, neither did they take any permission in the market area since the khat was allotted to them by the Ahom King. There was no leader among the group going down to the Gelagi khat. The group always comprised of 10 to 20. Occasionally females also joined the group and went down to the khat for business but male folks were always in majority. Sometime eight to nine year old kids went down with their parents but it was normally the young and energetic youths that went down as they could defend and outrun the enemy or protect themselves from the wild animals if they encounter on their way. There are times when animals like tigers and even elephants have attacked the traders on their way to Gelagi. However, there was no record of attack from the enemies as the Namsang village was reputed to be the biggest and the most powerful one among the Phom villages therefore, no villages dared to attack them. The Phoms took two days to reach the Gelagi khat. The road between Gelagi and Namsang was

the only road used by the Phoms to maintain their relations with the Ahoms. This road was mainly used for trade purpose.

The relationship between the Phoms and Ahom extended further beyond the regular business. The Phoms were invited by the Ahoms during the celebration of Bihus. The Phoms were presented betel nuts, rice, Kamsa, wine, as well as the other food that were given to them as a sign of good will gesture. Every Phom Nagas would visit the houses but were not allowed in the Kitchen other than that they were welcome in any part of the house. Wherever the Phom Nagas were rejected they left the place by placing a curse on them. The Phoms usually slept in the friends place for one or two nights to do shopping in Assam since friendly relation was maintained between the Phom Nagas and the Ahoms those days. There are no records of any Phom Nagas that settled in the valley neither there were any inter marriage between the Phom Nagas and the Ahoms. The Phoms carried out minimum trade during the summer seasons despite the thick vegetations and the monsoon weather, but the best season was winter time for marketing as the weather was more suitable and the vegetation in the forest was accessible for the Phom people during the dry seasons.

The Phom Nagas never went beyond the Khat for shopping. Besides Nazaria/Gelagi there were no other markets for business transactions. The Gelagi Khat still exists. Till December 1973 tax of rupees 25 was collected from the Khat. Presently in the Phom Naga Hill, Longleng, Tamlu and Yongya township are the only marketing centres and are monopolized by bihari businessmen. Some of the essential commodities are imported from the plains of Assam (Singh. Et al 1949 :120).

From the resources we can say that there was a considerable communication between the Nagas and Ahom. Trade was the main agency through which the relationship was carried out on

the lines of social and political structure. The natural resources from the Naga hills provided as an excuse to enhance the trade relation where as the Ahoms continued to enjoy the revenue from the Nagas at the cost of the Naga khats. The main feature of the relation between the two communities was the friendly nature in which trade transaction was carried out. Both accumulated considerable wealth in terms of bartered goods. Though sometime there were difficulties in the relation due to unseen disputes between them. But the strength in the ability to handle the situations speaks volume of the effort these two communities put in to maintain peaceful atmosphere. The trade centres also became the centre for a source of information. The market place was also a place for spending one's leisure time and getting to know each other aside from doing business. Every possible resource was used to raise the quality of trade transactions. Quantity was there to meet the demands but at the same time quality was maintained. The trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms continued till the Burmese invasion and later on disrupted by the coming of the British raj in the North East India.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3.1 EARLY TRADE RELATION BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND AHOM**

The trade history between the Nagas and the Ahoms is very old. Trade started very early but took time to reach a comfortable level between the two communities. Initially the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms was nonexistent as the two communities were separated by the different geographical locations. The habits, cultures, traditions and customs were also very different from each other. These features did not encourage any challenges to discover each other nor were there any effort on each other's part to develop cordial relation for a long period of time.

The geographical feature was one of the major obstacles to initiate any contacts between the Nagas and Ahoms as the two communities were separated by dense forest and the uncultivated part of the valley were covered with impenetrable grass and thick vegetations. The greater part of the range was covered by varieties of tall trees and wild palm trees, cane, tall ferns and bamboos. In the lesser vegetation areas most of the open areas were covered with swampy parts and not safe for humans to explore. Unless they were on hunting expeditions, danger from the wild animals made it impossible for humans to roam freely in and out of the dense forest. Wild animals like elephants, rhinoceros, tiger, leopards, bears, wild dogs, wild hog, deer, buffaloes, and bison were found in large numbers. The environment and the situation thus did not provide any convenient means for easy accessibility and explore each other.

Normally, everyone had free access to the unoccupied dry lands for collection of fuel wood and building materials or for grazing their livestock (Goswami 2012:30). Thus the Nagas seldom ventured beyond their boundaries as S. K. Bhuyan, (1965: 41) writes "One of the lessons

which the tribals can tell us is their self-sufficient domestic economy. They are less dependent on supplies from outside”. They led a life of a self sufficient domesticated economy and were not dependent on outside resources. The stable diet of the Nagas included rice, millet and maize with a good mixture of fresh or smoked meat that ranges from rat to squirrel, bear, deer, porcupine, monkey and rabbit in addition to cow, buffalo, pig, chicken, goat, mithun and dog. Fish and eggs are other favorites. In difficult times jungle roots, tubers, stems, fruits and bamboo shoots come handy. Bunks of the grain are kept in grain huts on the fringe of the village (Sardeshipande 1987: 162).

Although there were few instances of rare encounters between the Nagas and Ahom and records of gifts exchanged between them but beyond that there are no records of any economic relations in the early stage. Contacts were periodical and very less at short intervals particularly from the Nagas which probably might be due to the fact that the Nagas from time immemorial had lived in isolation. The Nagas usually dwell in places that separates them from others even though they spend most of their time outdoors for cultivation, hunting and fishing their settlements were confined in the high lands that are higher than the land around it and surrounded by natural vegetations leading a comfortable but an isolated life.

The Naga live a close knit society based on patriarchal system. Nagas did not associate much with others and did not keep a wide circle of contact with other villages. This might be one reason why Nagas did not venture out much besides being self sufficient courtesy of the geographical location. Threats from the enemies might have also let the Nagas to take more precautions and that might have prevented them from venturing out regularly. The Nagas traditions and culture filled with myths, taboos and legends might have prevented them from intermixing or associating with the Ahoms to a larger extend.

The villages were also in a state of isolation from each other. The villages were situated five to ten kilometer apart and to negotiate it in the pathless jungle it would be double the distance. As a result of this isolation every villages had to develop everything by its own. Not only that, but head hunting being an accepted social and prestigious practice, it was necessary that every village must have its own defense. From this point of view every Naga village was situated on the top of a hill or at the foot of a hill it becomes vulnerable to enemy attack. On the other hand if it is placed on the top of a hill it not only commands the surrounding area but it becomes easier to defeat the attackers from whom it is difficult to climb up the hills and raid the village. For all these things villages are situated on well defensible position (Ghosh 1982:196). Thus one of the main reasons for the isolation can be the existence of head-hunting practice amongst the Naga tribes. The fear of attacks from enemy often prevented them to venture beyond their comfort zone unless they were safe in big groups and protected from being harmed. Each tribe had to depend exclusively on its resources available in the surrounding area and they were thoroughly able to maintain themselves. We may ascribe the existence of numerous dialects amongst the Naga tribes to this practice of head-hunting which kept them isolated from one tribe to the other (Devi 1968: 21). Head hunting was an inseparable ritual of animist religion, a religion largely devoid of moral code and mental upliftment, but predominantly subservient to a rigid practice of rituals and sacrifices that were remotely connected with the well being and fertility on any rational basis but firmly believed in by everyone as sacrosanct. Heads had to be brought to combat epidemic, failure of crops and any other natural calamity; and also to anticipate fertility and dominance over other surrounding villages. The religious head hunting ritual had another socio- political manifestation, that of bringing about coalitions of villages to attack the common foe, even where every village was every other's enemy (Sardeshipande 1987: 124). Another reason for their isolation was the constant threat of war between the Naga villages

due to disputes or animosity. The Nagas appears to be constantly on a regular perpetual war with one another. The dominant Nagas naturally ruled over the weaker villages and inhabit the fertile land where food was produced in abundance. The submissive villages served the powerful villages in obtaining their daily needs as a part of tributes. There were also other independent Naga villages that coexisted purely on a good diplomatic level. Inter marriages or sharing the forest land and products on proper understanding were some major factors for peaceful coexistence between the villages.

We cannot leave out the fact that the aggressive nature of the Nagas posed as a great hindrance to foresee any kind of deal between the Nagas and Ahom. The reputation of the Nagas as head hunters did not help either as anyone from the plains initiating contacts with the Nagas in the hills for any kind of work would be doing so with a great risk of losing their own lives specially due to the hostilities between the Naga villages. Nagas would not hesitate to attack any outsiders or weaker villages as an act of revenge or for mere plunder. However, the Nagas and Ahom could not remain entirely isolated from each other for a very long time without any major contacts as from both side population increased and habitation of the villages expanded making the contacts between the two communities inevitable. The Nagas and Ahom could no longer remain aloof from each other as at some point of time circumstance would make them to cross paths thus bringing them together at comfortable level with each other leading to a slow but healthy development of communication even before the relationship on trade line began on a full scale. The two communities would often encounter each other on hunting and fishing expeditions or sometimes when they visit each other's domain during festival and on other courtesy calls.

The initial Buranjis records show how the Ahoms under their king Sukapha encountered the Nagas when they crossed the Naga hills. The chronicles of the Ahom kings, or the Buranjis



as they are called, report that it was through the land of the Nagas that in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom, came with his army over the hilly country of the Patkai range. The country from which Sukapha came was called 'Maolung' according to the Buranjis (Devi 1968: 22). Ramunny (1988:10) states that "The Nagas resisted the advance of the Ahoms into Assam through their land and there were fierce fighting in many places". The first contact with the Nagas was violent and many lives were lost. The early part of the history shows how the Nagas resisted the Ahoms when they entered the Naga territories. The Ahoms under king Sukapha in turn retaliated by suppressing the stubborn Nagas. The Ahoms plundered and killed the defiant Nagas in masses. In order to teach the rebellious Nagas a lesson and to set an example to the other hill tribes the Ahom King Sukapha roasted the flesh of the slain Nagas and let their own family members and relatives eat the flesh. Many Nagas who encountered those incidents were intimidated enough not to come in the way of the Ahom invasion though not for long as history of Nagas aggression repeated and the uncontrollable nature of the raiding Nagas ever remained as a thorn in the flesh of the Ahoms. A study of the Ahom-Naga relation reveals sporadic clashes for one reason or the other throughout the six hundred years of Ahom rule in Assam. But the Nagas rebelled against this imposed subjugation effectively, and numerous expeditions had to be dispatched from the valley. In many of these the Ahoms suffered more losses than the Nagas (Ramunny 1988: 11). No amount of suppression and expedition could bring the Nagas to their knees neither could the Ahoms carry out full scale expedition to the Naga Hills due to the climatic nature and the rough terrain of the thick forest in the hills.

All Throughout the Ahom period of about six hundred years, the Nagas in their village 'Republics' continued to live in their own ways. Their hatred of the outsiders and intruder increased, their isolation continued and their resolve to preserve their land and traditions were

strengthened. The intense love of independence of the hillmen, and the resentment at the subordinate status which Ahoms tried to impose on them, forced them to stand up against the intruders. This is the basic characteristic and psychology of the Nagas which we see all along the centuries of their history. The Ahoms on the other hand had to keep their route to their original home clear. They felt that the only way to do so would be to subjugate the Nagas. But all their efforts, starting from the barbarous action of Sukapa, only infuriated the Nagas. When the Nagas raided the plains the Ahoms took prompt action every time, even though fighting in the hills against the inhabitants was a difficult proposition and very little war booty was available (Ramunny 1988: 11). The Nagas nature of raiding the plain areas and plundering the food stocks, other important commodities and even men and women as captives made the Ahom kings to suppress the Nagas and introduced a system of collecting taxes from the Nagas which was usually in kind. Whenever the Ahom kings succeeded in dominating the Nagas they would bring down food crops and other forest products to the Ahom kings as tributes.

The only alternative for the Ahoms to coexist with the Nagas peacefully was to reconcile and extend friendly gestures. One of the first steps of reconciliation was allotting revenue free lands to the Nagas known as Khats. Some Nagas despite their aggression became submissive to the Ahom king and lived in peace and harmony as long as they paid their tributes and were suppressed by the Ahoms as of when required. By then the Nagas were also venturing into the valley and occasionally keeping in touch with the Ahom though in a limited and restricted manner. There are stories of encounters between the Nagas and Ahoms and how they came in contact with each other followed by occasional visitation to each other especially during the festivals. The Nagas visited the plains more than the Ahoms most probably out of curiosity.

The Ahom rulers of Assam were confronted with the additional responsibility of protecting the subjects from the inroads of the tribes inhabiting the hills on the immediate borders, almost all of whom were of a most rapacious nature, and anxious for opportunities of plunder. Attempts were made to adjust the mutual relations, but their strict observance could not be usually enforced as the tribesmen lived in inaccessible hills and forests, and the conduct of expedition against them was invariably a matter of extreme difficulty.

The whole burnt of tribal ferocity fell upon the inhabitants of the tracts lying between the foot of the hills and the extremities of the plains. This belt of land was very fertile, and produced abundance of rice, cotton and other staples valued by the neighbouring hillmen. It was intersected by a number of Duars or passes through which the hill people maintained their contact with the plains. The ownership of this belt was claimed by the Ahom government, but it could enforce its claim only when it was strong enough to expel the tribal intruders. But when the government was weak the hillmen swept down the plains on marauding excursions and carried off property and men from the Duars; and they did not even hesitate to claim ownership over this zone. The crops, cattle and other property were constantly at the mercy of the hillmen. The Ahom government was compelled to be ever-vigilant, and its weakness was reflected in the increased transgressions of the stipulated limits (Bhuyan 1949:34).

The Nagas with whom the Ahoms came in contact while crossing the hill regions were mostly towards the foothill areas only. By the time the Ahom wave hit the hill regions most of the Naga tribes has grown into a large population and spread out to the different part of the hills. Many Naga villages were divided into smaller villages with smaller tribes and clan that migrated to different part of the region. Some of the Nagas who resided in the foot hills from time to time came in contact with the plain areas. According to S.K.Bhuyan (1949:41) the Nagas are divided

into several tribes, each possessing distinct characteristics; and they have also entered into the composition of a few other tribes and races who are now known by different names. The Buranjis of the Ahoms, however, refer to those Naga tribes with whom they came into contact not by these names but by Assamese names like Khamjangias, Aitonias, Tablungias, Namchangias etc. in some places they do not mention the name of the Naga tribe or clan, but state the names of the several villages against which expeditions were sent again in some places they refer to them by the general term 'Naga' (Pronounced Noga). According to L. Devi(1968:18) the Assamese names of these Naga tribes originated from the duars or passes through which their inhabitants descended into the plains or from the important Naga villages or places of the plains situated at or near about the entrance of the passes.

The Nagas curiosity and adventurous spirit developed into a habit of going down to the plains to visit the Ahoms. The Nagas never shut themselves from the people living in plain areas like wise the Ahoms had the accessibility to the hill people. According to S.K. Bhuyan (1965:45) The Nagas are one of the most numerous tribes inhabiting the borders of Assam. They thus occupy the whole hill country bordering upon the plains districts of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lalkihmpur. They are also found along the northern slopes of the Patkai mountain. The Nagas can be divided into two classes; those who live at a little distance from the plain districts, and those who live in the interior hills. The language spoken by these tribesmen are different from each other, and also their manners and customs. The Nagas are again divided into a number of sub-tribes, each speaking a dialect entirely different from those used by the other sub-tribes (Bhuyan 1965:45). The Nagas came in more frequent touch with the Assamese than the other tribes; but the relations were mostly confined to the Nagas occupying the low hills (Bhuyan 1965:52). The other Naga tribes, however, seems to have remained uninfluenced by civilizing

influenced from outside till the advent of the British, when the Christian Missionaries began to penetrate into the hill areas of Assam and preached Christianity amongst the tribal people (Devi 1968:19)

Regular interaction between the Nagas and Ahom began as they discovered common interest in each other's culture, society and tradition but most importantly common economic interest in their commodities fulfilling each other's requirements. The essential products available from the hills and the plains were indispensable items needed by both communities. The Nagas sought the commodities available from the Ahoms for their benefits and often attempted to acquire beyond their means. The commodities produced from the respective locations were different due to the geographical features therefore the resources had a positive impact as the goods complimented each other's requirements.

In the earlier times whatever little trade the Nagas carried out was limited to its neighbouring villages in the hills especially between those villages on good terms. Trade was simple and rather unorganized as their economy was based more on hunting and fishing occupation. In a way this did not create any opportunity to expand economically in a broad manner. Trade in the plain was more developed and well organised as compared to the Nagas hills. Under the Ahom rulers the Country was on the whole prosperous. The Ahom economic condition shows that the country enjoyed stability and with large tracts of lands. It had developed a good system of agriculture, industry and trade. The existence of strong and well organised central authority contributed to make the country rich and self sufficient. Industry was highly developed in the Ahom period. There are references of weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in Ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. They made their boxes, trays, stools and chairs by carving them out of a single block of wood (Gait 2008: 271). The land of Ahoms were

connected to agricultural communities with resources to mining areas from metals, strong trade systems, livestock, river boats and bullock carts for easy transport and communications. The economic prosperity of the Ahoms is reflected from the exquisite beads for necklace for ornaments, metal tools and potteries that were produced by the large numbers of artisans. Ahoms were far superior in the living standard as compared to the Nagas who preferred an isolated life style. Ahoms experienced one of the finest examples of flourishing trade and agriculture based economy. The land being fertile and with sound network of irrigation Ahoms thrived on the cultivation of crops like wheat, rice, mustards and other vegetables. Apart from the subsistence of agriculture and hunting, the people made a living by trading with different goods produced from their land. Active trading activities were found in the plains by the Ahoms with the neighbouring peoples which shows that they were not confined to the boundaries of their own places. Trading helped the Ahoms to expand its culture by coming into contacts with the others.

The Ahoms were promoters of trade just like other rulers, and their diplomatic relations with the neighbouring states and tribes centered, in many cases, round the object of introducing free commercial intercourse to the advantage of both the parties. The Ahom government aimed at making their market secure and free so that people of the adjacent territories could frequent them with commodities and thereby contribute to the maintenance of a steady income from market duties and customs revenue. The Ahom government interested itself in the trade of the frontier tribes, though it was conducted on a small scale, as large scale production was unknown to the frontier tribesmen (Bhuyan 1949:49). It is a mistake to suppose that the hill men lived apart from the plain folk. They were inter-dependent for the products of the forests and mines, and the labours of the cottage handlooms; and in times of emergencies each sought the other's help. (Bhuyan 1965:39).

### **3.2 KHAT**

Ahom kingdom soon flourished into a busy trading centre. Traders in and around from the plains areas and the hills men carried out active trade with the Ahoms. Nagas were not far behind and benefited the most as they eagerly joined the trading opportunity with the Ahoms. The Ahoms realised that the first step to end the rivalry with the Nagas was to extend friendship. One of the major steps in that approach was creating a relationship from the economic point by opening a market for trade transactions which came to be known as khats. History has shown that trade has been the best way to create friendship, economic growth and long time prosperity. The initiation for trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom was by no means a failure as it yielded fruits and trade began to expand beyond the social and political ties. Relationship based on mutual respect and understanding between the two communities enhanced with exception to the aggressions from the untamed Nagas time to time.

