



Research Paper

The Cultural Dynamics of LOTHA Naga Tribe

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ABSTRACT

Culture is an integral part of any society and it is not static because the lifestyle of the people keeps changing daily. The socio-economic and political lives of any given society are affected by their culture. However, the culture of Lotha tribe is not much known to the outside world due to the lack of documents. Thus, this paper seeks to investigate and document the culture of the Lotha's that was before and after the advent of Christianity and Modernization. The result revealed that the introduction of education to the Lotha tribe after the advent of Christianity and Modernization has immensely contributed in transforming the social, political and economic lives of the people. However, it was also found that many indigenous belief and practices of the Lotha's have vanished while accommodating the culture of Christianity and Modernization. The paper concludes with certain suggestion for preserving the age-old culture.

KEY WORD: *Lotha, Pre and Post Christianity and Modernization.*

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Culture is an integral part of any society in the world. It affects the entire lifestyle of human beings living in the society. A society has its own cultural value and socio-economic and political factors are impacted by the culture of a society. Culture is defined as the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). Similarly, Meg defines culture as a collective set of beliefs, behaviors, ideas, philosophies, and practices shared by groups of people (Meg, 2023). Hence, culture has multi-dimensional facets that influence all round activities of society. The *Lotha* society is no exception to it. A tribe must have a distinctive language, or a distinctive use of elements of other surrounding languages (Egyonkosh, 2023). Thus, tribal culture can be defined in the way tribal people live, the families, the tribe's language, laws and custom, feast, songs and dances, and so on.

Cultures of *Lotha*'s ancestors are not known to the outside world due to lack of writings and documents but the culture that had been left by them were rich that can guide the lifestyle of the people a lot. Traditionally the social and economic lives of the *Lotha*'s were village based wholly dependent on agriculture. It was a closed tribe because of the constant conflicts among the warring villages with little contact with Ahoms of Assam. Thus, trade and commerce did not flourish much and the culture of *Lotha* tribe remained intact. But after the advent of Christianity and the creation of Nagaland state in 1963, the closed village economy shuts down and many important changes and development has taken place. From oral education to formal education, huts to buildings, naked life to fashionable life and from simple stable food to varieties of food items, the culture of the *Lotha*'s has been changing ever since the advent of Christianity and Modernization. Evidences from various researchers shows that christainity has played important role in transforming the tribal societies of the northeast. Pala and Dubey (2012) demonstrated with empirical evedince that Christianity had played a positive role in fostering literacy among the tribes of the northeast. Mawrie (2012) also shows that Christianity has played important role in the spread of socio-political consciousness among the tribes of the north east.

However, there are many positive and negative impacts on the culture of the *Lotha*'s after the advent of modernization and globalization. Thus, the objective of the paper is to investigate the effects of Modernization and Christianity on *Lotha* culture. To fulfill the above objectives, an interview was conducted on the older people who had been a part to the old traditions. Keeping this view the paper is divided into two sections.

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Section I highlights the cultural perspectives of *Lotha* tribe before the advent of Christianity and Modernization. Section II investigates how much Christianity and Modernization has affected and is affecting the *Lotha* tribe and what changes are still on in this tribe. This section also contains some recommendations to check the blind copying of modernity with concluding remarks.

PRE- CHRISTAINITY AND MODERNIZATION:

Pre-modernization period had its own culture that was very much dominated by older beliefs and lifestyles. Pre-modernization culture was lacking democracy, economically backward and socially closed. There was lack of formal education so there was lack of mobility also. This section tries to analyze the entire spheres of older culture of the *Lotha* tribe.

a) Political life:- The political life of the *Lotha* tribe was not democratic. It was somewhat monarchs in its nature. But it does not mean that democratization was not there. To some extent there was democracy, as the selection of *Pvuti* (chief priest) was not hereditary but it was selected from the respective clans on rotation basis which highlights the democratic nature of this tribe. But there was gender biasness in the older political system of this tribe because women were only seen in kitchen, farm and fields but not in the decision making body. The village was controlled by *Pvuti* (Chief priest) who is selected according to clan and was on rotation basis. All the issues and decisions of the village are discussed and resolved in *Chumpo* (multi-purpose) house in the presence of the village elders (Man) along with *Pvuti* (Chief priest, who is also the chairman). The rules and resolution passed from this *Chumpo* house was final and binding for all the citizens of the village. The cases of any disputes in the village were also disposed off from here.

b) Economic life: The economy of the *Lotha* tribe was though mainly village based economy wholly dependent on agriculture, yet handicrafts and handloom activities were in practice.

