

Understanding Traditional Justice System through Institution of Kotoki among the Nyishi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh India

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Abstract: This paper considers how the kotoki (political Interpreter) adopted by the Ahoms kings and later adopted by the British to deal with the various hill tribes of Arunachal Pradesh became one of the important element in the Nyishi traditional system. Here I tried to highlight the growth and development of kotoki and its mere role as a messenger to becoming a decision making body in the Nyishi Village Council. The paper focuses on the how the kotoki served as a bridge between the outsiders and Nyishi, which helps in understanding the culture, customs and traditional practices of the Nyishi. It also deals how the Nyishi after remaining isolated for so long gradually opened up to the outsiders though with much intricacy.

Keywords: Bhaghu Aabhu (man who occupy the front hearth), Nyegham Aabhu (a person expert in oratory skills), Posa (kind of blackmail), nyele (Nyishi village council), kotoki (Mediator), Gingdung (middle man).

INTRODUCTION

Arunachal Pradesh located in the extreme North-East region of India is a mountainous province of steep hills and deep gorges is home of several ethnic groups or tribes each having distinct culture, traditions, customs and belief. Nyishi is one of the major tribe of the state.

Known to the people of the plains as *Dafla* (therefore it is a common site to see the word *Dafla* in works of the earlier writers) nonetheless the tribe call themselves as Nyishi, a term arrived from the word 'Nyi' meaning 'man' [1]. Today the name has been discarded and the term Nyishi is used in conversation and official publication as the long pending demand of change of nomenclature from *Dafla* to Nyishi was fulfilled with the passing of the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order (Amendment) Bill on the Parliament in March, 2008 [2]. Geography has influenced the socio-political development of the Nyishi to a large extent and the development of traditional village council is the outcome of such factor which is discussed below.

Human kind is a social animal and as such there are certain norms that are prevalent in a society to which human are supposed to abide by it. The humans, being a social animal, express their nature by creating and re-creating an organization which guides and controls their behaviour in myriad ways. This organization, in return applies necessary condition for the humankind to which they had follow and maintain the standards. Society is a system of usages and procedure of authority and mutual aid of many groups and divisions, of control the human behaviour and activities. This ever-changing complex system, we call

it as society. There is the web of social relationships which is always changing [3]. Family is a smallest unit of the society. A typical Nyishi family consists of the man, his wife (wives), children both married and unmarried. Sometimes man's brothers, his wives and children may also share the same roof. There is no binding to it. Generally, the Nyishi prefer to live in joint family in order to forge a common unit of work force. The Nyishi have a patriarchal society and the father is the head of the family and the house. Its member family recognise and obey the authority of the senior man of the lineage head of the house [4].

The prevalence of the polygamy system in a Nyishi society is quite common. Thus, it comes no surprise for a man to have more than one wife. In fact, having more than one wife shows the prosperity and social status of a man depending upon the number of *sebbe* (bos frontalis) he possesses. For a Nyishi it is a matter of prestige to add as many women as possible to their household [5]. In most cases, the first wife herself finds for (her husband) another woman to be his wife. This was done in all probability to seek more helping hand in household chores, agricultural work, collecting of the firewood, cooking food etc. In certain cases, if the first wife is incapable of bearing child or has no male child issue, the husband has all the rights to

remarry to ensure the male genealogy. Among the Nyishi the descendant is reckoned through the male child only who maintains patriarchal social order of the Nyishi society. However, it may be noted that there are not much of restriction on Nyishi women, unlike the women in other social structured society where womenfolk are restricted with several social taboos.

The social life of the Nyishi can be best understood from their villages and their geographical locations [6]. The Nyishi villages are rarely found in cluster. In the early days, they usually live a secluded life with a few houses in one village. As a matter of fact, inhabiting in secluded areas they did not favour any outside intrusion and random averse to stranger. Thus, the living pattern of the Nyishi also effects the political institution and social organizations of the community. It is exhilarating to probe into the functioning of society other than one's own and to discover that there are innumerable ways in which human beings can attain social harmony with their environment in such a manner as to allow the members of their community to adjust with each other [7]. Since the constructions of the houses are reasonable far away from each other, there seems to be less interference with each other and there rarely emerges any disputes. The disputes in the Nyishi house often emerge from the members of the family. When any disputes occurred amongst the members of the family on any matter relating to family is generally settled by the head of the family who has a greater say on the rest of members.