In an entirely different way also, some of the Naga tribes had friendly relation with the Ahom rulers. This was mainly due to the farsightedness of King Pratap Singha (1603-41). Most of these tribes, as already stated, were deficient in some of the necessities of life which compelled them to commit raids in the plains below in order to fill up those deficiencies. King Pratap Singha who clearly grasped the situation allotted to the Naga Chiefs of these area small plots of revenue-free land called “Naga-Khats” along with retainers (bahatias) to be managed by Assamese Agents called Naga Katakis, for the benefit of the Naga tribes. Some of the tribes were assigned fishing waters also. In return for these assignments, however, King Pratap Singha made the Naga Chiefs acknowledge the supremacy of the Ahom king by regularly paying tribute with their hill products. The introduction of this system proved to be very successful (Devi 1968 44). The Ahom rulers considered it enough to receive the submission of the Nagas and to allow them

to enjoy their tribal autonomy so long as the Nagas living near the plains who were granted revenue free lands and fishing waters along with retainers in the plains, did not raid Ahom territories (Devi 1968:47). The estates thus granted were known as Naga-Khats, and they were managed by Assamese agents called Naga katakis. It was custom for the Nagas to leave their spears at their Katakis' house as they came down from the hills on trading expeditions, and to reclaim them on their return (Bhuyan 1965:52). The Ahom kings allotted khats to the Nagas with the intention to have friendly relations and convert the casual trade communications into a regular trading economy to serve the interest of both the communities. The khats geared to serve the interest of trade between the Ahoms and the Nagas. The permission to trade in the khats areas marked a swift opening up of communications with the other hill tribes. The Nagas went down to the khats with a purpose of making profit through trade. They introduced many hand made goods and other natural resources in the markets. They made use of the market place to their advantage. The goods brought to the khats by the Nagas found a very eager and profitable market. The khats became the source of accumulating raw materials and a market for finished goods as well. Trade was carried out through barter system. All this was done for the benefit of the Naga tribes of the area and to prevent their raids into the plains (Ramunny 1988:12). Besides the Ahoms could not ignore the Nagas who came down regularly to the valleys with their commodities for trading purpose.

According to Rattan (2004:44) granting lands to the Nagas has double meanings to achieve the wishes and objectives of the king as such:

- (i) To establish friendly relationship between the two communities.
- (ii) To develop trade and commerce by way of exchanging their products at the khats.



The Ahom King granted plots of land to the Nagas at the foot hills so that trade could be carried out under their surveillance and also provide security to the Ahoms from the Nagas. Trade was generally carried out only in the khats allotted by the Ahom kings to the Nagas. A line had to be drawn by the Ahom king so that the Nagas would not venture beyond the allotted place and any sort of communication between them would be carried out from the demarcated boundaries only, reason being mainly due to the Nagas way of plundering and raiding practice. The plot of land allotted to the Nagas for trading purpose later became the permanent market place. All the goods and products were brought in the Khat areas and exchanged between the Nagas and Ahoms. The primitive nature of the society did not allow any innovative ideas to carry out in the market transactions other than the traditional ways where the market was based on barter system. The barter system remained the main basis of trade system till the real money was introduced. The barter system was not very ideal due to the time and effort it consumed when searching for mutual needs. However, it was considered to be the most efficient and convenient method those days.

The early trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms was only for the requirement of basic commodities. Initially the Nagas went down to the plains to collect commodities when it was festive season or to stock commodities when it dry season. The Nagas also went down to the plains as guest when invited by the Ahoms to attend their bihu festivals. On such ventures the Nagas would take with them commodities like salt, dry fish, cotton, pan leaves, pig hairs, animal skin, horns, bones, teeth etc, hoes made of hard wood, bamboo and cane baskets, yams, millets, sesame, honey wax and other vegetables, animals and fowls. The need for basic requirements like salt, dried fish, tea leaves, iron, cowries shell, conch shell etc made the Nagas to venture into the valley and make contacts with the Ahoms on a regular basis which later developed into the

lines of social, political and economic relations. The market system was transparent and quick. The transaction was done very efficiently early in the morning and by midday it was over. All the traders dealt with the commodities of their specialties. Their goods and produces would become dominant commodities in the market place. The inherent efficiency and transparency of transactions in the marketplaces encouraged the economic advantages. Market was open for production and distribution of commodities based on the supply and demand from the hills and the plain people.

The Nagas were noted as good trackers so they had no problem of finding their way down to the khats for marketing on weekly basis. Market was earmarked on a particular day where everyone was aware and was ready for trade activity. Calculation for the market day was usually done by observing the movements of the moon, change in weather and movements of birds and animals. There are occasions when the traders even keep a look out for the birds singing in the forest to know the right time to venture to the market. Nevertheless the Nagas always knew that winter season was the best to visit the khats since the forest was clear by then and river crossings were also easier. There was also less chance of losing their way during winter season. Protection from insect and animals could be also easily taken care of.

The Nagas realized the advantages of such institutions and became a regular visitor to the khats for trading purpose. There was a considerable improvement in the relationship between the Nagas and Ahom trade relation as the market expanded and became more accessible. The Nagas made progress in their trade activity without getting much priority to the development of roads and other means of transport and communications. Neither cattles nor other kinds of animals were used much for transporting the goods. Everything was carried out manually on the head or on their backs preferable with bamboo basket or straps made out of jute and tree barks. The

Ahoms on the other hand produced a stable and secure kind of transportation network that allowed them to trade with the Nagas freely and in abundance. The economic organization of the trade was very simple as it was mainly supported by agricultural and forest products with rare industrial products from the Ahoms. The Khats became the prominent trading centres with network spreading to the neighbouring villages. It soon turned out into trading colonies.

Throughout the history of trade relations between the Nagas and Ahoms the opportunity for communications was not taken for granted as there were records of mutual respect and cordial relationship. Both the parties made sure that they collected and exchanged all the essential commodities since trade was seasonal and not on a daily basis. All the transactions were finished within a day and did not prolong for another day. The market usually starts early in the morning and would be over by mid day since the Nagas would return to the hills the same day with some exception to few who stayed back and left at day break the next day

The Nagas did not inhabit the allotted places but kept it for trade purposes. The Khats were also a resting place for the Nagas coming down from far-flung villages. The exhausted traders spent the night in the Khats and depart the next day since it was not safe to return back the same day for some of the Nagas coming from greater distance. Sometimes the Naga traders would stay for eight to nine days in the khats. It was customary for the Nagas to keep their spears, shields and daos in the Khats when they come down from the hills and venture to the plains for trading expeditions. The khat also served as a refuge for the criminals, robbers or murderers who would take shelter in the khats for safety and protection. As long as they remained in the khat they could not be harmed by any one.

There were care takers in the khats from the people living in the plains usually Ahoms also known as kotokies. The kotokies were the agents from the plains who look after a small plot

of revenue free land called Naga khats on behalf of the Naga tribes. They also carry out the duty entrusted to them sincerely and act as the middle man between the Nagas and the Ahoms. They were responsible for the maintenance of the khats reserved for the Nagas in the plains. Any important message from the Ahoms to the Nagas would be carried out through this kotokies. They were allowed to occupy the area and maintained it by paying taxes in cash or in kind. They occupied the prime land of the khats. They cultivated the paddy and other vegetables. The kotokies repaired the Duars from time to time and a small fee was paid to the Nagas as a kind of revenue called posa. Payment was done once in May-June and once in the month of November at the time of repairing the duar. It was a regular and traditional contribution to the Naga villages which was continued for centuries. The Ahoms never failed to pay the tax but in case of a failure, tax was compensated with three and half kg of rice, a pot of local drinks or a cock. Apart from maintaining the marketing places the Ahoms also cultivated the land. The Ahoms gifted hens and ducks to the Nagas when they left for the hills. Whenever the Nagas go down to the khats in the valleys to do marketing as well as collect tax annually they visited the Ahoms. If the Ahoms refuses to welcome any Naga, they left the place by placing a curse on them. Out of fear, the Nagas were never turned away and were always welcome to stay with whosoever the Nagas chooses to put up with.

There was no provision for any make shift khats so whenever there was dispute between the two communities the Duars were closed to the Nagas. The Nagas tried their best to maintain peace between them so that trade relations between them would not be disrupted. The other Nagas having contacts with the Naga traders also followed certain system of rules for correct conduct and procedures to be followed in the trade conduct between the villages. They never go against a village having the status of being prosperous and having contacts with the Ahoms.

They depended on these villages for procuring the necessary commodities from the plain areas. Above all there was always a common courtesy between any Naga villages so it was not hard to maintain proper conduct in terms of showing respect and good manners. High standard of decorum was usually required when visiting one another village for trade or for other purposes. It is generally understood that the biggest and the most powerful village usually took the first privileges to select the items of their liking which was to be followed by the lesser powerful village in order of merit. The weaker villages always accepted their status as they owe due allegiance to the powerful villages in terms of support and protection from their enemies.

Corner stone was usually erected demarcating the Khats also known as Tohondor Ali meaning Road for the Nagas. In the later years the market places were gradually occupied by the Ahoms because the Nagas could not go down to the areas regularly. When the British took control of these areas they stopped the Nagas from venturing into the valleys for six months during the monsoon months due to the harsh weather and diseases. Thus, in a year the Nagas were allowed to venture into the valleys for six months only. Approximately there were 24 recognized Khats as per the government record. The land Pattas were issued by the British Government when they saw the prevailing condition of the Khats they recognized it besides, it was an order issued by the Ahom King.

The khats tell us about the nature of trade and cultural changes that took place in the early stages of the trade relations between the Nagas and the Ahoms. Once the khats fully developed into a busy trading center it began to serve as an open market to both sides and increased the stability and predictability of the trading environment between the two communities. The khats served to benefit both the communities basing on resources from their geographical locations. The khats concerns with the study and understanding of the human past of how the people

organised themselves into social groups and took advantage of their surroundings. How they communicated and why their culture changed. The study enlarged the aim of learning more about the relation between Ahoms and the Nagas.

### **3.3.1 SOME OF THE NAGA VILLAGES THAT CARRIED OUT TRADE IN THE FOOTHILLS AREAS:**

#### **3.3.2 AO NAGA VILLAGES**

1. Mopungchuket
2. Changki
3. Molongkimong
4. Mernkpu
5. Yachang
6. Longan
7. Debuia
8. Khar
9. Mongchen
10. Changdang
11. Nokpu
12. Nokpuyimjen
13. Lirmen
14. Waromong

### **3.3.3 LOTHANAGA VILLAGES**

1. Akok
2. Chamgpang
3. Tsuroi
4. Yingsung
5. Bhandari
6. Yanmhon
7. Longchum
8. Pangti
9. Lakhuti

### **3.3.4 PHOM NAGA VILLAGES**

1. Namsang
2. Phongon

### **3.3.5 KONYAK NAGA VILLAGES**

1. Wakching
2. Wangching
3. Jaboka
4. Konngan

## **3.4 DUARS**

Due to the acute hardship faced by the Nagas travelling through the thick forest and rough terrains very few Nagas took up trade as a regular activity. In difficult places the paths were cut

freshly by passers who use it sparingly specially during the trading seasons. Most of the paths lead through bamboo jungles along the side of hills on a narrow path crossing cliffs and good roads as well which need not be maintained all throughout the year. Each step was taken with great care and at the risk of losing even their lives. There were even river crossing areas which were often risky. It took two to three days for the Nagas to come down from the hills and reach the Khats. They would come down in a group of not less than five persons who can defend or out run enemies and wild animals. Sometimes the male groups were accompanied by small numbers of females and kids.

The Nagas regularly used a particular route to go down to the plains and communicate with the Ahoms. These passages known as duars were constructed on mutual understanding and maintained by both the parties to promote an effective implementation of regular trading activities. The duars were the major connectivity which later on became their main life line for the two communities. The Nagas carried out all the necessary trading activities in the khats with the Ahoms through the duars. During festivities the Nagas and the Ahoms keep in touch with each other by using the duars.

The Naga tribes communicating with the plain people were recognized by the name of the duar or passes they used.

- (i) Namsangia
- (ii) Joboka
- (iii) Tublunggia
- (iv) Assiringia



The important duars between the river of Dikhu and Doyang rivers in the Naga hills are:

1. Assiringia Duar
2. Namsangia Duar
3. Dopdar
4. Doyangia
5. Hathiguria
6. Pane Phat

These duars served as the meeting point for the people of Ahom and the Naga Hills. During the reign of Ahom King Godapani roads like Dodhar Ali, Akar Ali and other roads were also constructed for the benefit of Nagas using the duars. Provisions like wells were constructed for the benefit of the Nagas. Sometimes the trade was disturbed when the Nagas carried out raids or plunder in the plains and in retaliation the Ahoms blocked the duars till the culprit was produced for justice. These were the times when trade was halted for time being.

### **3.5 SALT WELLS**

Originally Nagas were living in a condition of village state. Every village was self contained unit and it used to have its own cultivable lands, forest, water sources etc. whatever the village needed. The only thing it did not have was salt. Some villages had brine wells but most of the villages did not have it. Therefore they use to bring it from the Ahoms during the early Naga and Ahom contact (Ghosh 1982:195). The Nagas used to purchase the salt from the plains by bartering with their produce of ginger, cotton, chilli, mustard seed etc. Trade took a new turn with the introduction of salt. There was a large influx of salt traders making it into one of the most important commodity for the Nagas. The subsequent demand for salt encouraged the Nagas

to carry out consistent trade with the Ahoms. Almost all the produced was exchanged with salt. Traders assembled at the khats mainly for salt as it had rather high value in the market.

From the sources and information available the traditional way of making the salt was done by collecting water from strongly saturated salt water from brine well in a hollow trunk or a bamboo bucket. The mixture of salty water from the well was used especially to preserve or add flavor to the food. The salt continued to have high value for a long time and remained as the main item used for bartering in the market. The Nagas were manufacturing salt of their own but the quality was not as good as the ones produced by the Ahoms thus they often procured salt from the plains. The salt manufactured by the Nagas can scarcely compete with that produced by the Ahoms. The Naga mode of manufacturing the salt was exceedingly crude and the process both slow and wasteful. The Ahoms had maximum salt well under their possession but they always eyed for the ones in the foothills under the Nagas. There were numerous salt wells in the plain areas controlled by the Nagas which became a bone of contention as Assam had to depend on the Nagas for the of salt sources. This often resulted in dispute between the two communities.

Among the items that the Nagas collected from the Ahoms in the markets, Salt was no doubt the most important commodity. In the Naga territories where there were no salt mines they cooperated and gave their annual tributes to the Ahoms but the Naga tribes that had to share the salt mines with the Ahoms continued to clash with the Ahoms.

The exchange values for salt differed from commodities to commodities which were as follows:

1. 1 kg of cotton was exchanged with 15 kg of salt
2. 10 kg of black sesame was exchanged with 30 kg of salt

3. 1 fowl was exchanged with 1 packet of salt
4. 1 day's wage was paid in kind of 1 fowl or 1 packet of salt

Items like lac, cotton, jute etc which had major exchange value were soon replaced by the increase in demand for salt and iron implements like dao, knives, sickles, spade. According to Longphek Konyak from Phongon Village, under Mon district, the main commodities that the Konyaks exchanged with Ahoms were betel nut and salt. He further states that the most expensive commodities in the market were brass bells or gongs, elephant tusk, cows, buffalos, salt, cotton, dried fish and black sesame seeds. However cotton continued to be the main commodity for barter system followed by cows.

Unlike our present time or the British time when salt used to be imported from the western coast, in the earlier days salt was a rarity and precious. It was an essential commodity for both the Nagas and the Ahoms equally, but the Nagas did not have many brine wells in the hills whereas the Ahoms had it in the plains as well as in the foot hills. There were a number of brine wells in the Naga areas and therefore the Ahoms used to maintain good relations with them so that the Ahoms from that locality can use the salt from those wells. The Nagas of Namsang area also had a good number of salt wells within their territory and so the neighbouring tribes used to pay tribute to the Namsang chiefs to make use of those wells. This made the Namsang chief very rich. The Ahoms also used those wells and as a result this Naga group had direct relation with the Ahom capital and they rose to prominence. They mixed up with the Ahoms so much that they adopted the ways of life of the plains people. At the same time there were some eighty five brine wells in the foothills under the Ahoms. Nagas needed to use those well so they not only maintained good relations with the local people but also used to pay annual taxes to the Ahom

kings for use of those wells. Even during the time of Purandar Singh the last Ahom monarch, this system was in vogue (Ghosh 1982:75).

The Buranjis of the Ahoms reveal that clashes of the Ahom ruler with the Nagas which began from the very beginning of their rule in Assam continued throughout the entire period of their rule in the land. This fact shows that the land of the Nagas had strategic importance to the Ahom rulers. From the economic point of view also the land of the Nagas had its importance to the Ahom rulers (Devi 1968: 21). When the Ahoms arrived and wanted possession over the salt mines in Naga areas, it was very much resented and resisted. The Ahoms entered into north east Assam from Burma through the Panchore pass over the Patkoi via the Nongyang lake and through the land of Nagas of Tirap District of present Arunachal Pradesh. They belonged to the Mongoloid race. From the Buranjis we find that it was through the land of the Nagas that Sukapha in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century came with his army over the hilly country of the Patkoi range.

The trouble with the Nagas, who lived on the low hills of Tirap close to the plains of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur district were due to economic reasons. Ahoms had to fight the Nagas to get exclusive possession of salt wells. It was with great reluctance that the Nagas agreed to share the salt wells with the Ahoms. But they still occasionally raided the people near the salt mines. Ahoms in return dispatched punitive expeditions. The salt mines were in Naga territory and the Ahoms needed them. This was another reason for the continued hostility between the Ahom rulers and the Naga people of that area (Ramunny 1988: 11). The Nagas occasionally committed raids upon the people of the salt mines under the control of the Ahoms and the Ahom government, on its part had to send punitive expeditions against them to retain their rights on these salt mines. This economic interest of the Ahoms in the salt mines thus stood as one of the

most important barriers in the way of establishing friendly relations between the Ahoms and the Naga tribes of this area possessing salt wells in their territories. Friendly relation however developed between the Ahom rulers and some of these Naga tribes whose chiefs were in the habit of visiting the Ahom kings at their capital and also of inviting the armed intervention of the Ahom government against one another in their own inter-tribal conflicts. The other Nags tribes also, after their defeat acknowledge the supremacy of the Ahom rulers and established friendly relations by offering presents and agreed to pay annual tributes though of course, they often flouted their agreement (Devi 1968: 43). Most of the tributes paid by the Nagas to the Ahoms were fowls, cattles, cotton, betel nuts, sesame seed, elephant tusk etc in return for arable land. The salt wells in the Hills are for the most part the sole property of the Nagas.

In some of the wells the former Assam government obtained a joint property, the Nagas having a right to draw the brine for a certain number of hours and the government for an equal period. The salt that came annually from the Naga Hills amounted to about 650 maunds. Several vegetables and mineral substances were also found in the Naga hills, bay leaf, several spices of laurels, and wild plants in considerable quantities (Bhuyan 1965: 52). The Ahoms gained considerable revenue from the salt trade with the Nagas. Nagas brought annual presents of hill products. This procedure adopted by the king was very successful particularly in the area where there were no salt mines. The tribes who had to share the salt mines continued to have clashes with the Ahoms (Ramunny 1988:12).

Inspite of the varying degree of remoteness, one fact is sure that the two elements of Assam's population have been living in intimate contact on account of the exigencies of neighborliness and other indispensable requirements of close proximity. The culture of Assam has developed in a manner which makes this intimacy and contacts advantageous to both parties.

Isolation or separation was outside the scope of the intentions of Assam statesmen and leaders. Their objective was always to bring the two elements as much closer as possible. The very independence and solidarity of Assam attained in maintaining a closer understanding and a spirit of mutual dependence between the two (Bhuyan 1965:44)

The hostility and apprehension was replaced by friendly relation as trade developed between the Nagas and Ahoms. The early trade relation was beneficial for both the communities but it had its limitations from the commercial point as trade was introduced mainly to serve their domestic purposes. On one hand trade was to serve the subsistence needs of the Nagas and not for profit where as on the other hand trade served the purpose of the Ahoms in controlling the salt wells and containing the Nagas from plundering their territories time and again. Trade was carried out based on a barter system and was not extensive. The goods brought to the market complimented both the needs and demands of the two communities. The goods varied from food commodities like yam, sesame, honey, brinjals, chilies, lac, animal meat, animal hair, bones, horns, skins, teeth and elephant tusk, cowries shells, cottons, salts, wools, woods and handicrafts products like baskets, bamboo mats, irons and implements and decorative piece with different color. Lack of proper development in marketing system also attributed to the differences in demand and supply as initially the trade did not progress much.

