



## Seeing Sociologically- Measuring the relationship between two border states: Nagaland and Assam

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**Abstract-** The study between two border state is significant in understanding the shape of the relationship among two entirely different cultures. This paper undertakes the task of understanding how one state influences the other and the assimilation among the two states. Assam and Nagaland shares approximately 434km boundary. And the both states share a remarkable relationship; The unrestricted movement of people across this border over time has enhanced social and cultural ties and expanded economic interdependence between two countries of people, who shares many commonalities. The selected Foothill village is an indigenous community residing in the border region of Nagaland and Assam. In this case of a border village, its liminality exposes it to the forces of assimilation from both the larger Assamese food culture as well as other tertiary globalizing forces of the neoliberal market regime. Thus, by sustaining their indigenous traditions, the foothill village have produced a counter paradigm against such assimilative forces and have been able to mark out a space for their traditional peculiarities, their identity, to be precise.

**Keywords:** assimilation, remarkable relationship, unrestricted movement, commonalty, indigenous community, liminality, counter paradigm.

### I. INTRODUCTION :

Although it has been seen some land disputes over the border areas but now a day's assimilation has been taking place among the Nagas and the Non-Nagas areas like in the economic sector, in the social structure, culture, religion and in the food habits also. Due to extension of business, the Naga people have been visiting the nearby markets of Assam like Merapani. In such a process, there takes place the exchange of language, which is inevitable in the process of market system. This also leads to exchange of attires, ornaments, food habits which in turn results as the assimilation in culture and rituals. Food habits have been changing in assimilating with the other Naga groups as well as non-Nagas. With the introduction of Christianity among the people of Lothas many changes have taken place in the traditional Lotha Nagas food. In spite of many changes taking place in the food habits, life styles and in many areas, they are not giving up their traditions..

The study will be significant as the selected research site is a foothill, a heterogeneous, and a border village where the habits of the village people gets assimilated and generate a blended culture.

### II. AN ACCOUNT OF FOOTHILL VILLAGE:

North East India is a homeland of different ethnic groups. There are various ethnic groups who inhabit the North East region; and Nagas are one of them. The term Naga has a various understanding among the people. It is a generic name of the community given by the outsiders. Among the Nagas there are 16 major groups which include Ao, Sema, Konyak, Phom, Lotha, Rengma, etc. Each tribe is distinct in character from the others in terms of customs, language, food habits and attire. Nagas don't have a common language. Each tribe has their own language. English is the official language among the Nagas. The traditional Naga religion is animistic. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of British rule Christianity was introduced. Now they become

Christian. Villages were divided into certain clan. Marriage within the same clan is not permitted, it is considered as taboo. The traditional Naga society is a patriarchal in nature. The selected foothill village comes under the district of Wokha, Nagaland. The district Wokha also known as home of Lothas having a total geographical area of 1628 sq. km, it is situated in the mid-western part of the Nagaland State<sup>1</sup>. This is located in the border of Assam and Nagaland. The area covers an area of 160 square kilometres, and the total population of the village is approximately 1,786, amongst them 55% are male and 45% are female, with 250 household approximately. Among them, 225 households belonged to Lothas, 8 households belonged to Sema, 6 belonged to Rengma, and 5 each belonged to Aos and Konyaks, while there is also 1 Kuki house. And therefore, the majority of the village belongs to Lothas. The main road link from Merapani to Wokha, it is around 20km approx. The road condition is not good. In the rainy season the people of the village face lots of problem. The people of the foothill village finds difficult to go to Wokha town for any reason. In the village, there are some Baptist Christians, while some are Catholic Christian. There are four churches in the village such as Baptist church, Catholic church, united Baptist church, and Assemble God.