The Nyishi tribe knows no kingdom or king like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Nature has made them to live in rugged hills and terrains for centuries. There were very less contact not only with the outside world but also among themselves. This made them to live often a secluded life which of course they prefer living in that way for many social factors. This settlement pattern of the tribe was seldom misinterpreted as individualistic by early researchers and writers. This is partly true on the ground that the Nyishi as mentioned earlier prefer living secluded, they dislikes the very idea of outside interference in their independent social order. On the other hand, they also have a strong social mores and laws to which they were to abide by it and failing are liable to fines or punishment as per the unwritten laws and customs of the community. It is the law of nature that with the emergence of human society there also emerged certain customs and traditions. It is understood that right from the origin of human being they began to live in settled life with certain uncodified laws framed by every group of people or every society in order to lead a systematic way of life [8]. The customary laws that prevalent in the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh slightly vary from each other, but the fundamental roots are same. The social mechanism and methods available for enforcement of customary laws amongst the Nyishi are

homogenous with little variation from one area to another due to geographical and environmental distances. However, in the matter of village administration of justice and dispensation of disputes are fundamentally same in this regards, captain John F. Michell elaborates in these words.

“Each village is independent to the local self-government; but in certain localities a number of villages acknowledge the leadership of one chief or *gam*. Thus, in the last raid made upon us, Nana *gam* headed the warriors of several villages, and Pakfi *gam* was the acknowledged leader of all the warriors from his portion of the country. Each *gam* is the head of a household, and the council of *gams* of a village give the laws to the whole community. A *gam* of proved wisdom in council and conduct in the field will occasionally obtain, not only power over his own village, but over many of the neighbouring villages. Even when he attains this power he does not, however, act independently of the council of the different villages [9].”

Traditional Justice System

Nyishi are refereed as individualistic by the earlier writers, which is partly true. The reason for such reference given was mainly because the Nyishi people are not politically organised. Infact the political institution is the outcome of the nature of their social system. In a typical Nyishi village there are very few houses that also in a considerable distance from one another. One reason for this is that that the Nyishi prefers to live in joint family. So it comes to no surprise in one Nyishi house there will have thirty to eighty numbers of members, sometimes upto hundred. Such type of house is called *Namda*. The eldest male member of the family is the head and by and large manoeuvre his control over the rest of the family members. He is generally referred as the *Bhaghu Aabhu*. Virtually, it was the *Bhaghu Aabhu* of the family and the Clan, which performed the smallest unit of political society. Any matters or feuds within the *Namda* are heard by the *Bhaghu Aabhu* and after careful analysis, place his decision to which all agree to. The Nyishi always try to resolve their disputes within their family or village and most of the times disputes are settled within the family. They believe that any matter related to family or clan must be resolved within the family. In support of this Nabam Naka Hina rightly pointed out that,

“The Nyishi always tries to resolve their disputes within their family or village on the basis popular maxim “*emme barik kam koda hoge ligmumab*” (family matter should be allowed to go public) and “*nabung barik kam dela ligmumab*” (matter within the house should not go out of the house) [10].”