Assam had to depend on products of the hills and had the hillmen to depend upon the products of the Assam plains. There was thus considerable commerce between the two areas which also encouraged the improvement of the social relations and mutual understanding (Bhuyan, 1965: 46). However, it was not easy for the Nagas and Ahoms to carry out any kind of trade freely because the Nagas were settled in an environment not easily assessable to others besides they were headhunters by nature and the Ahoms were not impressed by the Nagas

reputation and ways of uncivilized ways of life and so the Ahoms tried to keep distance from them. The Nagas carrying our trade in the khat areas were treated with suspicion. The duar (passes) were sometimes closed to the Naga traders due to the relentless plunders in the plains by them.

One of the major outcomes of the initial trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom was the development of friendly ties and interaction on a large scale. There was more interaction and freedom of movements from each other's territories without any fear of attacks or intimation from either party. Friendly gestures were more common than war cry. There were no issues like land encroaching or stealing of properties as the nature of communication was clearly understood and respected by both communities. No doubt the unruly Nagas on more than one occasion would raid and plunder the plains areas on their way back to the hills after their trading activities but those kind of rare conflicts arose due to misunderstanding and mostly when they were intoxicated after consuming the local drinks. The Ahoms continued to restrict the movements of the Nagas and took actions against the Nagas who violated the standard of conduct laid out for them. Despite the short coming from the Nagas the trust and friendly trading activity continued in an uninterrupted manner. One reason could be the two communities needed each other's commodities and needed to support each other's products.

The Nagas did not carry out the trade for profit nor to meet any demand. Trade seems to have developed not by intention but purely due to the result of the Nagas adventurous spirit and curiosity to venture into the plains. On the other hand the Nagas unrestricted entry to the Ahom territories must have encouraged the other Nagas from the hills to move freely leading to further communicating towards trade. The commodities brought to the khats from the Nagas and Ahom side in the early part were limited only to the local products. Noticeable products included

millets, yam, cotton, chilies, dry fish, salt, animal products like bone, skin and horns etc. There were due respect between the two communities and a lot of courtesy was shown when ever trade began in the khat though there was limitation in communicating with each other due to language barrier. Trade was made easier due to the fact that the market was based on the barter system which was a simple way of communication but an effective way of carrying out trading activity in the khats. Gradually the khats became the most happening place for trading activities and people flocked from every region. It became a hot spot for commercial purpose. As trade progressed there was shortage of supply due to the growing demands in the markets. The new feature of the trade led to the extensive trade activity. Nagas from the hills came in big numbers and prolonged their presence in the plains. They brought commodities more than what they had been producing to meet the demands. An effort was made from both ends to keep the options ready to be introduced in the markets. New innovative ideas and impressive ways of attracting the consumers were introduced. If items like plain wood craft was presented in the market now it was full of decorative motifs. The traders worked hard to circulate the bartered commodities to near and far places and in doing so this approach enticed the other people from both communities to become curious of the khats that were buzzing with trade activities. This was another reason for the trade activity between the Nagas and Ahom to expand in a wide manner as they could not be contained by the small clustered trading activity. Especially the Nagas from the far flung areas became interested in venturing to the khats more or less to make profit from the happening trade centres.

Naturally trade became more systematic and well organised. The khats were earmarked for trade activities only and the Nagas were restricted from venturing beyond the Khats. The commodities brought to the markets became standardized and the introduction of alternative



products was introduced. Options and variety of choices were brought to the market. Both the parties met their expectations when assembled for marketing in the khats. Monetary system was not in practice in the early part of the trade system but was well organised and every one benefitted from the market activity. The initial trade system was very simple yet effective with satisfied transaction whenever the two communities meet. The main purpose for trade activity in the early stages was to meet the demand of the two communities basing on barter system.

The Nagas never ceased to venture into the plain areas and continued their trade relations resulting in the dependence of the Naga products in some ways. Dependence on the Nagas product increased leading to the economic growth of Naga that spread to the other parts of the neighboring Naga Hills. There was sustainable economic growth.

### **3.6 AHOM-NAGA RELATION RETROSPECT**

We have seen that the Ahoms on their march from Burma to Assam (A.D. 1215 to A.D. 1228) through Patkoi hill have fought the Nagas, and after reaching the plains also they had occasionally fought with the Nagas. This goes to prove that the Nagas were already there before 1225.

But the most important cause of Naga and Ahom fight was due to the raids of the Nagas conducted into Ahom territory. These raids were mainly carried out for plunder but at the same time headhunting which the Nagas had made almost a religious institution was another cause. It has to be mentioned that these raids were perpetrated not by the Nagas as a whole or the interior Nagas but only by the Nagas living on the North –Western side of the state of Nagaland.

The history of these raids and the punitive expeditions by the Ahoms is stereotyped. Every time the Nagas raid an Ahom area they were punished for that and had to submit and offer

presents. Sometimes some Nagas sought help of the Ahom king against the attack of another group of Nagas. The help being granted, the Ahoms fought the offending Nagas. Brine wells also used to be the source of unfortunate incidents. Besides this kind of fighting, the Ahoms have never tried to conquer the Nagas or extend their rule to the Naga hills, nor the Nagas surrendered their independence to the Ahoms.

Nagas relation with the Ahoms was a curious blending of friendship and enmity. Infact they were friendly but because of their headhunting culture and lust for plunder they use to conduct raids into Ahom territory resulting into enmity. This enmity was not permanent but short lived. The Ahoms also did not consider the Nagas a permanent enemy and used to be satisfied with their submission and offering of presents. They never tried to destroy the Nagas or permanently occupy their land. After an expedition of the Ahoms and submission by the Nagas they became good friends again, and Nagas used to visit the Ahoms in the plains. So long as the Ahoms were strong, Nagas had not indulged in head hunting in the plains or against plains tribesmen. But with the Ahoms losing their strength they found it possible to revive their traditional activities unhindered.

Apart from the large scale fighting, there were petty quarrels between the Ahoms as well as among the Nagas themselves. These had to be settled amicably and peacefully. It was practically the responsibility of the Ahom king to settle such cases and therefore he became the chief arbiter of Ahom and Naga relation. The Naga used to obey him and pay respect to him though by no means it was surrender of their tribal independence. Thus for the purpose of maintaining peace and amity between the Nagas and Ahoms, the Ahom kings appointed an official called Khamjang Gohain. His duty was to maintain peace and good relation with Nagas.

Likewise there were other officials for similar purpose in general and they were called Naga Katakis. Their duty was to maintain good relations with the Nagas in a general way.

Facilities were extended by the Ahoms to the Nagas for marketing in the plains. Nagas generally carry a spear and a *dao* wherever they go. So when they used to go to the plains they used to carry these weapons too. *Dao* is not considered as dangerous as the spear and so when they used to go to the plains they were required to deposit their spears with the Naga *Katokis* and take it back while coming out. This was a precautionary measure so that untoward incidents do not take place. The Nagas abided by this rule ungrudgingly and were satisfied.

The Nagas used to pay tribute and present elephant's tusk etc to the Ahom kings and in return they use to get arable land. Those lands are called Nagakhats and were used by the Nagas until recently. These plots of land used to be given to the friendly Nagas only and not to hostile ones. These friendly Nagas were called *Bori* Nagas that is submissive Nagas and the unfriendly ones were called *Abori* Nagas that is unsubmissive Nagas. The *Abori* Nagas also used to go to the plains for trading purpose, that is exchanging their products with the articles they required but they did not find favour with the people. It may be mentioned here that during this time all the sale and purchase were on the basis of exchange, that is, barter system (Ghosh 1982:74).

One of the interesting features of the trade relation between the two communities was the adaptive nature and accommodating the two communities made for each other. In more than one occasions they looked out for each other to continue their relation on good faith. There were times when they protected each other from enemies attack. Much of the historical accounts show that the Nagas were good neighbours to the Ahoms. They gave the Ahoms shelter and even defended them whenever they were under threat from the enemies. Likewise the Nagas even welcome the Ahoms to settle in their regions. There were instances of matrimonial alliances

between the two communities but not to a larger extent. Ao, Phom and Konyak Nagas were mentioned to have protected the Ahom raja when he was on a run and also these three tribes were there to protect the Ahoms when Burmese invasion took place. According to S.K. Bhuyan (1965:50) King Godadhar Singha accepted two Naga princesses as his consorts.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.1 NATURE OF THE TRADE SYSTEM**

The geographical location of the Nagas and Ahoms gave a boost to trade as the two communities were much closer than the other neighbouring areas. The commodities from both regions complimented their requirements. The economic relationship between the Nagas and Ahoms flourished to a new level as trade progressed. This was achieved by utilizing the available resources to attain higher standards in trade. The efficient market system facilitated the momentum for economic growth. There was no yardstick to bring certain products to the market rather the trade system was marked by the demand for available products resulting to the economic development. Regular and consistent trade took place between the Nagas and Ahoms to form a particular trade pattern in the market. Interestingly there here were signs of healthy competition in the market as the two communities began to understand the benefits of trade. The influences from the dramatic development in the new type of competitive transactions added details to the trade that helped to progress rapidly. Trade was considered to be a period of thriving for those who actively participated in it. One of the main factors for the development of trade was the desire to be a successful trader in the comparative resources where both the regions had their own products and the ability to meet the demands of the consumers in the markets. Many Naga villages that were engaged in trade transaction with Ahoms either by way of doing business through barter system or procuring their commodities were part time traders in the initial days. However, they became fully engaged in trade on a regularly basis in the later part as markets became standardized. Market became easily accessible as the number of traders increased. Trade became an occupation for those people who developed the art of dealing with the persons or groups in the market centers.

The new economic progress made it possible for the increase of production. As trade progressed technical development became one of the most important features that had great impact on the marketing process. Trade transactions picked up spontaneously with the emergence of a group that had knowledge on manual and technical skills like craftsmen and artisan. The use of specialized knowledge in practical skills and craftsmanship created more avenues for varieties in the markets that led to improved transactions. Increase in production was made possible by the new forms of technological improvements in the economic organizations. Agriculture being the most important base for primary activities and the chief basis of food supply to the market there was emergence of Skill labours for the cultivation of crops like rice, cotton and jute which determined the character of the market. It also encouraged the producers to grow varieties of crops that will benefit the traders. Wise and efficient use of the natural resources also supported the daily requirements in the markets. There was a steady progress in perfecting the manufactured products like salt, iron implements and other products. Commodities like cotton and salt had been an important asset in the market from the beginning and value kept on growing. There was also marked improvement in the accessories that were brought to the market.

The nature of trade pattern between the Nagas and Ahom was quite different from each other since the beginning. The Nagas have been carrying out trade for ages but were not very active and did not carry out extensive trade. There existed a domestic trade culture with the neighbouring Naga villages on a low scale. Trade in the Naga hills was rather based on door to door service where goods were carried around from one house to another. Transportation facilities were nonexistent in the hill region therefore, the supply of the products from the region was at most times delayed or failed to meet the demands. Trade flourished to a new level only after their contacts with the Ahoms. The history of the trade relations between the Nagas and

Ahoms was marked by one sided initiations in the beginning. It was the Nagas who ventured to the plains in the khats to carry out the trade with the Ahoms since the later hardly ventured to the hills for trade or any other purposes with exception to rare occasions like intermarriage or to attend festivals and functions. There were times when the Ahoms took refuge at the Naga hills while escaping from their enemies and even settled in the hill regions but those are rare cases.

A sense of estrangement that existed between the Nagas and Ahom was replaced by mutual respect and understanding when the market flourished between the two communities. Along with all these changes and developments came improvements in the communication network which exposed the isolation of the provinces to new ideas and thoughts. The role of production and consumption became significantly important in the trade relationship between the Nagas and Ahom. There was an emergence of quick and better growth of market for the benefit of both communities. From there on consistent trade in the market took place due to the determined and conscious efforts on the part of traders to utilize the resources which contributed to the progress. All this changes had a far reaching impact. The trade relation unearthed a number of cultures about the two communities. They both unraveled the nature of trade relation employing different methods.

## **4.2 COURSE OF TRADE**

The products brought and sold in the markets by the two communities were either of high value or of least importance. Most of the commodities were agricultural and forest products with few exceptions to iron and brass items. The products which made lesser profit lost its value in the market gradually. Commodities such as cotton, salt, dried fish, iron, were of high value in the market. Agricultural products continued to be indispensable items in the market. The main

agricultural products that found favor in the markets were rice, chilies, Sesame, ginger, yam, dried chilies, brinjals, cotton, tobacco and many other products like fruits, vegetables and even dairy products. Pan leave and betel nut became trader's choice of items in the market.

One of the main items serving the interest of the market was forest products. The forest products became an indirect contribution to the markets. It helped in pursuing the economic progress in a wide scale. The forest had been a rich hunting ground for wild animals and birds. Some of the popular forest products brought by the Nagas to the markets were bamboo products like the basket, mat, hats, fishing gears, farm implements, bamboo ropes, wet and dried bamboo shoots, Ivory, honey wax, lac, hoes made of hard wood which was in high demand from the Ahoms, antlers to make knife handles, pig hair in bulks to make brush. The Ahoms on the other hand brought to the market items like Salt, iron, dried fish, pan leaves, duck, hen, cows, coal, jute products, wood crafts. They exchanged muga silk, lac, elephant and wild boar tusk, cotton, pepper and mustard seed. Elephant tusk and agar or aloe wood which had medicinal value were the principal articles exchanged with the Nagas apart from the salt and dry fish.

The type of crops and raw items produced in the market was not similar due to the geographical locations and the methods of farming, resulting to the different amount of yields from place to place. Some market places were located far away from the hill regions and took more days to reach the market. Perishable products like vegetables were brought near the markets in abundance since it will not withstand the durability in far flung markets. Commodity like agricultural products, mining goods, forest and animal products were brought to the market. The market also witnessed mass production based on specialized products indicating progress in trade between the two communities. The commodities were brought in the market for the conveniences of the traders and to the advantage of consumers. Preference was given to quality



control. The importance of small marginal goods did not diminish but rather its value of exchange remained consistent in the market. Most of the goods widely available with small margin for profit like chilies continued to do well in the market. However, in the later part some commodities like jute, sesame, bamboo product etc began to lose out there value with the products that were ready to be exchanged immediately like the pan leaves, betel nuts, salt, cotton, cattles, and iron. These commodities grew more in demand than the regular ones and soon flooded the markets. Merchandise goods like cowries shell, salt, cotton and iron were aggressively sold in the markets and continued to have high demand till the later part of the trade relations between the Nagas and Ahom. Efforts were made to promote the goods which were newly introduced in the market like Yarn, silk which was considerably purchased from the Ahoms. Beads which the Nagas use much for making ornaments and other decorative piece were available from the Ahoms.

Livestock provided additional income to the Nagas besides their daily requirements. Meat markets had to be supplemented regularly with live-stock for purchase in the market. The quantity and quality of the products were determined by the demand in the market. The major livestock produced were cattle, buffalo, pig and poultry. Commercial farming of livestock developed in the later part as markets flourished to full scale. Cattles became one of the important commodities in the market. The two communities required livestock for different purposes. Much of the cattle rearing activities were meant either for consumption or for sacrifices and festivals purposes. Their skins, bones, hooves and horns for making various craft work found places in the market. The Nagas domesticated animals like cows, pigs, goats, dogs and fowls for consumption and to barter in the market. The animals were more widely distributed in the market than the other commodities. Infact the demands for animals were much more than

the food crops during the festival seasons. Cow remained the most prized animal in the market reared for multiple purposes. Comparing to the Ahoms, the Nagas were quite behind in regards to rearing cattles. Though most of the Naga festivals were associated with animals but cattle rearing in the Naga hills was unorganized. There was considerable trade in the dairy products but not on a large scale. The Nagas also gave much importance to the pigs and was in high demand. The Nagas reared large numbers of pigs and most of the important festivals and celebrations of the Nagas were associated with pigs. Pigs thrive on almost every surroundings but the productivity of the pig was low in the high lands so the Nagas often got hold of pigs from the markets since the pig rearing was scattered throughout the lowlands of the hilly regions. One of the main products sold in the market apart from its meat was the pig hairs brought by the Nagas to the khats. Items like pig hair for making brush was a very interesting finding. Pig hair was in demand for making brush of different shape and sizes. Among the Nagas tribes, the Konyaks took down the pig hair in the market and the Ahoms would barter it to make brush. One of the respondents from the Wakching village under Mon district Pongjai Konyak said his grandfather took pig hairs in bunches to the khat. Pig hair was said to be in demand by the plain people therefore, whenever they killed pigs the hairs were pulled out carefully and preserved nicely for marketing purpose.

As far as the priorities for commodities were concern cotton was considered to be one of the most important commodities in the market. The importance of cotton grew as it began to serve in many forms either with the seeds or its fiber. Cotton and its finished products like cloths was the most valuable items among the textiles brought to the market. Comparing to the Ahoms the cotton produced from the Naga hills were far superior. The quality of the cotton produced from the hills was in demand from the Ahoms. The Nagas were efficient cotton producer as most

of their traditional attire and regular cloths are the products of cotton from ages. The Nagas also contributed to the trade as they were already growing cotton for their domestic needs. They took their cotton product to the market. The art of making cotton has reached a high perfection (Gait 2008: 271). However, on account of the expanding demand in the market for other products consumption of cotton came down in the later part of the trading activities. Nevertheless cotton accounted for at least half of the markets consumption as it was not only limited for making cloths but used in manufacture of other important house hold items.

Jute was another fiber brought to the market. It was used mainly for the manufacture of carpets, cloth and other decorative purposes. Jute produced by the Ahoms were of superior quality and was in demand in the market. To the Nagas it was an intriguing commodity which served their purpose and added flavor to their motifs and designs.

Assam enjoyed a high reputation for producing silk of fine texture. A skill in the art of weaving and spinning has always been held to be one of the highest attainments (Gait 2008:271). They manufactured three principal varieties of silk called *Pat*, *Endi* and *Muga*. The first variety is the finest and the costliest quality. *Endi* is of the coarsest quality and is generally used by the poor. The last variety, *Muga* is a stouter and more durable fabric than *Pat* but coarser and less glossy (Gait 2008: 271). The Ahom silk especially the *muga* was in high demand by the Nagas for making traditional cloths and attire. The natives of Ahom also used dyes to produce colorful silk cloths. The dyes chiefly used by the natives are lac, munjit and indigo (Robinson 1841: 234). Silk became one attractive item in the markets. The silk products by the Ahoms always found favorable market in the in the Naga khats.

Oil crops like mustard seed, sesame were brought to the market in large quantity. The annual plant like sesame seed yield was high in the hill region. Sesame was widely grown for

home consumption and only small amount was used for marketing purposes. Gradually the demand for the sesame seed increased and much priority was given to its production.

One of the biggest developments in the trade scenario was the growing demand for tea leaves. Tea became the most sought after products in the market as trade took full scale in the later part. The Nagas exchanged their commodities with tea from the Ahoms since they produced high quality tea far more superior than the ones produced from the Nagas hills. Among the Nagas the Konyaks were the first tribe to cultivate tea which they found in the wild and began rearing it for consumption. However, the quality of tea could not match the tea produced by the Ahoms in their regions. Proper use of tea and its commercialization started with the coming of the Britishers in the later part.

Smoking and chewing of tobacco was also introduced in the market. It became one of the most common items sold in the market and used by both the communities. Tobacco was a common crop grown in most of the gardens in Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms supplied the tobacco in bulk to the markets. Tobacco addiction among the Nagas was the direct influence from the Ahoms. The Nagas used the tobacco not only to smoke and chew but to drive away insects.

Chewing betel nut with pan leave was in vogue for a long time. The Ahoms invariably used good quality of betel nuts that were normally soft and freshly plucked from the trees. Every residents in the Ahoms kingdom reared betel nut trees in family orchards. Betel nut was introduced to the market and sold in bulk as the demand was high.. Betel nut and pan leave was a regular item used for bartering in the market. According to the history the Ahom king presented pan and betel nuts to the Nagas when they began friendly relations with them. Later on the Nagas became expert in cultivating the plants and produced in large number.