The selected foothill village consist of five Naga tribes: viz. Konyak, Sema, Lotha, Ao, Rengma. The Lotha Nagas constitutes one of the major tribes amongst the Naga. The Lotha tribes mainly inhabit Wokha district of Nagaland. Originally the Lothas called themselves as '*kyong*' which means 'man'. Till today they called themselves as '*kyong*'. It is a patriarchal society in nature. They are governed by their village headman. They termed the village headman as '*pvuti*'. Among Lothas they have clan system. Various clans among the people are *Odyuo*, *Kikon*, *Humtsoe*, *Ezung*, *Jami*, *Yanthan*, *Ngullie*, *Mozhui*, *Jami*, etc. They practice clan exogamy. Lothas are well known for their folk dances and folk songs. They wear traditional shawls occasionally and it indicates their social status. The shawl wear by women is known as *opvuram* and the shawl wear by men is called as *Longpensu*. Like other Nagas, Lothas also practiced headhunting in ancient time. Hunting a enemies head was a matter of prestige. Though the majority of Lothas are Baptist, there exist some catholic as well. Tokhuemong is a harvest festival celebrated among the Lothas.

The study has been based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected mainly by conducting interviews. This has been supplemented by participant and non-participant observation. Secondary source of data include books, articles, newspapers, journals, e-resources, etc.

**Religious Beliefs:** Simply, religion means belief in supernatural power, but the experience of religion is differs from one religion to other. Religion acts as an agent which brings solidarity among the people of a community (Durkheim, 2001). Among the Nagas, the concept of religion is something different from the others. Earlier they believe that there is something supernatural power behind the cause of lightning, rain etc. And they believed in life after death, In the case of Lothas, it is not exceptional; they too believed in this, they are also animist by their faith in natural forces. They called their god as '*potso*'. Many things have changed with the introduction of Christianity, though Christianity abolished animism but the beliefs are still there among the people. Earlier The Lotha people have faith on totem. For Durkheim, totemism is the elementary forms of religion, which is the simplest and most primitive religion (Durkheim, 2001). The entire village community eat together at the time of feast and other religious festivals. In *tokhuemong* which is the post-harvest festival of Lothas. Earlier, people considered Sky and Earth as God. Tokhu means going out and collect foods from the villagers. And Emong means the time. TokhuEmong is celebrated in the first week of November every year and it is celebrated for 10days. TsensaoKikon, a village headman and he also a retired teacher he expressed that it is a festival of brotherhood and oneness where they eat together and dance together. They praised god for their abundant blessings. The festival started from collection of food by the village headmen, these foods consist of rice, vegetables, fruits etc. and this collection offer to the God, in Lotha term God known as potso: A fraction of this collection used to buy a pig and the pig was distributed amongst every household. Although among the other Nagas these types of ritual mainly done by women for instance among the Angami Naga women are placed in high esteem. In Angami Naga society, it is a custom and ritual for women to initiate agriculture and beginning of harvest, who is known as *leidepfu* or the first reaper. Women are expected to have good knowledge about the distribution of plants, seasons of availability and methods of collections (Singh and Teron, 2017). There is a ritual that if a stranger visited the Lotha village

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://wokha.nic.in>

during the festival then he has to stay there until the festival ends. Rituals and festivals is the one where all the people unite and get chance to comes together and share their feelings with one another.

**Rituals:** There are some restrictions in terms of taking some particular food in some ritual. If one does this, it will be considered as a taboo. If a person dies in accident then the family don't eat any meat for 1 year but if one die by suicide and there was a heavy rain then they can eat meat it is belief that all sins gone with the rain. Among the Lothas, it is taboo for women to eat twin food, because there is a belief that if one woman takes twin food, then she will give birth to twins. During pregnancy there is a restrictions on eating goat, a village old stated the reasons that if the pregnant women eat goat during her pregnancy then child will talkative. There is restriction on taking old Guava and pineapple, it as causes of disease. They don't eat monkeys' meat. In marriage there is a ritual of distributing pork among the brides clan, and the head of the pig goes to the bride's father. And the rest of the meat distributed among the members of the clan; and in return they would give gifts to the couple in the marriage.

**Food habits:** Among the Nagas their food habits acts as an important determinants of their uniqueness. Often all communities have their own traditional foods. Among the Nagas, traditionally fermented foods are still a favourite item in the food preparation of Naga tribes. Mainly traditional Naga food consists of some kind of meat which is smoked, dried, of fermented and taken with rice. Naga cuisine is not just about meat, they eat lots of vegetables too. They mainly eat boiled vegetables. These are the traditional way of food habits among them.