It is this *Bhaghu Aabhu* by virtue of his knowledge, skill and capacity to give judgment goes on to become a *Nyegham Aabhu*. *Nyegham Aabhu* refers to experts in customary laws, an orator and expert in handling and settling the disputes. He is respected by all and many a times called upon by the villagers to hear a case and to solve the matter in the *Nyele*. (The Nyishi traditional village council is called *Nyele*, which stands for the welfare of the society in every respect.) The term *Nyele* was a traditional village council where the people gathered for transacting their political and social business. The *Nyele* consists of a group of elderly male body where the most experienced and influential person having oratory power, ability to present or decide cases in their traditional way is accepted to be the head of the *Nyele* (council). They solve problems like theft, murder, treachery, adultery, marriage, land disputes, feuds etc. Grievances of any sort are discussed and heard in the *Nyele*. Both accuse and offender defend themselves by giving their points of justification which are shown by placing a *khoter* (small bamboo stick used for counting/making a point) everytime they give point. As each point gives weightage in their defence. Everybody is given equal chance to put forward their points. The *Nyele* member present there hears the allegations and arbitration of both the party. And careful observation is made during the process. Normally, the proceedings of *nyele* require a patient hearing as it takes careful observation of the grievance expressed by the aggrieved and defence argument made by the accused. The proceedings may continue for months or just one day. After a vigorous debate and arguments the *nyele* try to solve the disputes and accordingly impose fine and punishment as per the traditional custom and law as amended by the society. A wise *Nyegham Aabhu* will always try to sort out the problems by depicting the fact that they are the progeny of *Aabhu Thanyi* (mythical ancestor of Nyishi) and that they shall live harmoniously amongst themselves. Generally there is no codified punishment system in Nyishi law. Only punishment is to get revenge or compensate lose by forfeiting fine to the victim. They have standardised fines of each crime felony which has been followed and practiced from olden days. Since the former is avoided these days so they resort by fine as per the verdict given by the *Nyele* members. Nyishi customary law prescribes standardized compensations for various crimes, though realizing the fine depends upon status and ability of the offender to pay. The clan members or the relatives of the guilty lend a hand in paying the fines. The fines generally include *majee* (tongueless bell), *taalu* (brass plate), *tashang* (beads), *oryok* (sword) which are considered as precious entity by the Nyishi. After placing the verdict, the *Nyele* members in order to avoid further friction, makes agreement with the both parties not to repeat the mistakes in future and in future they shall live peacefully among themselves. Who breaks the breach is liable of fines as per the traditional law of the Nyishi. Breach of agreement is looked as felony in the

Nyishi society. It is considered as an act of offence or insult to the dignity of the other person. For a Nyishi man there is nothing greater than his self-respect. They can resort to any means just to save their dignity. There is popular maxim in the Nyishi on this *no ngam eek poro gho gam mwma dho e? Hoge mwta no ngam Nyijap Nyiyap dhan*. You don't even consider me as animals and on top of it have the nerve to torment on me. Why do you do so?

In Nyishi society, middle man plays a very important role in regulating the *Nyele* proceedings. Whenever, there arises any case in the village specially if there are any major feuds, '*Bhurying Boothe*' or '*Gingdungs*' (arbitrator/Mediator) has a major role to play in settling the disputes. There are no specific rules and regulations to appoint a *Gingdung*. The person playing the role of the *Gingdung* is generally well versed in the customary laws of the Nyishi and is respected by all. Before any matter goes to the Village Council, the appointed *Gingdung* tries to resort or to clear the misunderstanding between the two parties. They also go here and there in the interests of peace and comprise to the disputing parties and finally convene a meeting of a council. As such a time is fixed by the *Gingdung* in which both the parties along with the relatives or family members are called upon to put forward their grievances. Both the parties are given enough time to place their contention. The family members present their acts as witnesses also are given chances to have their say if any. *Gingdung* after hearing places his judgement without showing any biasness to any party. Most of the time negotiation is done if the matter is related to the family of clan. After the verdict of the judgement a *Sebbe* is sacrificed to mark the solidarity. So it is seen that the *Gingdung* not only act as a messenger but he also has higher responsibility to check that both the parties do not resort to any quarrel thereby avert any possibilities of worse situations. He is the peace maker. As such they help the *Nyele* in maintaining law and order in the Nyishi society.