Fish was another chief items associated with the trade items found in the markets. It became an outstanding economic resource produced in bulk from the Ahoms. Fish formed an important diet of the Ahoms. Fish was taken either fresh or in some preserved form mostly dried. No doubt the Nagas were aware with the art of fishing but the quality and the quantity of fish from the hills could not be compared to the ones produced by the Ahoms specially the dried fish which could be stored for many days and months. The Ahoms had more fishing area than the Nagas thus there was mass production from them in the market with superior quality. Fish found an available and ready market in the khats. Fish holds partial solution to the growing demand of food items in the market.

The sector of industrial production was manned by group of blacksmiths and craftsmen whose skill were for making dao, spades, spears, sickles of all size and designs liking to their immediate Naga customers for using it for life security, agricultural tools for farm development and kitchen purposes (Rattan 2004: 52). The production sector gained from the cultural habits of the Nagas in the market. Fine iron ores available in the plain produced agricultural implements marketable for hill people and the Ahom. Silk and cotton thread and readymade clothes were marketed at the Khat. They produced golden dust and molded it into fine earrings and bangles. The quartz and stone dust along with gold and ivory in sufficient collected by expert hunter of Nagas were marketed in the Khats (Rattan 2004:56). Bangles made of wood also found place in the market.

Salt played a prominent role in the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom. The two communities need salt and it became the most important commodity thus they were compelled to adjust and learn how to cooperate and live in peace so that there will be an easy market access for salt and other finished and raw goods. The Nagas had many salt wells in the hills as their sole

property but the salt produced by the Nagas in their own areas did not have quality control. Salt produced by the Nagas was crude and was of low quality. Among these mines the best quality of salt was produced by the Namsang people and therefore they were also the most prosperous village among the Nagas. Traditional way of making salt was usually done from their own brine wells by using a hollow tree stump that was immersed below the water table and draw up the water which was salty and boiled in an earthen pot. Quality salt was obtained from the foothills only. It was the ultimate items sought by the Nagas since it played a very important role in their economy and society. Salt was very precious to the Nagas and was used for different purposes. Salt was used not only for consumption but for preserving the food that were to be used for the marketing purposes. Salt also aided the trade in eliminating the dependence on the seasonal availability of food and it allowed traveling over the distant markets, it was a highly valued item in the market and often used as a medium of payment for labour work or considered as a high valued medium for exchanging goods. According to Shoshumo Enieo from Phiro Village under Wokha District, they were paid only a small pinch of salt as wages for one days labour in the field work. The Nagas exchanged rice, opium, cotton, muga cloths for salt from the Ahom. Salt became the main pillar for the Ahom economy as its demand grew. The Ahoms used the salt mines for collecting revenue. In the interior Naga Hills there was mention of more than twenty one salt mine. In some of the salt well like Borhat, Nagahat and Joypur, the Nagas and Ahom shared the joint right to alternately obtain salt for a fixed period of time. The numerous salt wells in the plain areas controlled by the Nagas became a bone of contention as Ahom had to depend on the Nagas for the supply of salt. Despite the arrangements trouble crept up regularly. Tribes like the Konyak Nagas continued to give trouble to the Ahoms as they possessed salt mines and their economic interest were at stake. Salt created mutual respect and destroyed the relations at

the same time. The Ahoms could not restrain the Nagas completely. The Nagas continued their habits of raiding and plundering the plains which prompted the Ahom rulers to wage wars against the Nagas in order to retain their possession of the salt mines.

One of the principal imports to Naga Hills was iron and its implements. Iron smelting was not new to the Nagas. The best blacksmiths among the Nagas were from the Konyak tribes as iron is found in abundance in the upper and lower *Tiru* and the main area for extracting Iron is from *Yonhon*. Iron-smelting was one tribe's monopoly among the Nagas. During the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) iron was extracted from the land and different weapons like knives, swords, guns and gunpowder were made out of the extracted iron. On the eve of the British annexation the khels of blacksmiths continued to work at Bacha, Dayang and Joypur upto Tiru hills (Kumar 1986: 107).

### **4.3 BARTER SYSTEM**

Barter system was the original form of exchange since the beginning of trade activities. It was an ancient way of trading and one of the oldest forms of trading. Barter system is the direct exchange of goods and other services fit necessary. Barter system was considered as a dumb economy where people who were total strangers did transactions. Barter system was based on the exchange of goods or services without using any kind of medium. In the barter system the monetary value is absent since most of the transactions are done directly in open negotiations. Traders who did not understand each other's language exchanged commodities. Barter system was practiced between individuals on informal basis. The barter system existed as a kind of medium of exchange before the real money came to use.

The primitive nature of trade between the Nagas and Ahom did not allow much innovative ideas. The traditional ways of market transactions was based on barter system. Both

sides had what the other party required. It was not an ideal system due to the time and effort consumed when searching for mutual needs. However, those days it was considered to be the most efficient and convenient method. The Barter system was organised into an efficient structure which soon became the basis of exchange between the two communities. With excess productions and sale capacity the trade between the Nagas and Ahom evolved and the khats became an effective market for bartering commodities and carry out effective trade. The barter system was carried out between the Nagas and Ahom traders on a large scale though there was language barrier. The two parties could not speak nor understand each other's language yet the goods were exchanged with the approval from the traders all in good faith and to their full satisfactions. Barter system eased the communication gap and facilitated trade without the need to put much effort in carrying out the transactions.

The basic barter goods were cattles preferably cows, pigs, goats, fowls, cotton, salt, betel nuts, pan leaves, sesame, chilies, ginger, yam, cowries Shell and conch shells. Barter economy relied on durable goods like pigs or cattle for long term purpose. Prior to the advent of British in North East India, barter system played a dominant role in the local economy. The system was primitive and prevailed among the neighbouring tribes. All the merchandise comprising of woven goods, yarns, live-stock, food-grains, agriculture implements, house-hold furniture, wares were interchanged between the communities. But it was upgraded to exchanging precious metals which had symbolic meaning and traditional value like spears, spade, and machete or brass bells.

Barter is still confined in some of the remote villages that have no regular means of communication with the administrative centres. It is still conducted side by side with currency in the interior areas situated far from the main streams of traffic and commerce. Society therefore ranges from barter to an industrial stage. The country-folk are still prone to practice barter for



meeting some of their wants when an emergency has to be tackled with. Regular trade in terms of currency and the present metric standards of weights and measures have replaced barter totally in urban and advance areas Regular trade in terms of currency and present metric standard of weights and measures have replaced barter totally in urban and advanced areas (Bareh 1970:123).

#### **4.4 MONETARY SYSTEM**

Before the advent of the British, most of the goods would have been exchanged through the barter system. There were some items used in the markets which resembled more of a money type objects. The Ahoms were already using money currencies by the time they entered to the North East India. However, when they traded with the Nagas the barter system remained the main basis of transaction as the Nagas were not using of any kind of currencies. Monetary system was gradually introduced only in the later part of the trade relations as trade developed and progressed to new level. Before that there was no significant monetary system in the trade transaction. Trade and commerce based on barter system was rather a significant feature and was an important means of subsistence during the pre-British era.

Trade took to a new level when the system of transaction was changed into the medium of currency. Traders began to realize the possibilities of using currencies as a medium for trade transaction. Metal objects as a means of monetary value were introduced in the trade transactions in the later part of the trade system between the Nagas and Ahom. The barter system was upgraded to the use of metal objects which served as an alternate currency or medium of exchange in the markets. Naga tribes like Konyak and Phom used metals brass bells as a medium of exchange which had high monetary value in the market. Brass in the shape of a knife called *laya* was also used as a medium. Ao Nagas mostly used a metal called *chabili* as currency. It is a

narrow strip of iron, six to eight inches long with a triangular projection at the end. It represents a demi form of conventional dao of an obsolete type. The selection of this metal was probably due to the fact that iron was scarce in the hills. The *Chabili* had a unique beauty, befitting the temperament of the Nagas. *Chabili* was a high value among the Ao Nagas, and became a hereditary property in due course. The eldest member had the largest share of it. The punishment of stealing *Chabili* was so severe that the culprit was put to death without clemency. This currency was in circulation for a period of at least three centuries and chabili were accepted as a medium of exchange by neighbouring Nagas. Not introduced by any sovereign authority. The information about the existence of *Chabili* among the Aos and other Naga tribes first came to light when the British occupied the Aos country in A.D 1889. Hutton describe chabili as a form of currency formerly used in the Ao country. The *Chabili* were used for purchasing things which were considered to be valuable. The approximate values of a chabili are as follows:

- a) 50 *Chabili* = one slave
- b) 100 *Chabili* = one mithun (wild Cow)

Lotha Nagas were not known for using any kind of currency for a long time till *Chabili* was introduced to them from the Ao Nagas and the use of coins from the Ahoms and later by the British. It is indeed amazing that a tribe, living in the most difficult terrain, with a primitive organization, could introduce a currency more or less of standard weight. The absence of any script among the Nagas is probably the main reason that this sort of currency did not contain any legend (Bose 2006: 146).

The currency used in the market was made in different shape and size from a certain kind of metal as a medium of currency. The metals used as money in the markets were considered as a valued commodity. Of course by that time Ahoms were already using metal coins as currency.

The earliest Ahom coins bear a date equivalent to A.D 1543 and were struck by Sukleumung Gargaya Raja in the fourth year of his reign. The peculiarity of the Ahom coins lay in their shape. Instead of being circular, they were octagonal. It is noteworthy that there was no copper coinage during the Ahom period. Cowries or conch-shells were used for minor transactions (Gait 2008:277). The Nagas were far behind their counterparts as far as using metal coin as a medium of currency in the trading activity. They began trading with their neighbouring villages and later with the Ahoms through barter system which was the easiest and safest method for trading activities. The Nagas soon adapted to the new and improved method of trading in the market with metals as medium to buy and sell the products. The Nagas also acted as intermediaries in conducting trade with the rest of the Nagas in the interiors, through the plains along the foothills and the mountain terrain to the eastern country. These trades acted as barriers to the Nagas in the interiors of the hills, so that they could monopolise the trade (Bose 2006: 146).

By the time trade relations between the Nagas and Ahom was on a full scale the monetary system was introduced as a medium of exchange. Coin as a currency and a common article for bartering was introduced to encourage trade in a wide sense and to standardize the market value of goods and services. Coins came to be circulated along with metals of different shapes and sizes used by the Nagas. The Ahoms used money which was made of brass. No doubt the barter system continued to prevail in the trade transaction especially in the interior part of the Naga Hills. The monetary value of the commodities was either measured in currencies or bartered.

Brass discs, wooden or metal spear-shaped objects called *Chabili* and shell or bone strings served the function of the widely recognized standard medium of exchange. The proper use of money as a medium of exchange was introduced only by the colonial administrator and

hence, there was no significant monetized system of trade in the Pre-British period (Sema 1991:133). Trade and commerce which were insignificant during the Pre-colonial period received impetus with the introduction of British administration.

#### **4.5 THE NAGA BARTER TABLES IN GENERAL ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

1 male slave = 1 cow and 3 conch shells

1 female slave = 3 cows and 3 conch shells

1 Cow = 10 conch shells

1 pig = 2 conch shells

1 goat = 2 conch shells

1 fowl = 1 packet of salt

1 day's wage = 1 fowl or 1 packet of salt or small piece of iron or disc or a blade of worn out dao or small basket of paddy equivalent to  $\frac{1}{4}$ <sup>th</sup> of mustard oil or 4 kg of paddy (Singh 1994:102).

Conch-shell was equivalent to a cow or hoes. One cow was worth fifty basket of rice for some of the Nagas. Spear heads and daos were often used as currencies.

#### **4.6.1 THE FOLLOWING ARE THE EXCHANGE VALUES OF COMMODITIES**

##### **4.6.2 The exchange values of commodities for Money**

1. 1 kg of cotton is equivalent to 5 shorota or 5 kg of salt
2. 1 kg of black sesame is equivalent to 3 shorota or 3 kg of salt
3. 1 kg of dried chilies was 8 moya

#### **4.6.3 The exchange values of commodities with other items**

5. 1 kg of cotton was exchanged with 15 kg of salt
6. 10 kg of black sesame was exchanged with 30 kg of salt
7. 1 kg of chilies was exchanged with 3 kg of dry fish

### **4.7 LANGUAGE**

The Nagas and Ahom dialects formed the new communicating system in the market. Their cultural concept was integrated to the new kind of communication so that they can be well understood from the trading perspectives. They used any one of the system that could be understood by particular group or people in the market. The development in the language skills especially by the traders gave impetus to the growth of trade relation as communication became easier and faster.

The Ahoms brought with them historical writings composed in their original Tibeto-Chinese language. When Ahoms entered into Assam the people adopted Assamese language. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century we see historical writings of the Ahoms in Assamese language. The Assamese or Asamiya dialect was the standard of language used in the markets. Friendship with the tribes was assiduously cultivated with great care and Assam possessed a large number of experts conversant with the languages and customs of the tribe, and their experiences were requisitioned in all diplomatic negotiations (Bhuyan 1965:39).

The unique Naga society with its rich cultural tradition came with different languages. The Naga language has different tunes with rich vocabulary and the word meanings of each tribe are hard to understand. All the Nagas tribes have different dialects but it was not an obstacle for

communicating among them like wise for the Nagas to communicate with the Ahoms was not an issue as they somehow managed. Communications in the market began with borrowed words from both the communities. However, the basic structure of the Naga language remained unaffected by the use of new language.

The Naga language has been classified differently by different philologist, although, in present context, it is quite beyond the scope of discussion. However, what is most interesting to note that despite diversity of dialects the people are bound together as one people as Naga. The isolation tendencies of the tribes which possibly gave rise to much of dialectical differences are no longer obtaining in the hill. Another important feature worth mentioning is that the Naga languages have come through a test of time and have not fortunately given place to the advanced languages of the neighbouring areas nor have shown any signs of erosion (Alemchiba 1970:216).

The greatest contribution of the Ahom people to the Naga is the introduction of Assamese language. Nagas speak many languages and so it is not possible for the plains people to learn them all to talk with them. On the other hand the Nagas also cannot speak to each other due to this language barrier. Further the Nagas go to the plains for their own purpose and therefore it becomes their responsibility to learn the language of the plain traders. As a result of this necessity the Nagas have learnt Assamese language. They do not speak the chaste language but a broken form, and have acquired a workable knowledge in it. The border Nagas know it better than the interior Nagas. The language which they started learning many centuries ago has become a linguafranca and so they communicate among different tribes through this broken Assamese which is now called Nagamese, the shortened form of Naga-Assamese (Ghosh 1982:76). It is a pidgin language. Nagamese led to the birth of a commercial language that could be easily understood by all. Most of the languages were adapted from the Assamese language.

## **4.8 WEIGHTS AND MEASURES**

History shows a proper record of weight and measures being used in the economic transactions. Everywhere in the khats no matter how old or ancient the system of scale was trade could not be carried out without the presence of precise weight and measures. Though there were no standard or unit of measurements in the market the process of measuring was precise even if it was slow and time consuming procedures. The weights and measures were in traditional system but were very accurate.

Traders used standard of measurement was to scale the goods. Certain quantity was fixed and usually specific amount was used in weighing the articles. An estimate was expected after the measurements and adjustments were made with proper understanding between the two traders. Articles like instruments or utensils were much easier and less complicated to trade off without needing to measure or weigh. Ahoms had an established system of standard weight and measures for a very long time. The Nagas no doubt had their own system of weighing scale which was based on ancient traditional technique yet accurate. Standardized method of weighing is not known but different villages use different methods of keeping counts. According to Mantah Konyak, one common method was keeping count of livestock by tying knots, keeping sticks or making a mark on the central post or pillars. However such methods were not very prevalent as most of them had few livestock which were countable with their fingers. One common method of weighing was measuring the commodity that was placed of a plate tied with a thread to a stick and was measured holding from the edge of the thread. When the stick levels it was accepted as the right measurement. The Nagas also used their hands or cups made of bamboo or gourd for measuring the quantity of their products.

The primitive systems of mediums were practiced by the different Nagas tribes. Angami Nagas considered conch-shell equivalent to a cow or hoes. One cow was worth fifty basket of rice for Rengma Nagas. Spear heads and daos were used as currency. Stones were used for weighing precious ornaments. But the practice was not common and applied to only few dealers having trade relations with the Ahoms. (Bareh 1970:124). One stone was equivalent to a seer of the old Indian system of weights and measures. Seer is a standard form of traditional unit of mass and volume.

The Nagas economy was mainly dependent on agriculture and mostly on shifting cultivation. This practice did not allow them to attain complete self-sufficiency in food production although they were much successful in procuring the forest products. Therefore they had to depend on the Ahoms items like dry fish, salt, jute, iron implements for agriculture and other uses. Food production in the plains was sufficient due to the nature of their wet-rice cultivation and they could work on producing other items as the area was much larger beside there were no threats amongst them like the Nagas who had to always look out for enemies thus limiting their ability to cultivate larger areas. Most of the crops were mostly produced from their gardens at home. Due to this reasons we see the Ahoms producing more varieties than the Nagas and the Nagas depending more on the produce through barter system.

The ability to carry out the trade efficiently popularized and developed the trade on a full scale. All the trade transaction was carried out in the market place called khats allotted by the Ahom kings to the Nagas. The products were not only brought and sold in the khats but it also became the centre for storing foods and other items that were regularly sold in the market. The traders from both sides assembled at the khats where trade transaction was carried out instantly and held on a regular basis. Khats were considered as business organization since it involved



many people and is often difficult to run the trade transaction without the common interest. The business in the khats were organized and manned by the businessman to regulate the trade between the Nagas and the Ahom. They organised regular market for exchanging agricultural and other daily products of the Nagas and the Ahoms. Traders brought commodities to the khats according to availability of resources and specialties. The market system was transparent and quick. Market was for accumulations and distribution of products based on the supply and demand from the hills people and the plain areas as well.

The geographical locations of the khats also favored the market since it was located in a place where everyone could have accessed to it. Thus the commercial activities progressed. It was a good opportunity for traders to assemble in the market for profit as well as get necessary goods to stock up for further business in the hill region with the neighbouring villages that would be in need of the commodities. All the buyers and sellers come together to meet their demands in the market place. The potential buyers received more opportunities to do transactions in the market provide the goods were available. In the khat haggling took place between traders. Maximum trade was carried out during winter season and particularly the festive seasons. During monsoon season the jungle was dense and thick to penetrate besides water level was too high to risk river crossing. There were Naga kotokies with the consent and approval of Naga chief, who were appointed by the Ahom king posted at the Naga khat to look after the mutual interest of the two people and act on behalf of the Nagas. These care takers worker hard to maintain the khats to make sure that the trade transactions carried out smoothly.

One of the interesting features of the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms was the nature in which the Ahoms considered themselves to be above the Nagas and therefore would take the out most care not to have any contact of any sort with the Nagas other than during trade.

According to Khyochamo Kithan Ahoms would always make sure to cover their palm with a piece of clothes whenever they hand out or receive anything from the Nagas in the market. The Ahoms also tried to keep themselves from any physical contacts with the Nagas. They considered the Nagas to be impure or unclean. The reputation of Naga headhunting culture might have made them to approach the Nagas with extra caution whenever there was any contact between the two communities.

Trade was a project undertaking of the Ahom king Sukapha, especially when the situation between the Nagas and Ahom were at difficult times. Any kind of relation between the two was complicated and risky. But the Ahom king's initiative to engage in a bold and daring step during the difficult times resulted in enterprising venture thus partly dealing with the crisis between the two communities. It was easy to begin the trade relation as both the societies were based on agricultural economy.