The system of cultivation for the *Lotha's* was Jhumming. The site for cultivation was chosen by *Pvuti* (Chief priest) of the village and *Opo-etae* (starting of jungle cleaning) starts only after *Tokhu* festival. Once the jungle was cleaned and enough precautionary measure was made, the whole village decides a date (usually in the month of March every year) for burning the cleaned jungle. Then, the unburned trees and weeds were cleaned and huts were made before *Lichen* (sowing the seeds). After sowing the seeds and before the harvest, the weeds in the fields were cleaned three times, viz, *Jumba Chondemo* (April), *Jumba Enio* (May) and *Lirhon* (July). Then the fields were harvested and taken to their granaries. Usually the jhum cycle was six to seven years, therefore, once the fields were harvested, the new site is decided for cultivation. They also practiced multi-cropping system of cultivation. Not only do they depend on agricultural products for their needs but they also depended on both wild vegetables and wild life for their food.

The *Lotha* ancestors were also self reliant as reflected by their activities. The utensils of the *Lotha's* were made of mud, bamboo, wood, sea shell, ivory and hairs and feathers of animals and birds. The different utensils made of bamboos were, *Bhareh* (for transporting firewood, water, etc.), *Okhyak* (for carrying rice), *Tsungtero* (for measuring rice), *Ophok* (for drying rice), *Ophvu* (Earthen pots), *Ophi* (plate made of bamboo), *Opvu* (cup made of bamboo), *Cha-ni* (for filtering rice-bear), *Moro* (for husking the rice), *Yenkok* (spoons), *Othue* (for carrying water), *Phya-pho-ro* (for drying vegetables which is placed above the fire), *O-nhen* (robe made of bamboo or the bark of a tree), *Chappa* (for carrying personal belongings), *Okhyu* (for filtering the bamboo shoot water). The different utensils made of wood include, *Be-lang* (bed made from one log of tree), *Tsumpo* (for grinding the rice which was also made from one log of tree), *Okong* (plate made of wood), *Ojen* (for storing rice and rice-bear, which is also made of one log of a tree and resembles the modern drum), *Lee-jub* (for carrying the daos). They also use the hard cover of the vegetable plants for making their handicrafts, viz, *Shumo* (for carrying and keeping rice-bear), *Lee-fu* (mugs) and *Pvu-took* (for carrying curry). The *Lotha's* dyed goat's hair for decorating their multicoloured spears and daos, hornbill's feathers to make the headgear and elephant tusk for making the armlets. The handlooms of the *Lotha's* were made from the cotton (*Khonkothe*). After the harvest of the cotton, which is usually done in the month of October, the cotton is dried in the sun and then the seeds in the cotton are taken out and the cotton is spun. To colour the spinned cotton *Khumvu* leave (a very poisonous leave) is boiled and the spinned cotton is put in the boiling water. Then, the coloured cotton is dried and used for making various handlooms.

The economic system being a closed one with limited trading activities with Ahom's in the form of barter (exchanging indigenous products for salt, iron and dry fish), the production system was based on self-sufficiency and large scale production for market does not exist.

c) Family and Social life of the *Lotha's*: – The family and social life of the *Lotha* was patriarchal in nature as women were not head of the family, do not possess property right and participated in the decision making process of the society. Moreover, the social, culture and religion of *Lotha* tribe were related to a large extent because most of the practice and beliefs of this tribe were dedicated to some unknown supernatural power. Though there was no formal education among *Lotha* tribe, the practice and belief of the tribe was passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition.