Genesis and Role of Institution of *Kotoki*

Before discussing its origin, a brief discussion on *Ahom* Kingdom is to be made as it was the *Ahom* King who started the institution of the *Kotoki*. The *Ahoms* are the offshoot of the great *Tai* race [11] or *Thai* family of South-East Asia (Myanmar) [12]. The *Ahoms* entered Assam from through Pangchou pass over the Patkai via the Nongyang Lake and Tirap Frontier Division of NEFA. The foundation of the *Ahom* kingdom in Assam was laid by Sukapha in 1228 A.D. and his successors continued to rule for about six hundred years without any break. In these years of reign the *Ahom* came in contact with various tribes, they were able to subjugate the plain tribes but had difficulty in dealing with the hill tribes. In the beginning of the early 13th century witness a transition to new chapter in the history of the Nyishi when the first reference of the

contact between the Nyishi and *Ahom* took place in the north bank of the Brahmaputra Valley. Prior to the 13th century, the Nyishi were concentrated mainly to itself with fewer or no contact with the outsiders. This period is important for the study of development of society, polity, economy, religious and various policies adopted by them with the tribes of Assam as well as adjoining tribes of the hills. Gradually the *Ahoms* expanded their rule other parts of the kingdom. In the process of its expansion the *Ahoms* came in contact with various tribes, 'each with distinctive manners, custom and language.' The first reference of any contact between the *Ahoms* and *Daflas* that we get was in the beginning of the 17th century during the reign of the *Ahom* king Pratap Singh (1603-41 A.D.) From the various sources available the Nyishi often created trouble to the *Ahom* Kingdom by looting, raiding, plundering and even kidnapping their subjects after that they will vanish in the thick jungles [13]. As it is evident from the remark of Laksmi Devi, the King ordered *Lako Barpatra* and *Bharali Gohain* to proceed to *Pashima Daflas* (Nyishi). However, the expeditions resulted in heavy losses for the *Ahoms*. The aggressive attitude of the Nyishi towards strangers may be understood as their isolation from outside world which ultimately compels them to look at the strangers with suspicious nature. But this has been wrongly understood by the *Ahoms* at that time and considered former to be ferocious and turbulent. As a matter of fact the tribe was rather known for its prowess and sturdy built up, independence loving by nature and temperament, simple, but industrious and straightforward. The Nyishi are proud and virile people. It is unfortunate that, in early times, they earned notoriety as raiders and treacherous folk.

It was certain that Nyishi and *Ahom* had a strained relation in the beginning itself. It was, therefore thought to follow a policy of give and take by the *Ahoms* in order to check-and-balance the further raid. Thus, King Pratap Singha (1603-41) constructed a kind of fortification (erstwhile known as *Dafala-garh*) in eastern part of the Tezpur subdivision of Darrang districts on the *Gohain Kamal Ali* road and named as '*Rajgarh*' (i.e., royal fortification). Seeing the aggressive and the war-like attitude of the Nyishi the former tried to conciliate them by granting of *posa* and numbers of *paiks* (passes) in different passes of the foothills. The *posa* was a kind of system in which the Nyishi people were given the right to receive payments from certain specified villages in the foothills and keep them content. In return they required to pay annual tribute to the *Ahom* King and accept some kind of loose suzerainty. From an account bearing dated the 13th May 1825 it appears that the Nyishi were entitled to receive from every ten houses, one double cloth, one single cloth, one handkerchief, one *dao*, ten head of horned cattle, and four seers of salt. According to Nyishi the word *posa* is pronounced in these terms like; '*Pensha*' or '*pencha*' literally meaning 'tribute' or 'ownership

allowances'. The Nyishi believed the *posa* to be their sole right where the *Ahom* monarch assumes it the other way. It was obviously understood to be a kind of compromise on the part of the *Ahom* so as to avoid further raid from this powerful and troublesome tribe. Moreover, the Nyishi lived in inaccessible hills and forest which made all the more difficult for the *Ahom* to send any military expedition against them. In this regard, it was pointed out by one of the *Ahom* Prime Minister *Atan Baragohain*, "The *Dafla* (Nyishi) miscreants can be capture only if elephant can enter into a rat hole [14]." It can summarized that Nyishi were not easy to grasp or to have control over them. Besides tough terrain add to its difficulty in overcoming the latter.