The whole concept of the nature of trade was to give something and receive something in return basing on the barter system. Transactions of commodities were based on dealings and negotiations. When a new phase came in the later part of the trade, the trading communities stopped using the barter system to a larger extend and introduced a certain kind of medium as currencies for transaction in the market. It was followed by a frequent buying and selling of products for quick profits.

But trade still rudimentary in organization, had not yet grown in proportion with the pace of the administrative expansion. Moreover, keen interest had not been taken to encourage trade and commerce on an elaborate scale. The entire trade being handled by a small number of

merchants there was a conspicuous absence of markets and whole-sale dealers. The newly constructed road (Golaghat-Dimapur) may have been a little help towards developing trade in foothills. In other respects, economic transition was caused but the new avenues of employment at the tea estates, road constructions and building works (Bareh 1970:124).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5.1 IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE**

The study focuses on the impact on Socio-economic life of the Nagas and Ahoms brought about by the trade relation. The paper studies on the pattern of changes in the agricultural productions, the process in which trade was carried out in the markets, the manner in which indigenous and non-indigenous products were exchanged in the markets, how the trade relation was entirely based on give and take policy and had impact on the economy and influenced the other Naga tribes. The transition of the two communities from a confined lifestyle to a more open and carefree ways of lives. The main impact of the trade relation was the introduction of innovative and creative ideas.

As the two communities began venturing out more to trade they became more approachable and carried back the influences they got from each other back home especially the Nagas to the hill areas. Trade continued uninterrupted and spread wide. Familiarity set in and the fear of approaching one another diminished. Apprehension was replaced by interaction leading to more communications.

There was a lot of diversity between the two communities therefore the progress attained by the traders was also different according to their geographical locations. However despite the differences trade developed to last long enough that had an impact on the lives of the two communities. The progress in trade relation resulted to a mutual respect between each other on equal terms. There were benefits not only in the socio-economy but benefited in building a strong relation too.

The trade relations between the Nagas and Ahom no doubt had a great impact mainly on the four Naga tribes (Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Phom) and the Naga tribes in general. However, relations between the Nagas and Ahom have deteriorated and efforts are made to re-establish any level of understanding on economic, social and political levels.

## **5.2 ECONOMIC IMPACT**

The Naga economy remained stagnant for many years. It did not make any progress nor develop in any field. Their economy remained basic purely based on agricultural and hunting economy. The tribal life remained monotonous as there was hardly any motivation for progress. The exciting phase in their economy began when Nagas came in contact with the Ahoms and started trade relations from the khats allotted to them which were to be put on hold as trade became stationary and failed to grow from the moment the British took over the economic matters in North East India. The other reason could be the Nagas inability to venture out beyond the regions of Ahom kingdom due to the difficulties in transporting the commodities besides complications in finding a set market place. The aggressive nature of the Nagas always played a major role in making them more isolated from others. The Ahoms were reluctant to carry out trading activities in the hill regions unless necessary thus the Nagas had to come down to the allotted khats most of the times. Safety measure from the Nagas and the wild animals were also one of the reasons why Ahoms did not carry out trade in the hill regions.

It was essential for the Nagas to regularly go down to the plains in order to get their supply of commodities, particularly salt, dried fish, rice and iron-made agricultural implements in exchange of their products such as chilli, ginger, cotton etc. on the other hand the Ahoms hardly needed to go and do business with the Nagas in the hills as the market place were all in the plain areas unless they needed shelter in time of emergency. Thus the Nagas were more or

less dependent on the markets in plain for their essentials commodities. However, since there was friendship between them, this dependence did not adversely affect the Nagas (Ghosh, 1982:74).

Economic relationship between the Nagas and Ahoms were not confined to trade alone. Friendly gestures like gifts were exchanged between them when courtesy call was made. Dao, spears, cotton, elephant tusk, wild animal horns, bamboo mats, sesame seed and few other presents were brought by the Nagas for the king. The Ahom king gifted Ahom hats, earrings, bangles, betel nut saplings, muzzle loading gun/muskets, and silk cloths to the Nagas. All this gestures gave an impetus for economic stability.

The Nagas and Ahoms traded interesting commodities that were considered as an important bartering items and necessary for practical use as well as for consuming purpose. The two communities also brought with them in the market to show their wealth and status. The Nagas brought items like the brass bell, gong, spears, and daos. The Ahoms brought knives, swords, shields, silk cloth, jewelries, furniture, and utensils in the market for sale as well as to show off. In this way the two communities learnt and adapted from each other's resources. In the long run the Nagas began to take down commodities to the market that was more in demand by the Ahoms. This also shows how it had a direct impact on the Ahoms economy because the basic commodities brought to the market by the Nagas were very practical in their daily use, most of which were not available in the plain areas. Hardwood found in the Naga hills were in demand by the Ahom people as it was very good for making hoes since the quality of wood was better and harder than the ones found in plain areas. The Nagas benefited much from the cotton trade as they produced high quality cotton. The Nagas also procured cattles, salt, dries fish for their consumption and business purpose in the hills. One of the main outcomes of this trade activity

was that the Nagas began to produce more commercial crops to boost their economy. The Nagas and Ahoms benefited by circulating the commodities they procured from the market. Thus their needs complimented each other's demands.

There were some commodities that had a major impact on the trade economy throughout the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms. Among the items, cotton served as one of the important commodities as its value was very high in the market. The Nagas benefited more from the cotton trade since they were efficient in growing cotton. The Nagas were the main suppliers of cotton in the market. In that way Naga economy got a boost from the cotton trade.

Salt being the most important commodity in the market projected economic stability for the people and the traders. Salt was one item in the market that always succeeded in deriving good bargain. Salt brought big progress in trade transaction because most of the traders came to the market for the value of salt only. Salt also represented social status and wealth. The need to use the salt brine wells also helped in developing friendly relation. Some of the brine wells were in the Naga territory and many were in the care of the Ahoms so both sides made an effort to maintain cordial relation for the sake of the salt commodity. There were some Naga villages like Namsang and Wakching that had salt brine wells under their control. They were very prosperous because of their assets besides many small villages were under them so they derived tributes from them. The Ahoms maintained good relations with the Naga villages like the Namsang who had salt brine in order to benefit from them. The Ahoms also received taxes from the salt wells they controlled and thus it made them very prosperous.

The two communities also benefited economically by learning from each other's traits like in the art of making basket and carpentry, carvings, constructions, blacksmith, sharing techniques in agriculture and patterns of cultivations. Vegetable seeds and fruit saplings were

exchanged between the two communities. Much was exchanged for economic purpose as well as for their personal use. Eating habits in some ways might have also been influenced from one another. Artisans and craftsmen learnt and exchanged ideas. They traded items required for work purpose. For instances, the Ahoms were good in making brush so the Nagas supplied pig hairs to them. Quality hardwoods were supplied from the hills to the Ahoms as it was not available in the plains. The Nagas supplied even to the extent of firewood in the market.

Betel nut holds a great significance in the Naga and Ahom relations. In all the historical records the betel nut remained the main gifts among the items that were exchanged between the two communities. There is also mention of Ahoms giving betel nut saplings to the Namsang Phom as an act of gratitude when the Phom Nagas gave shelter to the Ahom and defended them from the Burmese aggression. The influence of betel nut with the Nagas even to this day is still very strong. In Mokokchung, Mon and Longleng district most of the villages have betel nut trees planted in their gardens or in the field. Almost all the house hold in these villages is fond of chewing betel nut.

In course of time the Nagas evolved from the age old trade system based on barter system and became influenced by the new wave in trading system that was use of currencies as a medium for market transaction. The Nagas quickly got into the new system and learnt the use of currencies as the monetary system from the Ahoms. The Ahoms have been using coins as a medium of currencies from the time they entered to the Brahmaputra valley. The Nagas used brass, gongs and chabili as a medium of exchange and even circulated them with the other Naga tribes in the hill region. Other Nagas might have continued to depend on the resources brought to them by the Naga traders but as demand increased the scope for trade also expanded.



### **5.3 ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SOME NAGA TRIBES**

The Nagas received much of the influences to do trade transaction from the Ahoms. They learnt how to manipulate the market economy by bringing the items preferred by the Ahoms and also made sure to take back commodities that were in demand from the neighbouring hill tribes. When the Naga traders returned from the khats with their commodities to the hills they continued to carry out trade transactions with the other neighbouring hill tribes.

According to Talitemsu Ao from Unger Village under Mokokchung District(Personal communication) the influences and developments in trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahom inspired the neighbouring Naga tribes to take up trading activities. The trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom became very popular and was extended to the other neighbouring Naga tribes like the Angami, Semas, Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Khiamniungan tribes. These tribes benefited from the trade and became regular customers to the Nagas who were carrying out trade with the Ahoms. They traded with items like beads, fowls, pigs mainly with salt and iron implements. They also carried out trade relations with the Ahoms but it was minimal and considered as secondary traders since they were inhabited at much higher altitudes unlike the four Naga tribes residing near the foothills who had more accessibility to the Ahom. Some of the other Nagas residing in the interior part of Nagaland became aware of the trade existence with the Ahoms. In some way they might have traded with the Ahoms but there is no evidence of their direct contact with the Ahoms. However it is certain that a number of hillmen depended on the commodities from the Naga traders carrying out transactions with the Ahoms. This kind of trade helped the Nagas to develop social and cultural interactions with their Naga villages even to the extent of intermarriages. But rivalry did intensify in some cases.

The primitive systems of mediums were practiced by different Nagas tribes. Angami Nagas considered conch-shell equivalent to a cow or hoes. One cow was worth fifty basket of rice for Rengma Nagas. Spear heads and daos were used as currency. Stones were used for weighing precious ornaments. But the practice was not common and applied to only few dealers having trade relations with the Ahoms. The cattle imported from the plains were vital for sacrifices and ceremonial feast (Jacobs 1990:34). Cow remained the top priority for trade. The Lothas sold the cattle acquired from the plains to the neighbouring Ao and Sema Naga, through barter system (Singh 1994: 117).

In the later part of the trade relations between the Nagas and Ahoms there were some negative impact in some areas. Increasing contacts with the immigrants from outside to the North East India changed the pattern of the trade relationship. One of the main impacts was the introduction of opium to the Naga Tribes particularly to the eastern Nagas like the Konyak tribes. According to Mantah Konyak (Personal Communication), the use of opium has become rampant in Mon district. It is more prevalent in the lower Nagas hills from where opium is easily available and accessible in the market. There are issues on how the plains people carried out illegal trade to the Naga hills. They sell drugs like opium to the Nagas to earn easy income. In one of the field trips in Mon District, the researcher came across the son of Mon village Angh preparing opium in a very systematic way and smokes the opium in a bamboo tube. The procedure is practiced every day. He has stocks in his bag and sells it for generating income. He gets the supply of opium from Assam. Khyochamo Kithan from Chamgpang Village states that “the Lotha Nagas in the Merapani areas are more influenced by drug peddlers which have become contagious to the other Lotha villages”. All this influences has a negative impact on society because of the new direction in the trade economy.

The introduction of the foreign commodities to the markets created drawbacks in the economic ties between the Nagas and the Ahoms as more interest and preferences was taken into foreign products. Consumers began to look out more for those products than the products that were locally made. The British influences also effected the economic growth as they introduced trade barriers and gradually the trade link between the Nagas and Ahoms went to background. In the economic field the Nagas has gone beyond their traditional customs for generating income. The Nagas now work to earn money in railways as load carriers, coolies, guides in the hills, in the coal mines and even seasonal laborers at the tea garden. Most of the people in the foothill areas now earn their daily bread from these sectors working as work agencies. There are signs of developments in infrastructure on the border areas. Roads are constructed for better connectivity. Some places have railway lines connected to the foothills. Bigger projects are taken up for the tea gardens, coal and oil exploration has led to better communications between the people in the border areas.

#### **5.4 SOCIAL IMPACT**

For thousands of years, the different Naga tribes seem to have lived almost untouched by higher civilization. Neither Hindu culture of the plains of Assam nor Buddhism of Burma did ever spread into these hills where primitive races have lived up to this day in their ancient types of culture (Devi 1968:19). The Ahoms always followed the policy of non interference with the Nagas. The success behind the Ahoms in their dealings with the hill tribes was their immunity from the caste prejudices and their policy of equal treatment shown to the new tribal entrants into their fold. The tribal people were given equal treatment and were allowed to enjoy, to certain extend, the privileges of the Ahoms. Instead of hating the conquered people they chose to mingle with them. This course of policy had largely contributed to pacify many ferocious hill tribes,

who were deprived of their independence, while the inter caste marriages between the Ahoms and non Ahoms led to a further assimilation of different tribes within their fold (Kumar 1986: 269).

We have already seen that during the Burmese invasion of the upper Assam several groups of Ahom people had taken shelter in different Naga villages. Not only during Burmese invasion but prior to that prince Godapani also took refuge in Naga hills. Prince Godapani fled his kingdom from the hands of Laluk Burphukan who was claiming the Ahom throne. Prince Godapani travelled from the Ao Nagas villages to the Phom Nagas and to the Konyak Naga. There he married a Konyak girl called Watlong who was the daughter of Thawang. Godapani claim to the Ahom throne in 1681 A.D and assumed the name of Godadhar Singha. The new Ahom king presented gifts and plots of land to the Nagas who supported and gave him shelter when he was on run. These plots of land came to be known as Naga Khats. All throughout the period the Ahoms in trouble have taken shelter with the Nagas. Not only that, but the Nagas too have occasionally taken refuge in the plains to escape the wrath of his own men. And thus have developed cordial relation between these two people (Ghosh 1982:75). However, inspite of the good relation between these two people no proper matrimonial relation developed which could cement the social intercourse. There are stray cases of Ahoms taking Naga wives but there is no case of a Naga marrying an Ahom girl, at least in the upper strata of the society. It was so, probably because there was no social intercourse between these two people, but only political and commercial intercourse (Ghosh 1982:73).

The tribals, on account of their excellent health and physique were occasionally adopted as sons by Assamese princes, potentates and queens. The visit of a tribal chieftain to the Ahom

metropolis was solemnized by tribal chiefs flaunted along the corridors of the Ahom palaces at Gargaon and Rangpur, and Ahoms always felt gratified at such connections (Bhuyan 1965: 41).

The traders who continued to venture to the khats in some ways might have been influenced by the Ahoms in their day to day life style like in the manner they dressed and spoke their language. There is a clear indication of the Ahom influences on the life of some Nagas residing on the foothills. The Nagas were invited to Bihu festivals in the month of March and April likewise the Ahoms were also invited to the popular Naga festivals. There is a group of Konyak Nagas who reside in Sivasagar district of Assam at Hypar Ali Nagagoan. They speak Assamese but have all the Konyak character, features and traditions. They even celebrate Assamese bihu and celebrate Aoling as Naga Bihu. The continuous interaction resulted to cultural exchange between the two communities which is still evident between them. Lothas and Assam people at the foothills still exchange cultural activities during festivals and bihus.

The attitude of goodwill and friendship which the Assamese of the plains entertained towards the hillmen is seen in the invariable use of the word mita (Sanskrit mitra, a friend), in accosting a man from the hills. The use of the word mita summerises in a sense the whole attitude of cordiality existing between the people of the plains and the hills (Bhuyan 1965:46). The Nagas did not only come down to the plains for service or for other material benefits. Very often they also gave shelter to the Ahom Kings when the latter sought one (Johri 1933: 40). Some of the Ahoms who took refuge in the Naga Hills stayed back and in due course of time were absorbed in the Naga community.

The process of assimilation has been seen in a number of spheres, Linguistic, social, religious and political. The vocabulary of the Assamese language has been greatly strengthened by words used by the tribals. Assamese proverbs are brimful of references to the customs of our

tribal neighbours. The popular music and dance of Assam have been largely reinforced by borrowing from the tribals. Weaving of which is universal amongst women in Assam is also to be found amongst a large section of the tribal population (Bhuyan 1965, p46).

Socio-cultural ties strengthening inter caste by marriages and learning more fluent to speaking languages of the plain was because of the frequent visit to the kingdom and receiving visitors at their village as well apart from commercial objectives (Rattan 2004:55). Despite the language barriers the relation between the Nagas and Ahom was properly maintained with mutual understanding and the cultural awareness between the two communities was always carried out.

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the trade and communication between the Nagas and Ahoms was the development of the pidgin called Nagamese which helped them to communicate easily and conveniently while carrying out trade and communicating with each other. The later too had known the tribal dialects sufficiently enough to be able to carry on conversation with the hill people. So knowledge of Assamese had to be acquired by the visiting tribesmen by way of necessity and the same case with the people of the plains who had to carry on trade or transact business of the state. There were also tribal experts in the court of the king and their services were utilized (Bhuyan 1965:53).

The age-long process of integration thus came to an end somewhat abruptly, except in a modified form necessitated by the scanty requirements of trade. Relations with the tribes were conducted hence forwarded under the strict supervision of British officers, and free association of the hills and the plains of Assam thus began to be seriously handicapped (Bhuyan 1965: 57).

## 5.5 POLITICAL IMPACT

The relation between the Nagas and Ahom started way back in the period when the Ahom king Sukapha entered through the Patkai range in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD and encountered the war like Naga people. The Ahoms fought against the Nagas who did not want to entertain any foreigners in their land. The Nagas were suppressed by the Ahoms in a hard way but that could not contain the Nagas for long as the ever rebellious Nagas took to the old ways of plundering and raiding not only the neighbouring villages but even the plains area till the colonial rule was established and restrictions was imposed on the Nagas with sever punishments unlike the Ahom ways. Economic sanctions and restrictions of their movements in and around the plain areas were imposed.

The Ahom policy towards the hill tribes also seems to have been based on the conciliation backed by display of force when circumstances required. Most of the hill tribes were deficient in certain necessities of life. The Ahom rulers regulated their tribal policy in a very realistic and judicious manner. But inspite of the concessions granted to them, they are found in actual practice to have violated the agreements, indulged in raids, and at times withheld the payment of tributes. The Ahom rulers had to send troops to control and force them to pay the annual tributes. The Ahom tribal policy, however, reveals that the rulers placed more emphasis on the subjugation of the hill people than on the collection of revenues or exaction of tributes or levies. The Ahom rulers were satisfied with the payment of nominal tributes if the hill people submitted to them, and emphasis, therefore, was laid more on their submission rather than on exaction of revenue (Kumar 1986: 269).

The Ahom attitude towards the tribesmen of the frontier was extending friendship, accompanied by the application of force if the situation so demanded. The Ahoms realised that

the chasing of tribal miscreants to the recesses of the hills was a fruitless endeavor: it was like “an elephant entering into a rat-hole”. The regular blackmail was paid to the hillmen to prevent their foraging excursions into the plains. The blackmail consisted of articles of necessity to the tribes, like clothes, metals and salt. Intercourse with the Nagas was conducted under the supervision of a number of local officers called Naga katakis, who controlled the entrances and exits of the tribesmen. The conciliatory policy of the Ahoms made the hillmen their eternal friends, and all major operations like wars received the support of Assam’s stalwart and martial neighbours (Bhuyan 1965: 156).

So long as the Ahom government was strong enough to maintain their dignity intact by quelling disturbances within the kingdom and repelling foreign invasions, the Naga tribe remained peacefully submissive to the Ahom rulers and regularly paid their annual tributes. The outbreak of the Moamaria rebellion towards the last part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century which lasted for about three decades till the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century completely changed the situation. The rebellion not only brought chaos and confusion within the Ahom kingdom, but ruined the prestige of the Ahom government in the estimate of the Nagas as well. This state of affairs not only prompted these Naga tribes who had been forced to submit to the Ahom government and to acknowledge its suzerainty by paying annual tribute to throw off their allegiance to their Ahom overlord, but also practice their most favorite game viz, headhunting from which they had refrained so long and to enrich themselves by robbing the plainsmen of their properties (Devi 1968:45).