### III. ASSIMILATION AND INFLUENCE WITH NON-NAGA COMMUNITY:

There are many factors that influence in the process of assimilation for instance language, religious ceremony, cultural customs and tradition etc, through which they comes into contact with each other. The language of Naga people ie. Nagamese is very easy to understand. And in most of Naga families the different food items are prepared which are very similar to that of the Assamese community. For instance, the preparation of coconut laddus, which is made mainly by Assamese society during Bihu festival, has been of lately prepared by the Lothas. And also other changes have taken place in the food habits of Nagas because of the availability of foods, especially non-naga traditional items, in the foothill area. And people of the village are now engaged in plain wet rice cultivation. They face many problems in jhum cultivation such as their home is far away from the cultivated land it is difficult for them to go to those jhum lands and cultivate. So, they started cultivation of wet rice in the plain area. They themselves do not work in the field they give their land to Assamese people and Assamese people works there as a tenant. For this Assamese tenants have to give some amount of rice to the Naga landowners. And also intermarriage has been taking place among the nagas and non nagas.

Near the Naga village there is an Assamese village name Sibangpara. The people of Sibangpara village are mainly dependent on agriculture. The people of Sibangpara used to go to the Naga village for selling the vegetables like ghost peeper, green bean, black peeper, spinach, water spinach, fern, pea greens, coriander, mustard green, etc. Munindra Saikia, headmen of Sibangpara village stated that the people of their village are more or less dependent on the Naga village because mainly the Nagas buy their vegetables from them; the most of the profit collect from the Nagas. And he also expressed that Nagas don't bargain anything, but in the situation of Assamese buyers, it is different. And the people also go to the Merapani to selling the vegetables; there also they get Naga buyers. Nagas also buy chicken, duck and other animals from the people of the Assamese village.

Nagas invited the Assamese people to their festivals, Christmas celebration, marriage, and they arranged for them different meals. Because Nagas used to eat beef, snake, dog but the Assamese people don't eat these. So they arranged for them other meals like vegetables, fish curry etc. There are no hard and fast restrictions on taking food among the Lothas. Because of they are now transformed into Christianity and also with the

interaction with non Nagas they have given up some traditional food practices like they don't use dog, snake and any other foods in any ceremonies where they invited non Nagas which are not eaten by all people. As they are living in the foothill area they are mostly connected with the Assamese people and also with Nepalese and Muslims. The religious beliefs, values and traditional norms influence the patterns of food. Among the Nagas their food habits act as an important determinant of their uniqueness. Often all communities have their own traditional foods. Among the Lothas, traditionally fermented foods are still a favourite item in the food preparation of Naga tribes. Mainly traditional Naga food consists of some kind of meat which is smoked, dried, or fermented and taken with rice. Naga cuisine is not just about meat, they eat lots of vegetables too. They mainly eat boiled vegetables. These are the traditional way of food habits among them. Although the Naga people are advancing but they still follow their traditions. They didn't give up their traditional food habits. They still believe in those traditional rituals where there are some sorts of restrictions in taking some kind of foods for some definite time and if someone denying to follow these rituals, this would be considered as taboo. These rituals are coming from the ancient time; because of they have respects for their ancestors they have to follow their path and their advices.

#### IV. CONCLUSION:

So, we can say that it is just a line on map that separates the two states but the bonding they share is so strong that it is unbreakable. They have their own cultural customs, traditions and religious practices here influence derived from trade and intermarrying between the groups. And also Nagas invited the Assamese people to their festivals, Christmas celebration, marriage, and they arranged for them different meals. Because Nagas used to eat beef, snake, dog but the Assamese people don't eat these. So, they arranged for them other meals like vegetables, fish curry etc. There are no hard and fast restrictions on taking food among the Nagas. Because of they are now transformed into Christianity and also with the interaction with non Nagas they have given up some traditional food practices like they don't use dog, snake and any other foods in any ceremonies where they invited non Nagas which are not eaten by all people. As they are living in the foothill area they are mostly connected with the Assamese people and also with Nepalese and Muslims. The religious beliefs, values and traditional norms influence the patterns of food. Although the Naga people are advancing but they still follow their traditions. They didn't give up their traditional food habits.

It is crucial to conclude, the Nagas in the foothill village, has vitally sustained their traditions. And therefore, the Nagas subsequently produced a counter paradigm against such assimilative forces and have been able to mark out a space for their cultures.

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