Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution

in
Three Tribal Societies of North East India

Editor
Alphonsus D’Souza
Social conflict is found wherever individuals or groups engage themselves in antagonistic or hostile relationships. Conflict can arise because of such reasons as differences in personal preferences, group interests and aims. It can take different forms like quarrels and disputes, feuds and armed fights. It is generally recognised that social conflict is destructive in nature. Therefore whenever a conflict emerges, efforts are made to resolve it.
This booklet is the aspirations for peace of many persons from Northeast India. The study was done by the three authors under the guidance of Prof. Alphonsus D’Souza. In the field research fellows were supported by C. P. Anto in Nagaland and Tom M. in Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills districts of Assam. NESRC received financial support for these studies from Cordaid and Misereor through NED Social Forum. We are grateful to all of them for their support. Above all we thank the three authors for the effort they have put into this work.

Padmini Langthasa
Jirsong Asong, Diphu
Karbi Anglong Dt., Assam

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Both secondary and primary data have been used for this study. Secondary sources include published studies on the Dimasa. Unfortunately such studies are very few. Other sources are the reports of the conflicts published in local and regional newspapers. They cannot always be considered as truly accurate and reliable. Primary data was collected through visits to various places and interviews of people. Persons selected for interviews were men and women of different age groups, occupations and experiences.

The geographical area of the study included the Dimasa inhabited parts of the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, now known as Dima Hasao District. However, a concentration on Manja and Dhanasiri areas mainly because the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 took place in those locations. Constraints of time and difficulties of travel imposed severe limitations on this study. However, major findings of the study introduced in the following pages.

Origin and History of the Dimasa

The Dimasa tribe is one of the major tribes of the Kachari group found in Assam. Like other Kacharis, the Dimasa are Mongoloid. The name ‘Dimasa’ most probably stands for the ‘children of the big river’, perhaps the Brahmaputra. In actual practice, the Dimasa like to live on the banks of rivers. According to Edward Gait (1906), the Dimasa were called ‘Timasa’ by the Ahoms, which is a corruption of the term ‘Dimasa’.

According to Sonaram Thousen, before coming to Dimapur the Dimasa called themselves ‘Bodosa’. They came to be known as ‘Dimasa’ only after arriving at Dimapur. According to another view proposed by Nirupama Hagjer, it is a common practice among the Dimasa to introduce themselves by adding ‘Sa’ to the name of the place of their origin. This old tradition is prevalent even today, and that is why the people living in Dimapur refer to themselves as Dimapursa. In the course of time, Dimapursa changed to Dimasa.

Present Habitat

According to the Census of India, in 2001 the number of the Dimasa in Assam was 110,976. Their main habitat is Dima Hasao district, till recently known as North Cachar Hills district. In 2001, 64,881 of them were living in Dima Hasao district.
The British Period

In 1832 the British East India Company annexed South Cachar, consisting of the plains of the Barak valley, which was a part of the princely state of Cachar. The hills division comprised of the North Cachar Hills, parts of the Diyung valley, the Kopili valley and the Dhansiri valley, including the ancient capital of Dimapur, the 'Brick city' of the Dimasa Kachari kings. The hills division was finally annexed by the British in 1854 on the death of Senapati Tularram, the Dimasa chieftain, who held sway over that area. But instead of tagging the Northern (Hills Division) with South Cachar the British added the territory to the Assam district of Nowgong. The territory was then placed under the charge of a Junior Political Officer with headquarters at Asalu. Subsequently in 1866, this territory was sliced away and distributed among the neighbouring districts of Nowgong and the Naga Hills. Thus, parts of the Diyung valley and the Kopili valley were given to the district of Nowgong, and a portion was joined with the newly created district of Naga Hills. The rest formed the territory of the North Cachar Hills comprising exclusively the hilly region.

The land settlement procedure adopted by the British court, Subordinate District Council Court, and the District Council Court (Das 1987: 581-583)

Traditional Village Council

The traditional organisation of a Dimasa village had various officials and functionaries. These were: Khunang (village headman) Dilek (assistant village headman), Daulathurao (elders, members of the village council), Habaisagao, Pharai, Mantri, Hangseobukhu and Jalairao. According to Danda (1978: 98-99) this traditional organisation has become obsolete in most villages. Changes have taken place mainly due to the introduction of Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

As noted above, according to Danda (1978: 81-83), in keeping with the tradition the oldest member of the village became the Khunang. This made his selection unanimous. Dilek was the next in seniority by age. Daulathurao were the elders and their number varied depending on the size of the village. Their qualification was only seniority in age. Habaisagao were the next oldest males in the village. The Pharai were next in seniority by age. A Mantri belonged to the younger batch of the villagers and was selected on the basis of merit, not seniority. Hangseobukhu were assistants to the Mantri.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As noted above, according to Danda (1978: 98), the traditional village council with all the office bearers exists only in Semkhor, the oldest and most conservative Dimasa village. Danda provides details about the structure of the Semkhor village council as reproduced in the table below.