- i. *Epok* (Birth) – It is a custom for the *Lotha's* to give the name to a child the moment the mother gives birth; she/he should be named *Koshako* or *Koshakla* (bitterness) so as to save the child from being taken away by the evil spirit. The husband along with one child takes the placenta to tie it in a *tsungon* tree (banyan tree). Only on the sixth day (baby boy) or fifth day (baby girl) the real name was given. When the name is given, the child who accompanied the husband for placing the placenta on the tree was made the first person to carry the baby.
- ii. *Yanpi-yan-than* (Marriage) – When a boy and a girl want to get married, the family members along with the boy goes to girls house and engagement takes place. However, after engagement it takes at least two years of courtship before they get married. During the courtship the boy along with his *Okhumo* (best friend) goes to the girl house and chops the firewood frequently (almost every month before marriage). Then, when the time was near for the marriage, the boy has to get ready with *Tsopo Ki* (rest house) and *Oki* (home). During the marriage, the boy dress himself in a warrior attire and along with his bachelor friends goes to the girl's house at night and sing "*Oki Chonchia Lo*" (open the door). Then, the boy takes the girl shouting "*Eloe Soa Ka Hey*" (I am taking the girl along with me) and go to *Tsopo Ki*. Here, in this place they stayed for three to four days and leaves for their new home to start a new life.
- iii. *Echu* (Death) – When people pass away it is a custom for the *Lotha's* to bury the death before sunset. Then, family of the death person observes five days of mourning in case of the female and six days of mourning in case of the male. The belongings of the death including food items are kept in the grave. Then, on the fifth or sixth day after the death of a female or male member, the family members observe *Vachi-tsungon* (departing day) marking the end of the mourning. However, the belongings of the death as well as the food items are kept alternatively till *Tokhu Emong* festival. Then, on *Tokhu Emong*, the belongings of the death are thrown in *Echu-rachu* area (designated place to throw the belongings of the death).
- iv. *Rhu-van* (spraying of the seeds) – This ritual is performed before burning the cleaned jungle. The day is fixed by *Pvuti* (chief priest) of the village. Once the day is fixed the warrior/rich man of the village along with their wife goes to the site of the cleaned jungle and makes a dummy garden walled by branches of the bamboo. Then, the seeds of the rice are grind and mixed with water before throwing it in the dummy garden. After this act they launch from there and proceed for home. It was only after two or three days of this ritual that the cleaned jungle were burnt.
- v. *Likhum* (Worshipping of the field) – The *Lotha's* who were originally animist also worship the field. *Likhum* was observed when the harvest season was near, the day and the date is fixed by the individual farmers according to their convenience. When the day comes, the farmer performs a ritual by plucking the feathers off a live chicken. Then the chicken was cooked in an earthen pot and the whole cooked chicken was buried inside with the pot upside down. After all this rituals, they spend the night in the field.
- vi. *Epo-etha* (plastering of the holes) – This was an act of blessing the granaries before the harvest. When the harvest season was near, each household prepares for this act. The day was fixed by the head of the family and when that day comes, they prepare a heavy meal and take small children to their granary. When they reach the granary, the father would open the granary and put the children inside and asked if there are any holes. The child had to say, no father, no hole is found (which means it is a sign of abundance). Then, they dined together and leave's for their home.
- vii. *Elo* (offering) - When a person falls ill, the *Lotha's* believed that it was the handi-work of some evil spirit. Thus, a person who was ill prepares a gift containing cooked meat and rice and offers it to the evil spirit by keeping the gift under the *Tsungon* (banyan) tree.
- viii. *Ra-mvu* (casting away bad fortune)- This ritual is performed by those family members when bad fortune occurs to them. In this ritual, the head of the family takes a young boy along with a live chicken to the outskirts of the village. Here, they sacrificed the live chicken and offered it to God. Then, the prepared food items brought from home were take and a prayer was made from there before leaving for home.
- ix. *Osho You* - (Lavish party) - The monolith that are there in the villages had been erected by a rich people in the village. The erection of this monolith was a show of personal prosperity and wealth for the *Lotha's* in the olden times. Before the erection of this monolith, a person who wanted to do it has to throw a lavish party (*Osho you*) for the entire village. Then, he gathers the youth of the village and the stone was cut and pulled from the jungle to the village. After bringing it to the village it was erected in front of the person's house. Then, the owner of the newly erected monolith proudly wear *Longpense* shawl (a shawl with blue and black strips) because it is a custom for the *Lotha's* that only those persons who has thrown a lavish party (*Osho You*) for the entire village were allowed to wear this particular shawl. In other words, this shawl also represents the cloak of the rich and noble for the *Lotha's* and those who were having this shawls, their status in the society were high.
- x. Festivals – There are four festivals celebrated by the *Lotha's*, viz, *Khyingroe Tokhu*, *Lanvon Tokhu*, *Loroe Tokhu* and *Tokhu Emong*. During this festival *Khyingroe Tokhu* - This is a festival for *Khyingroe* {bachelor(s)} which was held for a week before sowing the seeds in the field that takes place in the month of March every year. Once the day was fixed by the chief priest