Even after enabling the *Posa* collection, the Nyishi did not stop raiding. So in order to avoid further raids the *Ahom* king appointed special agents for dealing with the Nyishi and other various hill tribes. At first the institution of the *Kotoki* was originated by the *Ahom* king Suhungmung, (1497-1593 A.D.) to have a diplomatic relations with the other contemporary neighbouring kingdoms but *Ahom* king Pratap Singha expanded it. The *Kotoki* was used to communicate with the Nyishi regarding any matter. This proves that the Nyishi tribe was not subjugated by the *Ahoms*. During the reign of Pratap Singha this relation was intensified and tried to understand the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of the Nyishi more closely which might enable the *Ahom* rulers to plan properly in relating to tribe. This makes the *Ahom* authority to appreciate and comprehend the tribe hopes and aspirations. Therefore, the *kotoki* holds an important position in better understanding of the Nyishi tribe. Though there role was mainly to act as go-between to mediate and interpret; and also to check or stop the acts of depredations committed by the tribe. *Kotokis* were required to watch over the movements of the Nyishi and simultaneously he was to report to the authorities on regular basis. Despite the fact that the *Ahom*-Nyishi relation was not sailing well during those days however, it had reported that many Nyishi were recruited to serve in the *Ahom* army and fought for the *Ahom* kings. The Nyishi were not always inclined to peace so easily and were tend to perpetrating depredations in the plains rather too often. Given under these relations the *kotokis* were appointed to keep watch on the movements of the Nyishi so as to update their activities in the *duars* [15]. Since the Nyishi were given the right to collect *posa* from the *Ahom* subject inhabiting on the adjacent of *duars* or plain had not able to content them from hostile activities. As a result, the Nyishi often violated the friendly agreement and did not content with the *posa* arrangement. This act of Nyishi sometimes compelled the *Ahom* to send a punitive expedition to the hills resulting in loss of lives and properties from the both sides. But in most cases, the *Ahom* government tried not to indulge in such punitive expeditions unless the

situations, so warranted. In the event of such situations the role of the *kotoki* showed an important measure in dealing and mediating with the concerned Nyishi chiefs to come into terms with the *Ahom*. Under the *kotokis* active role and persuasion on the disputes or conflicts were generally settled mutually in which the both sides accept the resumption of cordial relation and maintaining *status quo*. The place of the *kotoki* in maintaining harmonious relations with the Nyishi and also with other frontier tribes were well appreciated by the colonial power and therefore the institution of *kotoki* was continued to exist even during the British rule. Accordingly, the office of the *kotoki* was opened throughout the district of the North Lakhimpur during imperial regime to administer the Nyishi and also other frontier tribes. The institution of the *kotoki* could be seen even in the present day of Arunachal Pradesh and its important attached to administration of justice to citizens are still indispensable. But under the British administration, the *kotokis* were employed for carrying out trade regulations between the frontier tribes like Monpa and Sherdukpen. In fact, the British sometime used the services of *kotokis* merely as a 'go-between' for the government and the hill tribes. The duty of the *kotoki* was to go into the hills as and when required; and provide information about the Nyishi affairs to the authority. In several occasions these *kotokis* used to escort the officials in the Nyishi Hills as a guide and interpreter. If we see in broader perspective, the role of the *kotokis* was multipurpose depending upon the nature of task assigned by the authority.

New Dimension in the Role

When the present researcher made an intensive field study to know about the new status and role of the *kotoki* an interesting and important changes are found to be taking place, which the findings are elaborated in the following arguments. As such, it has been noted that during the period of the British rule, there still had some Nyishi who would come down to plain of Assam to carry out seasonal trade and attending the durbar of the annual trade fair organised by the British especially in the foothills. These Nyishi people who were in constant communication with the plains dwellers had learnt some Assamese languages which could make them easy enough to interact. It is also seen that British at first approached those people by luring them by providing food, alcohol, cloths, etc., and slowly showed friendship to them. In this process of appeasing a few chiefs or head of the family, the British officials befriended and sought the favour by asking them to provide some information of people in the villages. Those individual Nyishi who could carry out or attend such assignment of the officials were generally appointed as *kotoki*. There are some traditions maintained amongst the villages about how the first *kotoki* during the British period was appointed. The tradition goes like this, the first *kotoki* named Tao Taya was provided with good food by keeping the food nearby him and the officials