During the Ahom period the Nagas used to be enrolled in the Assam army and they owned allegiance to the Ahom Kings (Johri 1933: 118). Close contact with the tribes was thus necessary for the security and welfare of Assam, and it was therefore organised on a mutually



advantageous basis (Bhuyan 1965:40). At the close of the Ahom rule the condition in Assam were not peaceful. There was anarchy and no security of life or of property. Naturally self preservation and self interest predominated in the conduct of the inhabitants. The last part of the Ahom rule was in chaotic situation with internal feuds among the noble bloods and the near civil war situation. The Moamaria uprising of 1769 shook the foundation of the Ahom kingdom. The repeated Burmese attack in the Ahom land put a grip on their freedom and independence within their own territory. The situation became worst with the British intervention in North East when the authority collapsed. The once rich Ahom kingdom lay wasted. The people were displaced and plundered there by putting the Ahom economy into ruins. The Nagas did not help calm the situation by intensifying their plunders and raids taking advantage of the turmoil in Ahom Kingdom. Under such circumstances the reins of the administration in the state were passed on to the new rulers, the British who shouldered the responsibility of bringing peace, prosperity and unity to the harassed people (Johri 1933: 47).

Colonial rule and other host of reasons might have prevented smooth transactions of trade between the two communities. By the time the colonial rule began in North East the British were smart enough to take control of the trade and became in charge of the life line of the Nagas and the Ahoms who became submissive to the colonialist. When the British set foot in the North East India, the Nagas were taken over by them unwillingly by way of interfering in the Ahom-Naga relation. They made an excuse of protecting the people in the plains from the Naga raids and restricted the Naga movements in the plain areas unlike before. Such clever policy was further enhanced by introducing provisions for permits to visit the hill areas inhabited by the Nagas. The British policy of imposing sanctions on the Nagas whenever they are disobedient and break the law created trade barriers between the Nagas and Ahom. They were not allowed to visit the khats

and their movements were restricted. The duars were closed to the Naga trader when situation arises. The inconsistency of interactions between the Nagas and Ahom in the later part might have discouraged the traders to get more involved in the trade activities and began to look out for alternative means by slowly losing their interest for the regular needs to a newer commodity available elsewhere. The national movement from the respective side also created a wide gap in the trading activities. Most of the trading centers in the borders became isolated when tension arose due to the violence during the national movements. Movements to these areas were restricted by the authorities. The colonial rule made the situation worst. All the courtesy and sincerity towards each other is now replaced by hostilities and mistrust. The border tension is a major obstacle for trade relation. The border areas are mostly inhabited now by the people who migrated from places like Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. They came as tea plantation workers and some as small time traders but now they have occupied most of the border areas.

There are persistent border issues created not by the Nagas or the Assam people in the border but mostly from the non Assames people who have migrated to the foothill areas mainly to work in the tea gardens and running small time business in those areas. Ontick Yansahanghu Konyak mentions that Naganimorah used to be a big market centre for the Konyak Nagas. Business were mostly confined to barter system and gradually developed to a monetary system. Borjan was the resource centre for collecting all the commodities and other items. The market is now mostly dominated by the plains people but the locals in the areas are putting more efforts and slowly taking over the business. The non locals are now required to take permission from the Konyaks whenever they have to carry out any business transactions in Naganimorah. Business differs from Stone quarries, coal mining, collection of bamboos, timbers, fire wood, cultivation

of crops. The value and permission also differs according to the season. The plains people like Muslims, Hindu, and Nepali run prosperous business there in the border areas where as the Assamese people carrying out business in this area is less. The non locals have even found a foothold and settled in Naganimorah like the Nepali village which has around 40 houses.

According to the local people, incidents of violence in the border areas are often blown out of proportions by the state and the local media. Petty crimes like theft or personal brawls in the market areas are often reported fights linked to the border dispute. Daily activities are often reported as border conflicts. The focus of the border conflict is usually around the 10 percent of the border area where Nagas have settled. Yet, several people pointed out that most of the disputed borders were encroached upon by the tea plantations. The plantation continues to evict, displace and encroach on community lands on the borders (Kikon 2008:71).

The existing trade centres in the border areas are now in a very pitiable condition and there is no infrastructure development. The government has not reached with proper development in the bordering areas even at present. The transportation and communications are very poor, roads are ill maintained and the traders are seen transporting their products to the foothill markets on bicycles, carts or as of when the trucks enter the village areas to collect firewood, stones, coal etc. as of when the trucks enter the village area the villagers take advantage and transport their products but it usually happens only during the dry seasons starting from November to April last.

It was seen that the Naga traders are exploited by the local traders in the common trading area. The local vendors bargain hard and forces the Naga traders to give away their product at a low price and since they cannot take it back to the hills they are compelled to give away the goods at their asking rates. Seeing the situation many Nagas today cultivate vegetables that fetch

more profit than the vegetables that are heavy and bulky yet do not fetch good value. For example vegetables like yam, pumpkins are replaced by crops like ginger, sesame etc., in this way there is also a change of cultivation pattern in the hill areas. The Nagas today cultivate more cash crops for the market seems to be cultivating more cash crops for the market purpose. Most of the crops found in the markets before are now replaced by commercial crops like Rice, Brinjal, potato, chilli, tomato, cabbage, ginger, bitter gourd. Apart from this there are tea, coconuts, black pepper, beetle nuts, pan leaves, broom, bamboo mats, firewood, timber, rubber and vegetables found in the markets.

The Nagas living in the border areas are small community. The Naga villages are mostly dependent on the foothill towns and markets to sustain its economy. They do not have proper land documents and hence the inhabitants are under the close monitor of the neutral forces and the state authorities. The Nagas have to seek permission even for land cultivation or house construction. Most of the lands in the bordering areas are under the mercy of the neutral force like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the state authorities who often play the role of civil administration to regulate the daily activities in the border areas. Exploitation is at its highest form in the border areas for the local vendors and passengers crossing the border areas. This kind of abuses discourages any chance for negotiation or renewed ties between the Nagas and the Assam people. The Naga villages in the bordering area lack proper infrastructures and road connectivity, lack proper educational institutions and health centres, the market system is also poor. They do not get government subsidies as in the main town for example the Merapani village bordering Assam does not get government aid like the Merapani town does. The major economic activities at present in the border areas are limited to readymade industrial productions like sugar, salt, chili powder, milk powder, spices, rice, crockery, machine tools for work

purposes, cloths aided by the modern means of transport and communications. Most of the Nagaland and Assam boundaries are planted entirely with tea garden. There are some locations where oil exploration and coal mining are taking place. Rubber plantation has also come up and is spreading to most of the foothill areas.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study is an attempt to bring out the historical account of the past and the present situation on the Nagas and Ahom trade relation. This research work can also be a source of guide to the other future research scholars. Proper study of the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms have somewhat been neglected in the past therefore this research can be taken as an attempt to reduce any propaganda, claims and confusion between the Nagas and Ahom trade relation. It also studied the economic development and changes that occurred between the Nagas and the Ahoms through trade relations.

The study on the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom has led to several interesting findings that have come to light through this research work. The primary observation from the present research work has led us to the following issues based on field data. They are discussed as follows.

#### **6.1 THE CORDIAL RELATION BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND AHOM IS DYING**

With the new influences of different lifestyle and cultural change, the peaceful relation between the Nagas and Ahom was soon forgotten and replaced by border feuds which further aggravated the relation between the two communities. Since then trade activities on the line of trust and cooperation has been lost. Peaceful negotiation was replaced by aggression. It has become a daunting task to establish diplomatic relations between the two communities or to open any kind of negotiations on economic cooperation and cultural understandings. According to Khyochamo Kithan the trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom was maintained with much respect and

caution. From both sides proper care was taken not to encourage any hostilities in any manner. Anyone found guilty in disrupting the flow of the market was dealt seriously and punished from each other's end. All the dealings in the market were done with much sincerity. There was complete cooperation between the two communities. However, there is much hostilities and mistrust now. The character of the market is lost and remains neglected. There is no effort to revive the market centres which could be mainly due to the prevailing border tension between the Nagaland and Assam state. This has remained a major obstacle for trade relation.

## **6.2 THE TRADE RELATION BASED ON BARTER SYSTEM WAS REPLACED BY CURRENCIES**

The first thing that strikes us is how trade based on barter system was carried out systematically on complete faith and trust. Barter system held a special relationship in the trade sector. Goods were exchanged according to its value. The exchange of goods was not only confined to the barter system but was also extended to ceremonial gift between the community leaders. The barter system was however replaced by the introduction of currencies in the market. Mediums like brass bell, gong, *laya* and *chabili* were used as a medium of exchange but those items also lost its monetary value with the introduction of coins and paper currencies. According to Thanglong Yanlem, the konyaks used brass in the shape of a knife called *laya* as a medium of exchange in the markets. The Ao Nagas, according to Purchila Longkumer used a medium called *chabili* in the market. *Chabili* is rather like the shape of an arrow head or a spear head and it is still preserved in Mopungchuket village. The age old market place still remains and the Nagas in the foothill continue to venture to these trade centres bringing down their commodities to carry out trade but the types of commodities has changed and barter system has gone to background which has been replaced by the monetary system.

### **6.3 LEAGACY OF THE DUAR IS NON EXISTING TODAY**

The Nagas used particular routes to reach the khats for trade purpose with the Ahoms. The passages also known as duars were maintained on mutual understanding. The two communities took care of the passes to promote an effective implementation of regular trade activities. The duars turned into a major connectivity as well as the main life line for the Nagas and Ahom. All the necessary trading activities in the khats were carried out with the Ahoms through the duars. The Nagas and Ahom keep in touch with each other during festivals and other important meetings by using the duars. However this duars came under the control of the British when they came to North East India. The British imposed restrictions on the in and out movements of the Nagas through this duars. The British monitored their movements and even introduced inner line permit thus restricting outsiders from collecting commodities or moving freely into the Naga hills. This actually did more harm than good as the Nagas were indirectly put under their control and their movements were completely monitored. Whenever the Nagas went out of control or disobeyed the British the duars were closed and denied any accessibility to the markets. These factors in a long run hampered the trade relations and affected the connectivity of the two communities. Once the movements in the markets were controlled the people began to use the passes lesser unlike before thus the effective commercial life line was lost its importance for good. Most of the trade routes are now unused and neglected or lost due to geographical factors like overgrown jungles, landslide, floods, rain etc.

### **6.4 LOST HERITAGE OF THE NAGAKHATS**

According to the available history of Ahom Buranjis and British administrators, all together there were 23 numbers of Nagakhats belonging to different villages of Naga tribes (Rattan 2004:47). Some of the khats granted by the Ahom kings to the Nagas in the plain areas are still prevalent



and market activities continues in these trade centres like the Geliki, Rajapar, Naginijan, Naganimorah and Merapani. It reveals how there was once a great trade activity that existed between Nagas and Ahom though now not active as before. According to the present findings most of the Nagakhats that were once buzzing with activities as a centre for gatherings from near and far places have now been abandoned, deserted, or occupied by the plains people. Some places have become disputed areas with exception to few. Majority of the khats are now occupied by the Assam people. The monopoly of the trade centres are controlled by the big companies and middleman. They control the price and affect the monopoly of the markets. The local traders are at their mercies and due to that business fails to progress. Khyochamo kithan an elderly man from Champang Village narrated how the most popular khat in the foothills of the Lotha tribe, Rajapar market was full of life with activities in the earlier times, people from the hills and plains carried out trade and exchanged commodities. He still goes there for marketing but the system has changed and most of the market products have been replaced by readymade industrial goods with fixed price and Chinese products. Shingnyu Phom states that Nagachilla was the first trade centre for the Phom Nagas. The place was known in different names as Nagachilla, Henghibal, Nazaria and Geliki. The later name is commonly used now. Till December 1973 tax of rupees 25 was collected from the Khat. The market place is still there but most of the goods are industrial processed food and cloths only. Market is carried out twice a week on Tuesday and Saturday. People from Namsang come and slept in the khat where there was provision for them. It took two days to reach the market area. Once the colonial rule was established in the Assam plains the age old market system was put to rest. The Nagakhats are not functioning anymore. Traders lost their profession of making benefits from the trade. They gave up their age old profession and took up other occupations. Most of the Nagas who were active traders went back to the agricultural land as farmers. There are fewer entrepreneurs from the

Nagaland and Assam side that are carrying out the past traditions. The Assam traders have diverted their attention more towards the regions like Bengal and enjoy benefits from the new trade deals. The introduction of new technology and better industrial goods also developed a gap between the two communities. Their interest not only remained in each other's commodities but far beyond that. Eventually communication gap developed between the two trading communities. The new commercial activities perhaps could be one possibility that made the trade centres cease its existence. The Nagas still claim the khats that have been occupied by the Assamese people ages back. Settlement like villages and towns has come up in these areas. There are also khats where business transactions still take place.

## **6.5 DEVALUATION OF COMMODITY INFLUENCES**

Economically the two communities benefited by learning from each other's traits. Interesting items were also exchanged for economic purpose as well as for their personal use like the art of making basket and carpentry, carvings, weaving cotton and silk cloths, construction works, blacksmith, sharing techniques in agriculture and mode of cultivations. Vegetable seeds and fruit saplings were exchanged between the two communities. Eating habits in some ways might have also been influenced from one another. Items like pig hair for making brush was often used for bartering in the markets. Among the Naga tribes the Konyaks took down the pig hair in the market and bartered with the Ahoms who would make brush out of it. The extensive demand for the items like salt and metal implements influenced the traders to project more on those commodities but in a way it also reduced the demand for the other products that were doing well in the early part of the trade. Cotton was another important commodity which was used widely throughout the trade activity. Longpheh Konyak from Phongon Village, under Mon district, said Cotton known as *kobar/Bai* was cultivated but mainly for domestic purpose only and rarely sold

in the markets. Khyochamo Kithan from Chamgpang Village under Wokha District said “Cotton served as an important commodity for bartering goods with the Ahoms”. Most of the items were exchanged with cotton. But cotton lost its importance with the introduction of readymade clothes from the markets. People no longer needed raw cotton to make cloths when finished cloths were readily available. The major blow to the market activities came from the Burmese invasion and the Colonial rule in these regions. All the activities shared between them were cut off and once the khats stop functioning properly it affected the trade relationship between the Nagas and Ahom. The nature of trade activities that existed in the early days are now rarely seen between the two communities. Their requirements are now diverted by another set of commodities which are mostly industrially produced and readily available in the markets.

The salt wells were important for generating economy. The demand for salt resulted in many incidents due to the rivalries between the Nagas and Ahom. It also became the main factor for making new alliances as both sides needed the salt commodity. The salt trade contributed to a mutual understanding between the Nagas and Ahom. People lost lives for the sake of procuring the rights of ownership over the salt wells. Salt projected as a symbol of status and wealth. Salt trade activity took a new direction with the introduction of other commodities in the trade sector. The traditional way of making salt was replaced by the industrially produced salt which is much safer and easily available. There were also changes in the priority for the commodities. Salt lost its value in the market although in some parts of Nagaland like Kiphiri and Meluri traditional salt making is still prevalent. The major blow over the salt trade came when the company took control of the salt monopoly in Assam. People no longer have disputes over salt. A packet of salt today cost rupees 20 comparing to those days when one days wage was equivalent to one packet

of salt or 1 kg of cotton was equivalent to 15kg of salt. Salt has lost its importance in the market and people no longer need to struggle for procuring salt as before in the past.

## **6.6 LOST CONTROL OVER THE MARKET**

When the trade relation began between the Nagas and Ahoms, the market activity was only between the two communities in the allotted khats. There were rarely people from neighbouring areas that came to trade with the Ahoms other than the few Nagas residing on the foothill areas like the Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Phom tribes. These Nagas remained the main supplier of commodities to the markets. However the market scenario has completely changed. It has been observed that presently the entire supply of goods or services in the markets are completely controlled by few local business men in the border areas. The Assamese or the Nagas doing business in the border areas are lesser in number and practically nonexistent. Now most of the business community in the border areas are from mainland India like the Bengali, Marwari, Punjabi, Bihari, immigrant muslims (Bangladesh) who have dominated the trade sectors dealing in cloths, grocery, hardware, electrical appliances, stationery, jewelers, automobile parts, barbers, laundry etc.

## **6.7 LACK OF PROPER SET UP IN THE TRADE ACTIVITY**

The trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms flourished successfully but there were some flaws in the organization of the market place. One of the major drawbacks of the trade system was the lack of proper supply of commodities in some of the markets because of the distance factors. Perishable commodities like vegetables could not make it to the distant market centres. There were no proper set up in the exchange rate creating imbalance to the trade transactions. There could not be any uniformity in the trade centres. Everywhere trade were carried out on the

negotiations depending between the traders since the standard of transaction was based on barter system. There were local businessman that helped in transacting the trade but since the activities were confined mostly to the khats therefore we do not see many activities beyond the khats. Whatever transactions took place in the khats the traders were contented and departed only to revisit each other in the next marketing day with their commodities. The lack of proper organization in the market sector and the trade activities confined to the allotted market centres might be one critical reason where the system failed in a long run and it died a slow death.

## **6.8 RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENTS**

The Nagas character of isolation did not encourage the other neighbouring hill tribes to involve in the trade. In many ways Nagas habit of raiding and plundering did not allow smooth transaction of trade between the two communities. Trade activities flourish mostly in the regions where the Nagas did not raid or interfered. The continuous clash between the Nagas and Ahom also did not encourage proper trading ties in a long run. According to one of the respondent Shingnyu Phom from Yonglok village under Longleng District “The Phoms and Ahom were at constant clash either to claim for the right on salt trade or due to the raids and plunders by the Phoms against the Ahom over the Geliki khat”. Thus contacts were limited only to some few Naga tribes. Unless the Nagas were controlled there was consistent threat from them in the day to day activities. The trade transactions were confined to the allotted khats only. The Nagas were not allowed to venture beyond the khats for business purpose neither did the Ahoms took any interest for economic ties in the hill regions. The Ahoms considered themselves to be above the Nagas and therefore would take out most care not to have contacts of any sort with the Nagas other than during trade activities with restriction at the khats. If there had been more interactions between the Nagas and Ahoms, the trade activity could have reached to another level. Economy

in the border areas would have been functioning smoothly and the market centers very prosperous. But not only did the market centres lost its importance but became deserted. Market places like Geliki, Rajapar, Merapani, and Naganimorah have lost its significance as trade centres. There are very few locals carrying out business and the commodities are mostly brought from outside Nagaland and Assam with exception to indigenous products few items like chilies, yam, traditional shawls, necklaces, bangles etc. The introduction of inner line permit has somewhat restricted the people to venture in and out freely. Restrictions of movements are still prevalent in the border areas. The traders who were very active at one point of time seem to have lost their interest. Only if the relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms continued as in the past with courtesy and mutual respect there would not have been so many border tensions nor would we see so many people from mainland India settling in those border areas and occupying the markets.

## **6.9 OUTSIDERS INTERVENTION**

The trade relation between the Nagas and Ahom existed as long as the market existed. Trade could not be carried out without trading centres. Earlier the trade system was dominated by barter system. With the evolution of monetary system, currencies were used and there was an up gradation of the market system by way of improving and developing the commodities for better markets. Thus when there was a trading place where someone is ready to sell and someone is willing to buy, the trade activities existed but with the end of trade activities the relationship between the two communities also subsided.

The commercial interaction between the Nagas and Ahom led into a joint venture and a deeper friendly relation. The plains were open to the hill people and the hills were easily accessible to the plain people. There is a wonder as to how the advent of an alien ruler stopped

this act and sowed the seeds of estrangement and misgivings. Also as to how those comfortable Naga villages at the frontiers became so poor and backward than its counterpart relatively and few questions to be answered (Rattan 2004:56).

The friendly relation between the Nagas and Ahom is almost forgotten after the Burmese invasion and followed by the colonial rule. The British administration over the Assam and the Nagas hills created a wide gap by creating several legal barriers thereby depriving mutual contact between the Nagas and Ahom. The British encroached the Naga territories in plains area due to their economic interest for establishing tea industry. They also imposed several restrictions on the Nagas and Ahom contacts for their own benefits. The age old demarcated line between the Nagas and Ahom made the work for the British government easy to capitalize on the borders and frame policies along the border areas.