(*Pvuti*) of the village, all the families in the village prepares for the festival with rice beer and meat. During this period all the bachelor(s) in the village do not venture out but engaged themselves in activities, viz, games like high jump, tug of war etc., were played. Then, the bachelor goes in group singing in the village path. When the festival is over, then the sowing starts.

Lanvon Tokhu – This is a festival which was celebrated in the month of July every year after cleaning the paths leading to villages and fields. Once the paths are cleaned the next day is observed as *Lanvon Nvu* (respecting the ways). It was believed that if anybody goes to the field on that day, the plentiful harvest of the season will be adversely affected and therefore, it was strictly observed. During this festival rice beer and meat were being made and celebrated by different age-group (*Yinga*) in different houses.

Loroe Tokhu – *Tokhu Emong* begins by celebrating *Loroe Tokhu* which is held every year in the month of November. This festival is mainly observed by the *Lotha Loroe* (Women), where the best traditional attire were displayed and local brew are offered to friends, families, neighbors etc.,

Tokhu Emong – It is celebrated in the 1st week of November every year and it stretches over to 9 days. Earlier, no particular date was fixed. It was the *Pvuti* (chief priest) who gives the signal for opening the festival. He was accompanied by the aides (*Chumpo Khyongroe*) for collecting un-husked rice from every house in the village. The collected rice was sold and the money was used for buying a pig and the rest was used for making rice beer. Then, the pig is shared to all the contributors. This ritual was considered as a contributing factor to general prosperity. Before the commencement of the festival, if any stranger happens to be in the village, he gets two options either to leave before sunset or to stay until the festival was over. He however, enjoys the warm hospitality of the villagers. During this festival, all the villagers take part in the celebration. The main feature of this festival is presented by games like tug of wars, high jump, long jump, javelin throw, Koro errata (modern tri cycling), songs, dances, feast, fun and frolic. Everyone dressed themselves in their traditional attires and costumes according to their social status. The male attires include Longpensi, Phanrupsi and Suisa (Rhukasi) and they wear head gear, hand bangles made of elephant tusk, a tale shape made from animal tails and colourful knee cover along with their spears and daos. For female they are dressed in *Opvuramsi* with necklace made from sea shells were used. This festival also marks the end of the year and the beginning of New Year for the *Lotha*'s. The family who lost any member during the year performs the last rites during this festival.

POST CHRISTAINITY AND MODERNIZATION:

In the post modernization the indigenous culture the *Lotha*'s has been hybridized by many foreign cultures. This fusion was brought about mainly by the introduction of education, christianity and development. Thus, there have been a lot of changes in *Lotha* culture in the field of political, economic and social lives after modernization. The most important changes was the end of head hunting process among the *Lotha* tribe. In this section an analysis was made on the entire present culture of the *Lotha* tribe.

1) Political life;- The introduction of democracy at the grass root level by Nagaland village council 1978 (Govt of Nagaland, 1978) has a great impact on the political life of the *Lotha*'s. The formation of Village Council has revolutionized the political activity of the *Lotha* tribe and it attracted this tribe toward democratization. People from this tribe started participating in political institutions and contributing in democracy a lot. Thus, democracy replaces the age old tradition of chieftainship governing the villages. Now all the important decision regarding the village matters are made by the village council chairman in consultation with the members. However, the law and proceedings of the courts, as protected under Article 371 A, are still dispensed according to *Lotha* custom.

2) Economic life;- The economic horizon of the *Lotha* tribe had widened after the advent of education and modernization. There has been a paradigm shift in the economic activities of the *Lotha* people from agriculture sector to industry and service sector after the advent of modernization.