had hidden and watched him from behind. At first Taya had run away from the British officials but gradually he reciprocated by eating the food and receiving other goods and items given to him. Later on, he was called and given more foods, and washed him and provided more cloths; and other items more than he could ask for. Thereafter, Taya brought more Nyishi friends and got introduced them to the British officials. As a result of his early familiar and accepting the good from the British officials qualified him to become the first *kotoki* of the Lakhimpur area amongst the Nyishi. However, there are other who display that the first Nyishi *kotoki* was Kop Temi who was also holding the post of Head Political Interpreter for Subansiri Area [16]. The nearest equivalent meaning for *kotoki* used in Nyishi language is *puibayabho*, which literary meaning is messenger. In due course of time this messenger gradually evolved as a powerful and influential person in the Nyishi village by virtue of his ability to have direct contact with the British administrators. With the passage of time, the *kotoki* not only acted as a messenger but also began to settle various types of disputes in the villages. As most of the villagers did not speak the Assamese or Hindi language, the *kotokis* were always asked by the British officials to tell what the villagers were saying. It was all in *kotokis* hands to say whatever pleased him. If some problems emerged in the village then the *kotokis* were to report it to the British officials. The Nyishi villagers being a man of simple living and thinking were ignorant about any office proceedings during that time and out of fear they would pay bribe to *kotoki* saying not to report anything bad about them to the authority. Thus, there was apprehension among the villagers for the *kotokis*, the commoners never dared to stand against him. The *kotokis* sometimes misused their powers against the innocent villagers. It was also told that the *kotokis* often boast about them and sometimes indulge in *kamdanam* (seeking bribes) such as the valuables items of Nyishi like *thaaalu* (brass plate), *majee* (bell), *thashang* (bead) and even *sebbe* (bos frontalis). Since *kotokis* were privileged to direct access to British officials and were enjoying some kind of monopoly over dealing with the civil administrations. The *kotokis* generally act like a right hand of the civil administration, but on the other hand the *kotokis* also maintained good rapport with the villagers and accompany the villagers when they come down to the plains during the annual fairs. On certain occasions they were rewarded for their good work by the officials. The ability of the *kotoki* to carrying out transactions sincerely helped the authority to understand the customs and socio-cultural institutions of the Nyishi. There was no denying the fact that the *kotokis* played a key role in bringing sound administration in Nyishi area by furnishing the first-hand information from both the side for mutual respect and allegiance to the civil authorities.

Today the *kotokis* are officially designated as Political Interpreter (PI), the anglicised version of the

word *kotoki*. The *kotokis* are usually appointed by the Deputy Commissioner of the concerned district of the state. They are appointed as a regular government salaried employee and are transferable from one place to another. Now a days the function and importance of the *kotoki* seems to have relegated to the role of assisting the Magistrate. In many occasions, any disputes arise in villages are normally handled locally by respective *gaonburas* of the village without any assistance from the Political Interpreter (PI). However, if a case is formally notified by the Magistrate and the *nyele* issued the *kotoki* is required to present in the hearing to supervise the proceedings in order to conduct the same in a peaceful manner. In first instance any complained lodged against a villager by another villager of the same village are to be heard by the *gaonbura* of the same village and arrive at decision by obtaining due approval from the concerned Circle Officer of the circle. The local administration are to detail a Political Interpreter (*kotoki*) to act as umpire and also to ensure the peaceful proceedings in the village level *nyele* so that no biasness decision is made. The village level disputes are seldom settled within village authority and impose appropriate fine and punishment as per the Nyishi customary law and practices. The village authorities are to decide all cases in open *nyele* in the presence of at least three independent witnesses from the complainant and the accused. The hearing of *nyele* generally take minimum of one week continuously or more depending upon the nature of dispute. Sometime if both the parties are strong and equally well versed in local jurisprudence it may take more than one month also to settle the disputes or feud. If any disputes are unable to solve by *nyele*, it will go to the court with a written copy of the unsettled case authenticated by the local magistrate.