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In keeping with the tradition, the Dimasa village Council has two main functions, namely, executive and judiciary. The executive functions are related to development work or any other activity for the improvement of the community. Judicial functions are related to the maintenance of law and order in the village. This includes conflict resolution and the administration of justice.

In the past conflicts with other communities did not exist, and if there were any such conflicts, they were settled through negotiations. In my childhood I have heard from my elders that there was a war with the Nagas. This war is narrated in traditional dances.

Another incident is narrated in greater detail by another elder. He says that the conflict was resolved through negotiations in which the Dimasa king took the initiative. The elder gives us the narration in the following words:

There was also a communal clash during the reign of King Pandra Hasnu. At that time the king would identify for the establishment of a Dimasa village by shooting an arrow. It was understood that the Dimasa would settle where the arrow fell. Once when the king shot the arrow, it fell in a place near a Naga village called Malihang. So, a Dimasa village was established there. After a few years there was a conflict between the Naga and the Dimasa. But it was peacefully solved through negotiations because at that time the king was ruling. This is still narrated in a Dimasa traditional dance.

A more recent case of inter-tribal conflict is narrated by a Dimasa working as a teacher in a school. He says:

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After Independence

After India’s independence there were several changes in Assam. In 1951 a new district was created in the name of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. The Mikir Hills sub-division of the district was formed by carving out some areas from the districts of Nowgong and Sibsagar. The North Cachar Hills sub-division was separated from Cachar and tagged on to Mikir Hills to form the new district. Dimapur area was attached to the Naga Hills district. In 1970 the North Cachar Hills sub-division was separated from Mikir Hills district and formed into a full-fledged district. The Mikir Hills district was later renamed as Karbi Anglong district. In 2010, the North Cachar Hills district was renamed as Dima Hasao.

When the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district was formed, two Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India were established, one in each of the sub-divisions. When the North Cachar Hills sub-division was separated from the Mikir Hills district and formed into a full-fledged district, the Autonomous District Council of the Mikir Hills district was renamed as the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.

Inter-Tribal Disputes and Conflicts

In the past, though the Dimasa lived close to other villages and settlements, inter-tribal conflict was rare. The reason for this was that the Dimasa were a peaceful and cooperative people. They did not easily violate traditional laws. From early childhood they were trained to respect traditions and customs. Nevertheless, there were always some quarrels and disputes. As one elder says, “Sometimes there were quarrels in a family, between husbands and wives, or between brothers and sisters. But they were settled within the family.”

In the past, family quarrels were usually settled by the elders in such a way that the dispute was not taken to the village council. However, if a dispute was actually taken to the village council, both the complainant and the accused were heard and witnesses were examined. Finally, the case was settled by a majority decision. The punishment could be a fine, and in extreme cases, banishment from the village. The fine realised would be shared by the members of the court.

In former times such restrictions did not exist because disputes were settled within the village. There are occasions when people from a village need to cross the territory of another village for cultivation. In such cases, the village concerned seeks the permission of the other village. If the owners of the animals are not identified, a fine is imposed on the entire village. All possible efforts are made to settle the dispute at that level because in former times there was no possibility of appeal.

Inter-Village Disputes can arise mainly because of trespass. Sometimes there are quarrels in a family, between husbands and wives, or between brothers and sisters. But they are settled within the family.”
Dimasa of Hailakandi and Karimganj districts are recognized as 'Rukini Barman.' Thus the Dimasa have lost their unity and distinct identity. It is in this context that the Jadikhe Naisho Hoshom (JNH), the Dimasa apex body, and other organisations came into existence.

Social Organisation and Cultural Life

The social organisation and cultural life of the Dimasa have many distinctive features. The nature of village settlements, religious beliefs and practices, kinship organisation and cultural life have features that are unique to them.

Village Settlements

The Dimasa villages are situated in forest areas where there is sufficient cultivable land. However, it is almost axiomatic that there must be a river or stream flowing nearby, which proves that the Dimasa people love rivers. Villages are usually named after the river flowing nearest to the settlement, though some villages are named after the clan of the original settler. The establishment of a new village is accompanied by specific rituals that involve the proceeding of the village to the river and the immersion of the village's emblem in the water. The village headman spends the night in a hall dedicated to him, which is also used for meetings. There is no dormitory for unmarried girls. The youth are organised into groups or labour force to carry out several public works in the village such as the construction of village paths and cleaning of water holes, as well as to help the needy villagers in the fields.