The jhum cultivation which was practiced earlier has an adverse impact on environment, so people now realized and started to bring out changes in agriculture system. As a result, farming in modern days has witness great changes. From the production of paddy and few crops, the production of agriculture goods has increased both in quantity and varieties. These changes were brought about by the improvement in technology, knowledge of commercialization, demand condition and test of the people. The method of cultivation has also improved from traditional jhum cultivation to terrace cultivation. However, Jhuming still continues to dominate the system of cultivation among the *Lotha*'s which is due to lack of development in irrigation sector. Moreover, the development of the physical infrastructure such as light, road and transport system after the statehood was a boon for the *Lotha* tribe as it enhances the economic activities of the people. From a mere employee as handicrafts and handloom artisans, the employment opportunities has widen to be the employee in the industries (both small and large) and services sector. However, in the course of adopting new technology, the *Lotha*'s have neglected the indigenous practices. This resulted in the lost of many precious cultures while cultivating the modern lifestyle. The age old tradition of making handicrafts and handloom which has been replaced by machine made goods were a clear example of the *Lotha*'s culture drowning in the sea of modernity.

d) Family and Social Life of the *Lotha*'s; – The family and social life of the *Lotha* tribe has under gone a drastic change after modernization and especially after the advent of Christianity. The tribe is still patriarchal in nature with some changes regarding property rights and decision making in the society. In its old tradition, women were not given property rights, especially land, but with the advent of modernization, women get the share of their parent's properties (land) but not their ancestral land. The implementation of women reservation in Village Development Board (VDB) and provision of education to girl child has put women into the decision making process. However, many of the belief and practices of the tribe have vanished with the advent of modernization while some culture has undergone certain changes and a new set of culture has emerged. The age-old culture that are in practice even today with certain changes and modification are, *Epok* (Birth), *Yanpi-yan-than* (Marriage), *Echu* (Death) and *Tokhu Emong* festival. The *Lotha* still practiced the age-old tradition of naming a child only after six (baby boy) or five (baby girl) days of birth. However, the placenta is no more tied on a *tsungon* tree (banyan tree) but is now buried. The culture of marriage (*Yanpi-yan-than*) has also now changed and are now done according to the christain culture. The system of arrange marriage are practiced frequently but the entire process of marriage ceremonies practiced earlier are no longer found in the present culture. The practice of burying the death (*Echu*) before sunset, abserving *Vachi-tsungon* (departing day) and mourning days are still in vogue. However, the practiced of keeping the belongings of the death as well as the food items till *Tokhu Emong* festival are no longer adopted. Moreover, *Tokhu emong* festival is now the only traditional festival that is celebrated by the *Lotha* tribe. Earlier, no particular date was fixed. So in order to carve unity and uniformity among the ranges, 7th November was fixed every year. However, there are many cultures which have lost its value with the advent of Christianity and Modernization. The conversion of *Lotha* tribe to Christianity and the gradual demise of animist have led to extinction of indigenous ritual, viz, *Rhu-van*, *Likhum*, *Osho-you*, *Elo*, *Ra-mvu* and *Epo-etha*. Moreover, festivals like *Khyangroe Tokhu*, *Lanvon Tokhu* and *Loro Tokhu* are no longer celebrated by the *Lotha* tribe after the advent of Christianity and Modernization. With the lose of certain culture does not mean that the culture of *Lotha*'s has vanished with the advent of Christianity and modernization but it brought with it a new set of culture which are in vogue in the present society. From hairstyle to festivity many new culture has emerged due to the influence of technology and development. From the round hair cut for gents and long hair style for ladies and simple lions cloths for male and mekhala for female, the lifestyle of has changed to the latest fashion that are in vogue in the media. The celebration of New Year, Valentines Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Friendship Day, Mother's day, Father's Day and Christmas are a clear example of the influence of Christianity and westernization on *Lotha* culture.

II. CONCLUSION:

From the discussion it was found that there are many positive impacts on the *Lotha* Culture with the advent of Christianity and Modernization with some negative effect on it. The positive effect of Christianity and modernization on *Lotha* culture was the introduction of education in the society. The improvement in the education system among the people has reformed the society and many important physical and social infrastructure developments have taken place. However, many beliefs and practices which are indigenous to *Lotha*'s have vanished while accommodating other culture. Thus, it has been observed that the *Lotha* tribe is blindly copying Modernity and Christianity. This blind copying of other culture while neglecting one's own culture is dangerous because it will lead to the extinction of one's own culture. Thus, it is suggested that the *Lotha* tribe should keep their culture intact while flowing along with Modernity and Christianity.

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