The year 1945 is an important landmark in the history of the administration and justice for the people of Arunachal Pradesh. In this year the Regulation of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) was introduced. The purpose of introduction of this Regulation was to ensure that a vast majority of disputes and cases, both civil and criminal were adjudicated in conformity with the prevailing tribal customs and usages [17]. On the introduction of this Regulation the institution of *Gaonbura* came into existence in the title of village authority appointed by the Deputy Commissioner (erstwhile Political Officer). The persons having all the qualities like natural leadership, command, oratory, physical and moral soundness with ability to deliver the jobs were appointed as *Gaonburas*. In most cases, at the time of appointing *Gaonbura* preference were given to the elderly member of the village having sound knowledge of customs and usages. They were provided with red coats in order to distinguish them from other ordinary villagers. They were bestowed with the power to settle the any disputes in village. It is mandatory for every

gaonbura to present him in the red coat at any proceedings and visiting the offices. The Political Interpreters (PI) are not provided with red coats but they are given badge in emblem embossed with name of the *kotoki* near it strip. It shall be the duty of the *kotoki* to report to the Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner as soon as possible about crimes, violent deaths, and serious accidents occurring within their jurisdiction. In certain situations, they also play the role of magistrate judicial officials like that of the village head. This way the *kotokis* became an important body in assisting and helping the government officials in settling cases. While the administration of the village was left to the authority of the village headman, which was strengthened by the assistance of the *kotokis*

CONCLUSION

The Nyishi is one of the fewer tribes of the state who always love to remain independent and averse to strangers. Similarly, their social and political institutions emerged from this social matrix. Their isolation limited the knowledge about the other civilization beyond the hills. The averse and suspicious nature made the very first contact with the *Ahoms* not very appeasing. When the *Ahom* rulers claimed suzerainty over them, the Nyishi were unwilling to accept it and defied it whenever they found any opportunity and did not make their submission till they were compelled to do so by circumstances. At this juncture the *Ahoms* thought best to avoid the Nyishi and came up with different ideas to control the Nyishi. The wisdom of the *Ahom* kings lay in the fact that they succeeded at the end in framing a practical policy to deal with them. The *Ahom* policy in regard to the tribes was successful one as it had sustained their rule for several hundred years which was followed by the British and in some respect, it is followed even today [18]. This could not have been possible without the wise policy adopted by the *Ahom* by appointing *kotokis* for the purpose of dealing with the Nyishi. The art of management applied to the affairs of the frontiers by the *Ahom* was one of the key factors in determining the rule of the *Ahom* dynasty for so long.

The place of the head of the *nyele* possesses a very respectable position in the Nyishi society and the verdict given by him is obeyed without any contest. Despite the coming of the judicial department, the *nyele* still functions as an active and vibrant traditional institution to settle all kind of cases prevalent in the society. In fact, if attempts were/are made to solve the dispute amicably acceptable to both the parties within the *nyele*, but if they fails then under such circumstances the case were/are bound to refer to the judicial magistrate for further cause of action. Although, the Regulation of 1945 bestowed and recognised the powers and functions of the village council which were to be headed by the *gaonburas*, but these *gaonburas* were also depended on the *kotokis* who

were to act as observers and mediators in the *nyele* or meeting of the village authority. In some cases the *kotokis* were also given the power to settle the village disputes without taking into the local magistrate. In course of time the *kotokis* became more and more powerful, in fact they became the master of the village authority and administration. Moreover, the officials first interact with the *kotokis* to have first-hand information of the villagers and their grievances thereof. As such more cases were given to settle under active supervision of the *kotokis*. Thus, with immense power in their hands these *kotokis* sometimes became corrupted and they would misuse their power, by siding with those who would gratify them. However, after the attainment of the Independence of India in 1947, the administration of the tribal society came under the free Indian Government control. Consequently, after the Independence of India the present day Arunachal Pradesh was placed under buffer zone and administered through the Minister of External Affairs. In the year 1962 the Chinese attack on the territory of Arunachal Pradesh became a blessing in disguise which had changed the attitude of the people, and this landlocked state got the attention of the government of India.

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