The Possibility of compensating the Nagas with cultivable land was rejected because the administrators believe that this would result in similar conflicts regarding ownership and rights in the future. Naga villagers were displaced and declared as illegal settlers, land grabbers and extortionists inside the newly declared British territories (Kikon, 2009:61). Heavy militant movements are one factor limiting the movement of the people and goods freely. There is ever prevailing tension in the border areas.

#### **6.10 REVIEWING THE PAST RELATIONS BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND AHOM**

The relationship between the Nagas and Assam has not been entirely trouble free but both sides have firmly maintained friendly and cooperative relations. It goes without saying that any level of friendly relationship between Nagas and Assam people depends clearly on how far they are

ready to take the past history and culture attached with it seriously. Broad outlook on the entire situation is the need of an hour.

The hillmen do not consider the plain-folks of Assam as outsiders in any way, and this feeling is reciprocated by the latter. The two have known each other from time immemorial, and there is little chance amongst them of hurting their mutual sentiments and susceptibilities. Besides the hillmen and their brothers in the plains have developed a method by which a mutually understandable manner. The intervention of an absolute strangers, unless he knows the language of social intercourse, and the necessities of customs and manners will always fail to carry conviction or make any impression. The hill people have their own way of looking at things, and they have acquired a common sense view of life, and unless the inner meaning of their intentions and view-points is properly appreciated there will always be room for misunderstanding which may lead to serious consequences. No headway can be made in establishing cordial relations with the tribal people if we approach them only from the official angle without the trust and confidence. Our dealings must be simple and straight forward; even the remotest trace of insincerity and selfishness are easily detected by hillmen who are guided by their powerful instincts rather than by logic and analysis (Bhuyan 1965: 59).

The historical records are few but are still there to give informations of the past relation between the two communities. Non availability of data is one problem where a question raised for inquiry, consideration or solution is hard to understand and apply facts on the record for the research project work as the resources is insufficient. Beside the diversity of the Naga tribes and the Ahoms presents a difficult task to come up with any concrete information on the trade nature in detail.



The oral narration helps in reconstructing the past history and look forward to set up the tradition in a more rigid manner but there is no guarantee about the information being precise and accurate however it serves as a foundation to the historical study of the Nagas and Ahom. In other words, oral tradition as a source for history has its limitations. It must be kept in mind that oral tradition does not convey the original words and images from which the historians may be able to recreate the mental world of the past. This is so because oral narratives are essentially malleable and might have got distorted over a long period of time. But again, while one could maintain that the vital contributions of oral sources can hardly be denied in historical reconstruction, one cannot always sustain the idea that the historian, by empathizing with the ‘voices of the past’, can construct their histories with unerring accuracy. The reconstructions of the of the history through oral sources has now become necessary since written records are basically limited to the documentation of issues and events connected with the interests of the ruling groups in the valleys or the official line of the colonial times (Imchen 2006:114). Many rich sources of the past history are slowly and steadily fading away with time and age as the older generation with authority on the oral history of its culture, tribe and the traditions are passing away leaving behind nothing but limited sources and few implements as a testimony to the past cultures and thus the present generations are losing much of its rich heritage. The need for documentations of the rich tradition through the oral narration can be one of main sources from where we can record and preserve the history. It is important to document the available sources inorder to preserve the findings and the originality of the history attached with the clan and its importance to the tribe. As Sharma (2006:115) states “The present day analysis of oral history and oral tradition is one way of rectifying this deficiency. Over the years the use of oral sources has been enlarging the scope of oral history. Although oral tradition and oral history have several common problems of technique and interpretation, their characteristic subject

matters are still quite different. Nonetheless, oral history and oral tradition are now being taken up simultaneously in a meaningful way. Both oral history and oral tradition are being recognized as the representation of those”.

There is no proper historical guidance from the past to know the present. Throughout the ages we have seen the Nagas with their rich culture, customs and traditions. They have taken pride in maintaining their rich heritage but there has been no attempt to record the historical account systematically. We have few documents giving us insight on the Nagas and Ahom trade relations but it has its limitations. There are no proper historical accounts available to study about the past to understand the present. The Nagas have no written documents of their own to back the history which makes the work of understanding the history that more difficult. We only have the official records of the British who wrote several records while administering the Nagas. Though these books are useful in some ways they do not serve much purpose in studying the historical account as these books are mostly articles and notes in periodical and official publications to convey different message for their own means. Most of the work travel through the path of descriptive narratives with a very trusting dependence on the accounts of the early British officers and ethnographers. The other problem is that almost all the existing works focus primarily on the developments during the colonial period. But what is needed is developing a concept of history which goes beyond information and description and tries to analyse the existing data on economy and society in a manner which can reflect upon stages of development and socio-economic formations. Such reflections would also bring some important conceptual issues into the discussions on history writing in North East India. The first issue of course would be the necessity of breaking away from the very conservative and orthodox ideas of history which even now seem to be the predominant understanding of history of this region. Integrated

studies of economy, society and polity need to occupy centre stage in history writing for history to remain relevant as a social science discipline. The other important issues which would also then begin to figure in academic discourse would relate to periodisation and dating of developments in North East India (Sharma 2006: 16).

Loopholes or obstacles discouraging current trading opportunities may be research upon for providing constructive criticism. The geographical factor also plays a big role for the inability to sum up with any concrete evidence with the nature of trade relation beyond what we know due to the rugged terrain economic progressed might have been restricted. The climate factor also played a big role in the trade relation. It could not be a regular affair due to the heavy monsoon. Some tribes might have communicated with the Ahom but their records are missing or there are no records. There might have been varieties of goods brought to the market on a trial and error basis but we are still in dark which items were completely disapproved in the market. The historical records and resources might have been lost due to the ravage of time or destroyed and lost due to the geographical factors like rainfall, flood and humid weather. The same case might have been with the developmental works removing the land marks of the khats. Reviving the past trade routes can boost or help develop new trade relations. New trade routes and new trade modes may be explored. The goodwill gesture showed between the Nagas and Ahom can be revived by revealing past friendship. The sources are more limited outside the villages. The material remains like the *chabili* etc and the khats are of immense help for the study of the trade relation.

Trade between the Nagas and Ahom diminished probably due to industrialization that took place when the machine good replaced the hand made products. The handmade goods could not compete with the machine made finished goods in quality and quantity production. The hand

made goods like bags, shawls, baskets, woodcrafts etc are still produced till to date but struggles to find a place in the market as the machine made goods have over taken the handmade product which are more affordable and better in terms of finishing. The British intervention in Northeast and the influx of the Indians from mainland also disturbed the relationship between the Nagas and the Ahom.

Instead of trade issue now we have border issue now. The border areas need development work. The people in these areas are one of the most neglected ones. The people are suffering from basic facilities like proper health centres, good road with proper connectivity to the main towns, electricity and drinking water facilities, good schools and proper commercial centres for economic sustainability. The government does not reach to their doorsteps other than when election time is around the corner. Poverty in these areas has ravaged the society. Although there is a transition in production and development of commerce taking place in the border areas the productivity from the land is low due to the labour force which is very low. The rapid growth of population is also putting more pressure on the land and undermining the development process. Efficient Marketing systems with proper infrastructure and regulations can boost the markets which subsequently result to economic development. Proper transport and market infrastructure would help in supporting the growth of market activities.

In conclusion we can sum up that the Nagas led a simple and with self sufficient economy. They seldom ventured out beyond their boundaries but the curious nature of the Nagas especially the ones residing in the border areas led them to explore, and eventually came in contact with the Ahoms. There was regular trade relationships between them based on barter system till the transition of monetary system was introduced. The Khats became the centre for trade activities and the Nagas benefited more from the trade relationship as they procured more

resources from the Ahoms. The trade relationship between the Nagas and Ahom resulted in interdependence and mutual understanding between the two. The booming economy witnessed launching of several small business centers in the plains and hill stations. Other tribes like Rengma, Chang, Sangtam, Khamniungan tribes were regular customers with the neighbouring Naga villages that had high influence and carried out extensive trade with the Ahoms. Small and medium size market flourished and with the progress in trade the market expanded. The economic development is existent in the present age though not in the line of past trading system. The possibilities are there to resume the economic ties on a larger scale.

But trade, still rudimentary in organization, had not yet grown in proportion with the pace of the administrative expansion. Moreover, keen interest had not been taken to encourage trade and commerce on an elaborate scale, the entire trade being handled by a small number of merchants. There was a conspicuous absence of markets and wholesale dealers. The newly constructed road (Golaghat-Dimapur) may have been of a little help towards developing trade in the foothills. The newly opened bridle paths across hills were irregular means of communications, at times disturbed by cracks resulting from gigantic landslides. In other respects, economic transition was caused by the new avenues of employment at the tea estates, road constructions and building works. Much more progressed has been noted after the state was formed. Business has become more mobilized and trade has grown into bigger proportions, new administrative centers have grown into trade and supply stations (Bareh 1970:126).

When the British introduced the Inner Line Permit in 1873, the outsiders were prohibited from entering into Naga hills without proper permission. It was to protect the Nagas from exploitation by the outsiders but in real nature it functioned as a mode of serving colonial economic interest and restricted the Nagas from carrying out trade and communications in the

foothills without their knowledge. The resources from the foothill forest like hunting, agricultural activity, farming, fishing were restricted and not allowed to collect without the permission of the British. Such laws kept the Nagas away from venturing into the plain areas often and became irregular in visiting the plain areas making them go back into the isolation lifestyle again. Taking advantage of the isolation state around the foothills, the British converted the areas into massive tea plantation.

The border demarcation between the Naga hills and the Assam was drawn keeping in mind the economic interest of the colonial rule. According to Kikon (2009:62) this demarcation was carried out by following natural landmarks such as streams, trees and hillocks. Although this territorial demarcation was recognized as a legal border in post-colonial India, this demarcation led to several land disputes between the states of Nagaland and Assam. Natural landmarks such as streams often change course, villagers migrate to the forest during floods and settlements took place. Such development led to violent confrontations between communities, but these conflicts were often settled through community negotiations.

The Naga villages in the bordering areas lack basic facilities like proper education, medical infrastructure and above all lack economic growth. There are some borders like the Merapani or Tizit or the Geliki, Amguri areas with market places but do not meet the requisite facilities needed by the people. There are overlapping claims to the border rights. According to D.Kikon (2008:67) the Naga village of Merapani (Nagaland) does not get Government subsidies as the Merapani town in the Doyang Valley (Assam). It lacks proper roads and basic amenities like health centres, proper schools and markets. The locals from this Naga village travel to Merapani town in Assam for all their needs. Their dependence on the market in Assam makes them vulnerable targets of the central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and other state authorities

posted in this foothill border. The Naga villagers refer to their customary law and practices and say that they do not have land records and documents. Land holdings depend on self-occupation and on how much a person can cultivate. The farmlands have not been allotted by the government since the people live in a community land ownership system.

The border between the Nagas and Assam has become a disputed site. Movements for people as well as goods are restricted in most of the Naga inhabitants bordering the area of Assam. Inner line Permit even regulates and restricts in and out movement from the Naga hills. Places like the Merapani, Geliki, Amguri, and Tizit the borders are manned like international borders. The two states claim on the territory has developed rivalry between the two. This factor does not encourage the trade facilities between the two. Many tribals are also selling their lands to outsiders to meet their own means there by landholdings in those border areas which has a rich historical ties is slowly diminishing.

According to late Nzanbemo Kinghen “the Lothas still claim those lands that were granted by the Ahom Rajas as goodwill gesture which the Assamese have and converted occupied most of the land into tea gardens. They use the authority and the Central Reserve Police Force to evacuate the Nagas who make an attempt to settle in those areas”. The yearly tax which was given to the Nagas by the Assam people occupying the Naga territories in foothill areas have stopped or totally forgotten. Shingnyu Phom states that till December 1973 tax of rupees 25 was collected from the Nagachilla also known as Nazaria or Gelagi Khat.

Despite such developments in the foothill border, the government of Nagaland and Assam continue to have overlapping territorial claims on this border but one does not see a genuine effort to solve the problem. The historical and social ties in these foothills can become a framework to resolve the dispute. Instead, the rival states, territorial claims threaten to seal off

the hill-valley relations forever. Today politics in this border has two meanings: either electoral politics or civil society initiatives. For electoral politics, many households settled along the dispute boundaries have dual voting identity cards. They are eligible to vote both in Assam and Nagaland. Voting is a ritual on the Nagaland-Assam border but parliamentary politics greatly shape the border dispute. Often such persuasion tends to disrupt the social and economic collaboration and networks among people. Civil society initiatives are important as long as it involves the foothill people's experiences and views about how to continue to maintain the foothill border as a site of collaboration and networks, and not as a site to seal off the hill and the valley permanently (Kikon 2009: 87).

Through this work there has been considerable opportunity to get acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Naga tribes also meet people who had taken part in the trading activities with the Ahoms. The Nagas and Ahom have gone through a long chain of a dynamic development stages. There are considerable improvement in the transport and communication sector, development in trade and commerce in different level due efforts of the governments from both side.

From the research work carried out some core issue that need consideration are given below.

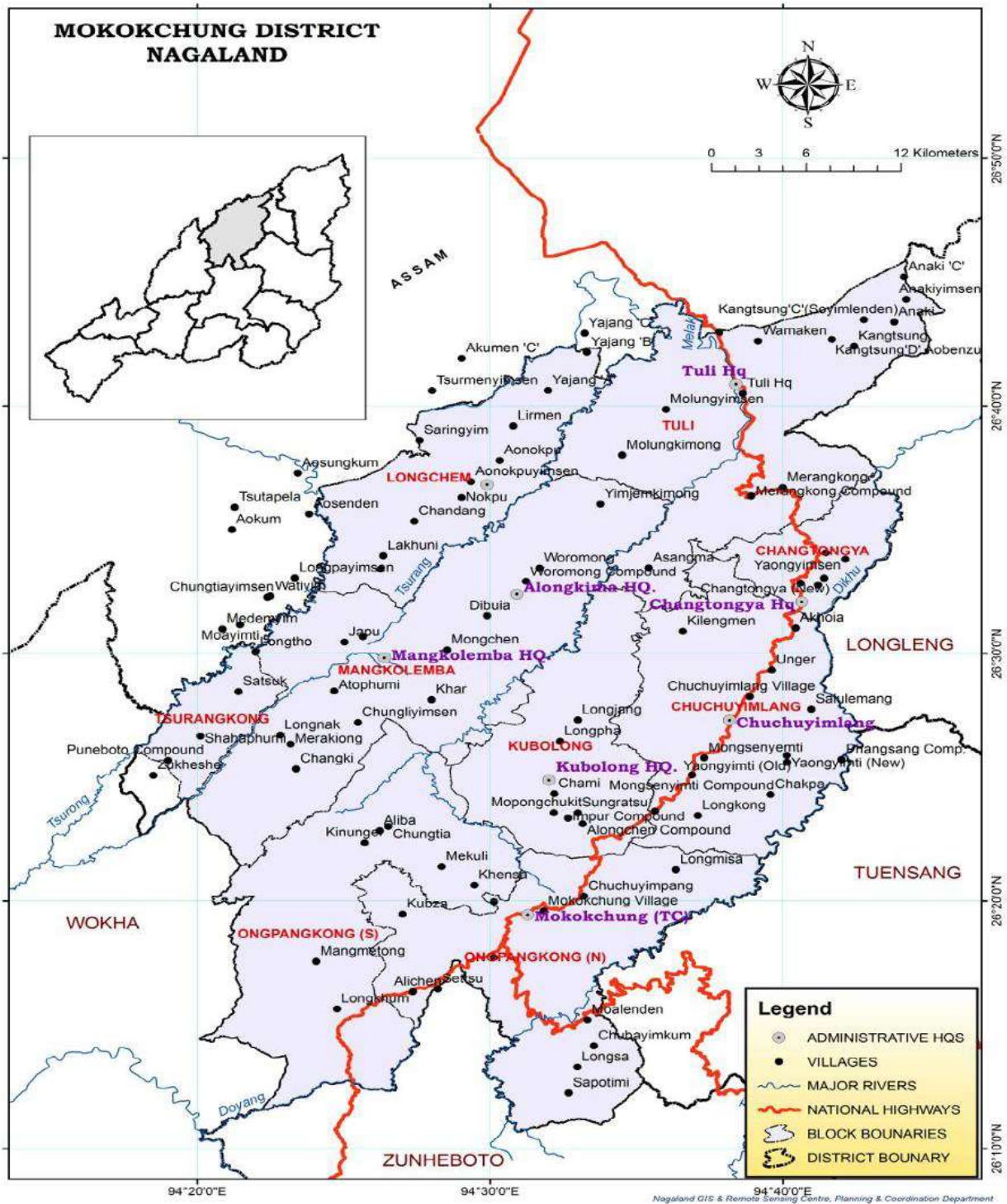
1. Why the governments from both sides are not initiating to preserve and maintain the age old market places that have rich historical significance?
2. Why there is no effort to rekindle the past relationship between the two communities?
3. Is the economic condition from the respective end self sufficient enough to put an end to the past history?
4. Can any restrictions be imposed on the illegal occupation and to the ever expanding business in the border areas?





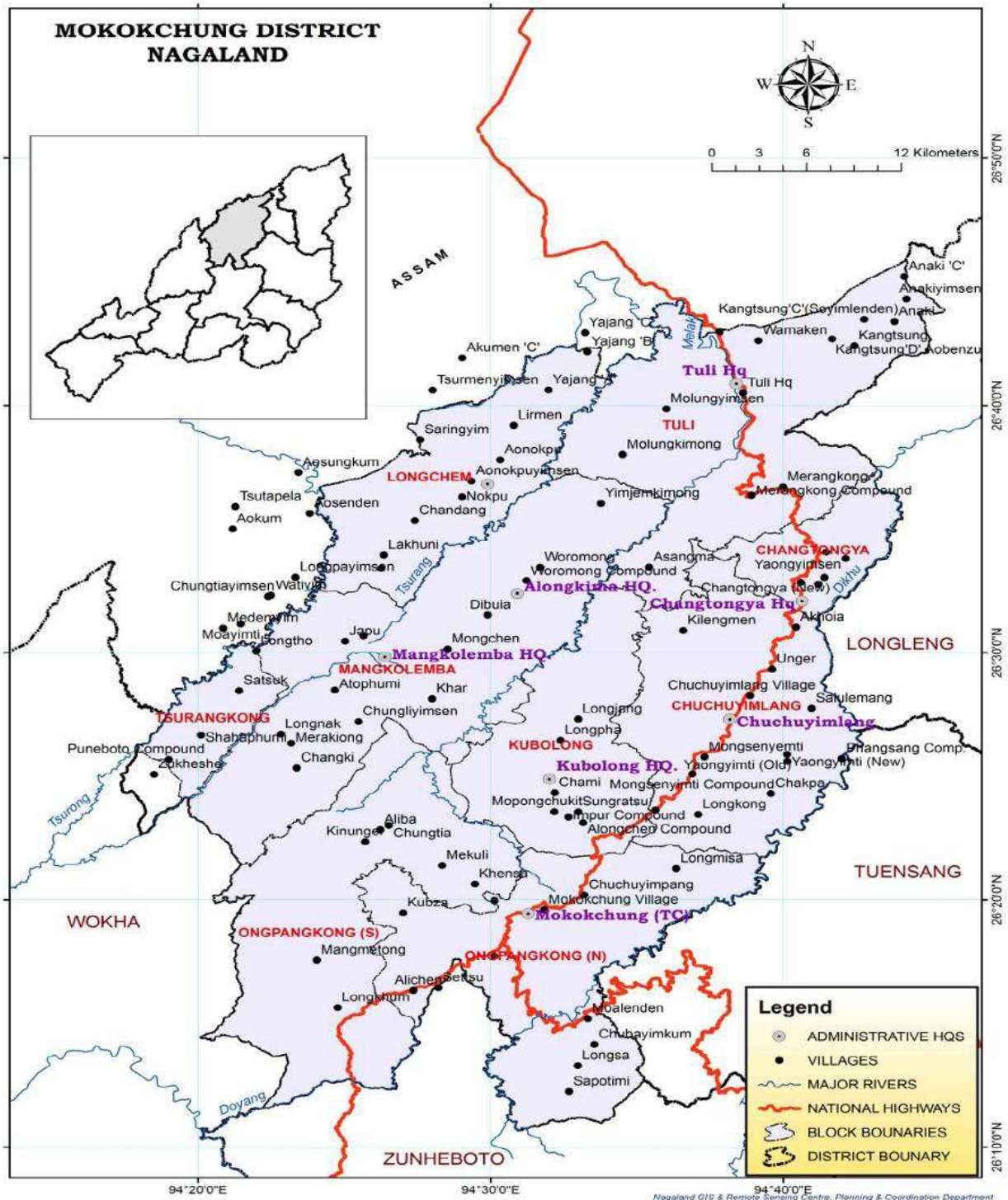
Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

**Fig 2. Map of Nagaland.**



Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

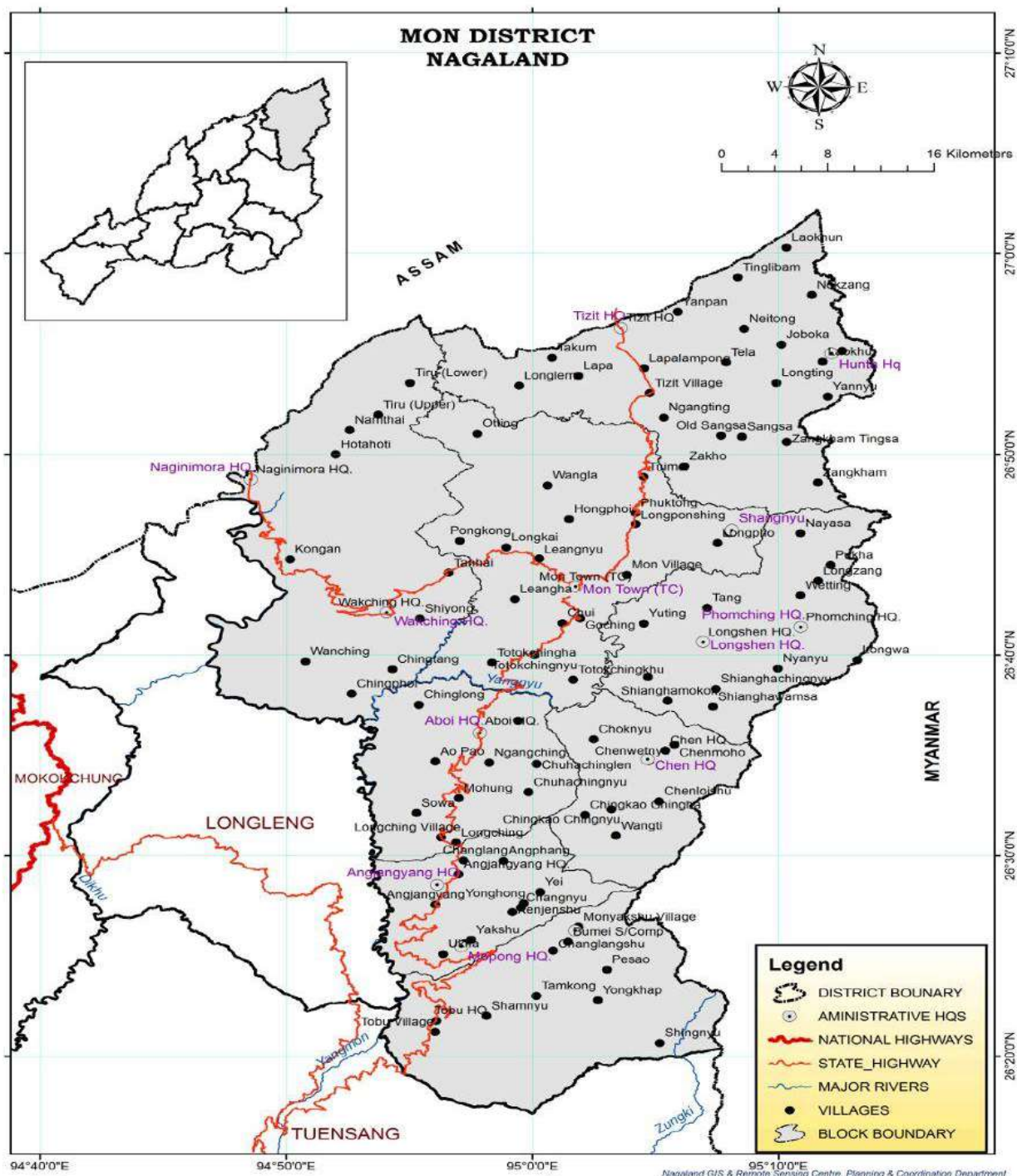
Fig 2. Map of Nagaland.



Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

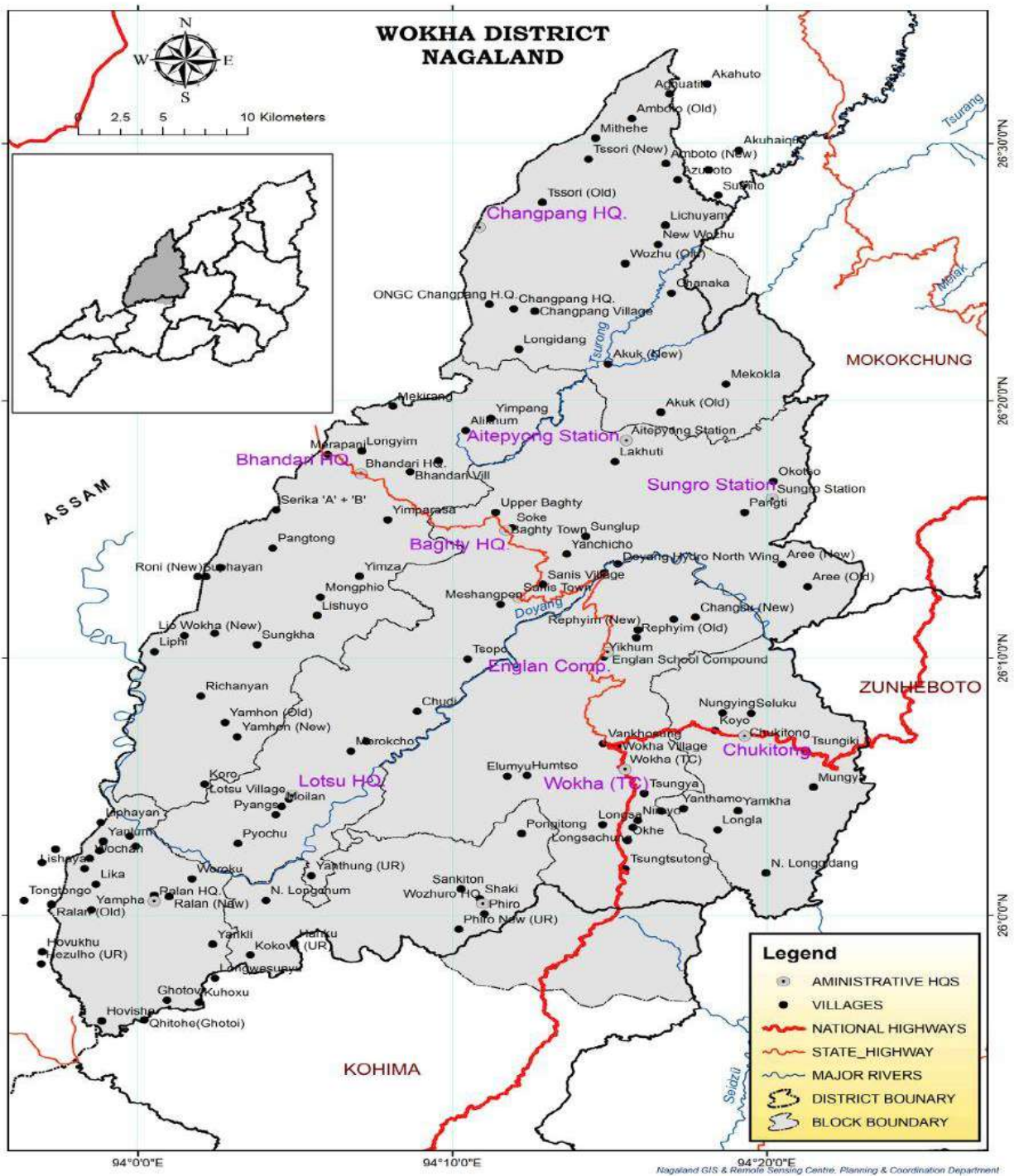
Figure 3. Map of Mokokchung District.





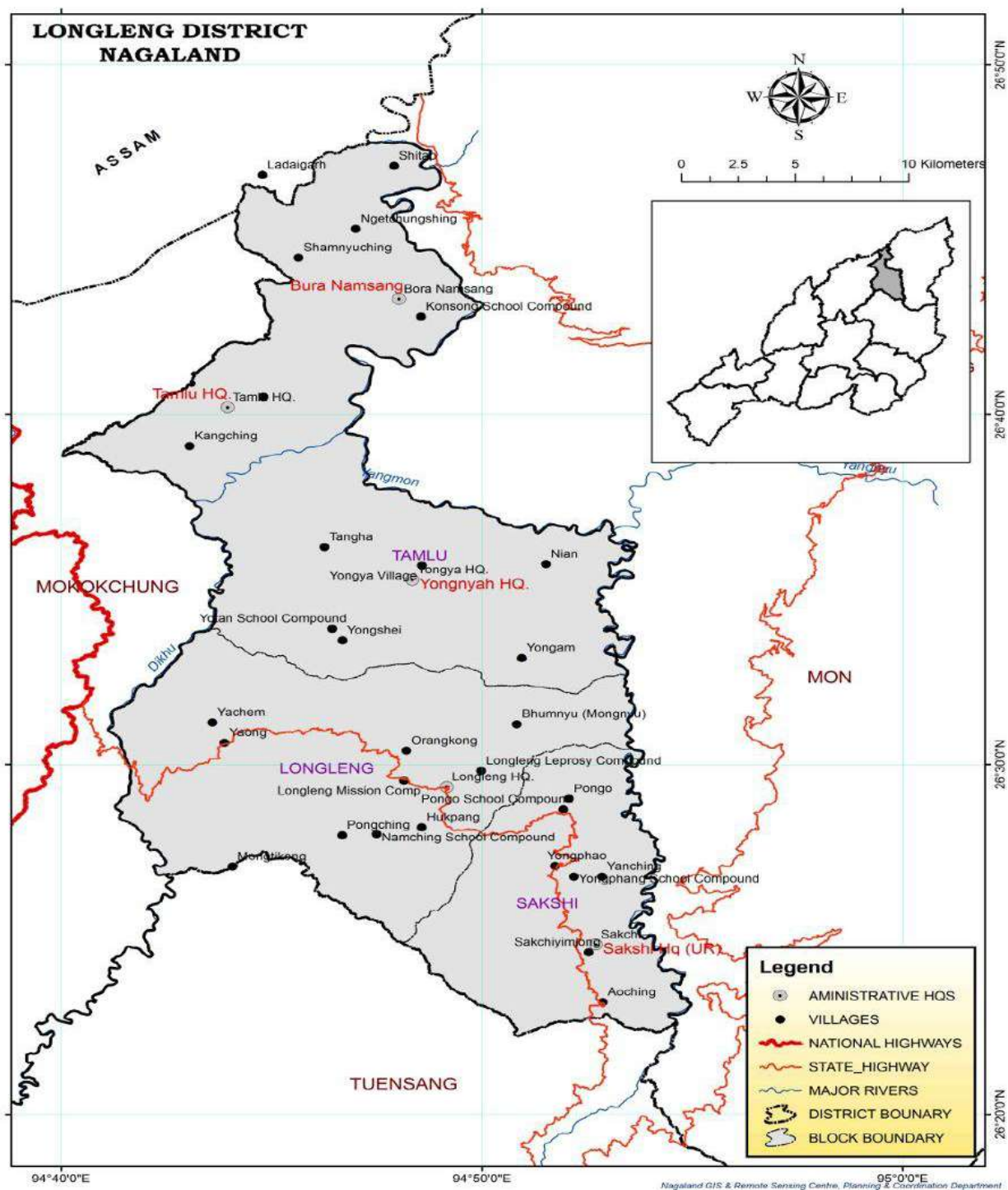
Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

Fig 4. Map of Mon District



Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

Fig 5. Map of Wokha



Source: Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing, Planning & Coordination Department.

Fig 6. Map of Longleng





**PLATE 1**

**Naganimorah Market under Mon District  
Assamese and Naga Traders selling local Product**



**Assamese Traders selling Betel Nuts and Pan Leave in the Naganimorah Market**





**Konyak Naga Ladies selling Bags and Shawls in Naganimorah Market**



**Konyak Traders with their commodities in the Naganimorah Market**





**PLATE 2**  
**Merapani Market under Wokha District**



**PLATE 3**  
**Rajapar Market in Assam**





**Bamboo baskets, mats and Fishing baskets.  
Rajapar Market in Assam**



**Bamboo Mat, Hat and Baskets  
Rajapar Market in Assam**





**Dry Fish Seller  
Rajapar Market in Assam**



**Banana Vendors in Rajapar Market, Assam.**





**Betel Nut and Pan Leave vendor in Rajapar Market**



**Iron Implements sold in Rajapar Market**



**PLATE 4**  
**Geliki Market in Assam**



**Geliki Market in Assam**





**Dry Fish vendor in Geliki Market.**



**Betel Nut vendor in the Geliki Market**



Source: Mopungchuket Senso Mungdang Library & Museum  
 PLATE 5. *Chabili*, A Monetary Value used by Ao Nagas



Source: Mopungchuket Senso Mungdang Library & Museum

*Chabili*





**Source: Angh's House in Lungwa, Mon District**  
**PLATE 6. Konyak Nagas Monetary value**



# **Appendix**

## **Field Questioners**

1. What was the geographical location of the Naga tribes that had contacts with the Ahoms?
2. How old is the village?
3. What is the strength of the village population?
4. What are the main crop produced by the village?
5. What is the main economy of the village?
6. Did the Nagas ventured to the valley for economic reasons?
7. What led to trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
8. What was the nature of the trade among the Nagas before they began trade with Ahoms?
9. Did the Nagas ventured in the valleys for other purpose besides trade?
10. How many Nagas tribes were actively involved in trade relation with Ahoms?
11. Why only few Naga tribes carried out trade relations with the Ahoms?
12. Why the other Naga tribes did not have trade relations with the Ahoms?
13. Which tribe carried out maximum trade with the Ahoms?
14. Which Naga village did the maximum trade with the Ahoms?
15. Which tribe resided near to the Ahoms?

16. Which villages were nearest to the markets?
17. Did the Ahoms maintain any contacts with the Nagas before the trade relation began?
18. Are there any official records or historical records to base the relation between the Nagas and Ahoms?
19. Did the geographical features assist the trade activities?
20. Did the demand for commodities differ from tribe to tribe?
21. Whether trade was carried out yearlong or seasonal?
22. Why trade was carried out within a definite territory?
23. What is a Khat?
24. What is the main purpose of the Khats?
25. What other purpose did the Khats serve besides trade activity?
26. Where was the location of the Khats?
27. Did the Nagas use a common route to reach the Khats?
28. Why Khats were allotted to the Nagas?
29. How many Khats were allotted to the Nagas?
30. How big are the khats?
31. In which areas these Khats were allotted?
32. How many days does it take to reach the khats?

33. Whether tax was collected from the Khats?
34. Did the Nagas pay tribute to the Ahoms for the Khats?
35. Did the Nagas go down to the market individually or in group?
36. Was there a guide or leader among the trading group that went down to the khats for trade?
37. How many people in a group usually go down for trade?
38. Were women allowed to go down to the khats for trade?
39. Who were in majority in the group? The women or the men?
40. What is the approximate year for the youngest member in the group to take part in trade?
41. Did the traders take the permission from the chief or chairman of the village to undertake the trade with Ahoms?
42. Does the group pay tax to the village headman or the chief to undertake the trade?
43. Are there any incidents of traders being attacked by enemies or wild animals?
44. Are there any incidents of sickness or accidents on the way to the market?
45. Who maintained the khats?
46. What was mode of payment to the care takers?
47. What was the designated work for the care takers in the khats?
48. Did the care takers give any tributes?
49. For how many days trade was carried out?

50. How many people assembled in the market for trade activity?
51. What type of commodities did the Nagas take down to the markets?
52. Did the trader commodities comprise mainly of domesticated products or forest products?
53. What kind of commodities did the Nagas exchanged from the Ahom?
54. What were the most important commodities exchanged between the Nagas and Ahom?
55. What were the most important items collected by the Nagas from the market?
56. What was the value of commodities?
57. Did the traders use any kind of standard weights and measures?
58. What were the basic barter goods?
59. Did your tribe use these items to trade with Ahoms?
- a) Cotton
  - b) Ginger
  - c) dried chilies
  - d) brinjal
  - e) betel nuts and leaves
  - f) yam
  - g) wet and dried bamboo shoots
  - h) Ivory
  - i) Bamboo mat and baskets
  - j) Sesame
  - k) Animal skin, horns, task etc

60. Did your tribe barter these commodities from the Ahoms?

- a) Salt
- b) Iron
- c) dried fish
- d) duck
- e) hen
- f) cows
- g) coal
- h) jute
- i) pan leaves
- j) Bamboo Mat and hats

61. What were the most important items used in trade by the village?

62. Did the Nagas collect the commodities yearlong or for few months?

63. What was the level of industry when trade flourished between the Nagas and Ahoms?

64. What were the kinds of metals used in the barter system?

65. Was livestock used for barter system?

66. What was the value of livestock in the market?

67. Was cattle considered to be more valuable than the other commodities?

68. What was the value of cotton in the market?

69. What was the value of Salt in the market?

70. Did the Nagas bought dry fish brought from the market?
71. Did the traders use any kind of medium besides the barter system for trade?
72. What was the name of the medium used for exchanging the goods?
73. The Ahoms used money which was made of brass
74. What was money known in the local dialects?
75. Do the Khats still exist?
76. What is the present status of the khats?
77. Who are presently occupying the Khats areas?
78. Did the Nagas settle in the valleys when trade relation started?
79. Was the business carried out on complete faith and trust between the Nagas and Ahoms?
80. Why did the Nagas communicate with the Ahoms at large and not with the other neighboring areas?
81. Was there any inter-marriage between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
82. Are there any Nagas settled in the plain areas?
83. What is the economic impact on the Nagas and Ahom?
84. What is the social impact of the trade relation on the Nagas and Ahoms?
85. What is the political impact on the Nagas and Ahom from the trade relation?
86. Is there any record of cultural exchange between the two communities?

87. What are the possibilities of reviving the past trade relation between the Nagas and Ahoms?
88. Was there any kind of restriction on the movements between the Nagas and the Ahoms during the trade relation?
89. Are there any record of outside interventions in the trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
90. What are the present developments between the Nagas and Ahoms in the border areas?
91. What is the level of communication between the Nagas and the Assamese people in the border areas?
92. What is the present economic condition of the Nagas and Assamese people living in the border areas?
93. Are the Nagas and Assames still running trade activities in the market?
94. What are the major commodities sold in the markets now?
95. Which side (Nagas or Assamese) is more active in the trade activities?
96. Did modernization effect the economic relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
97. Did the colonial rule in the North East India have an impact on the trade relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms?
98. How were the border demarcation maintained to have cordial relation?
99. Is the business in the border market based on the age old trading system or new innovation trading system has been introduced in the market?

100. What are the outcomes of the new trade system in the market?
101. What is the level of communication between the Nagas and the Assamese people in the border areas now?



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