Modern versions of the bachelors' dormitory are the Hangsao or youth organisations. They play a role similar to the traditional dormitory.

Rights and Duties

Every Dimasa enjoys various rights and has to perform different forms of duties. These rights and duties belong to three basic categories: economic, political and religious. While every Dimasa, irrespective of sex and age is respected, there are differences in rights on the basis of sex and age. With regard to economic rights, customary laws of inheritance vary according to sex. While a son inherits land and immovable property of the father, a daughter is entitled to movable properties like ornaments of the mother. With regard to political rights, a woman can never be the head of a village or a member of the village council. Similarly, a daughter is not entitled to participate in village affairs.

Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution

When a dispute arose, women were involved, they too were given an equal opportunity. Witnesses were also called. If the evidence was not satisfactory, the complainant was asked to take the oath. After deliberation by the Khunang and the elders, the dispute was resolved by a majority decision. If the headman was found guilty and punished, it was usually in the form of fines or confiscation of belongings. In extreme cases, there could be expulsion from the village. In dealing with offenders, even the village headman was not spared. Danda (1978: 111) reports a case in which the headman himself was found guilty and punished.

The headman was a good man. But in his later age he committed incest with his daughter's daughter. At this, the village people excommunicated him and his granddaughter and forced him to live outside the village. He had a son by his granddaughter. Before death the excommunicated headman suffered from ailments very severely and requested the villagers to allow him to live in the village. He apologized to them. Then out of pity the villagers again allowed him to live in the village. However, a daughter's family was not entitled to perform the funeral ceremony for the headman. Due to the fear of the spirits, no Dimasa would take an oath unless he or she was absolutely certain that he or she was right.

After the establishment of their rule, the British introduced the Mouzadar system at an intermediary level. The Mouzadar's court decided cases on the basis of traditional or customary law. The court consisted of the Mouzadar and at least three Gaonburas (village heads). The court was held in public. It decided cases on appeal. It also settled disputes between villages. But cases of a more serious nature were decided by the Subordinate District Council. The Subordinate District Council decided cases on the basis of the Indian Penal Code. The court was held in public. It decided cases on appeal. It also settled disputes between villages. But cases of a more serious nature were decided by the Subordinate District Council.
In the sense that it is inhabited only by the Dimasa people. If there are any outsiders, they are temporary employees of the Government like teachers.

**Economy**

Agriculture is the principal occupation and the main source of livelihood. Those who live in the hills practise shifting cultivation or jhuming, though they also have some permanent wet cultivation fields wherever possible. Those who live in the plains have wet cultivation. Paddy (rice) is the main crop. Other food crops include maize and various types of vegetables. Some cultivate fruits like oranges and pineapples. Domestic animals include buffalos, pigs, goats and fowls.

In general, the Dimasa are economically backward. This can be seen from the situation of the Dima Hasao district. In 2001, the literacy rate among the Dimasa in Assam was 59.6 percent (69.4% for males and 49.3% for females). A large number of villages in the district do not have access roads and other basic facilities.

**Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution**

Disputes can arise within the family, between families in the village, between villages and with other tribal communities. Information on how they were resolved is presented below. This information is drawn from both secondary sources and the responses given by persons who were interviewed. The names of the respondents are not given here for reasons of confidentiality and prudence.

**Disputes in the Family**

According to an elder, “sometimes there are quarrels in a family, between brothers and sisters or between husband and wife. But they are settled within the family”. Thus, quarrels within the family are usually settled by the elders of the clan. The method of settlement would be to listen to the parties and come to an amicable settlement. In the Dimasa society, the heads of the family are respected and obeyed.

**Disputes within the Village**

There can be various types of disputes between the people living in a village. Some of them can be offences against property, others against personal dignity. Trees or crops can be cut without permission, or the boundary lines can be altered. In such cases, the village council is the body that settles the dispute. This body is usually made up of respected elders who are in possession of knowledge of the laws and traditions of the Dimasa. If the dispute is very serious, the elders will consult the chief of the village. In the last resort, they will consult the district court. But if the parties are willing, they can also agree to a settlement that is acceptable to both sides. In the end, what is important is that there is no direct violence. The girls are also consulted. The leaders of the village are the ones who sort out the conflicts.
settled through discussion, negotiations and compromises. In the
the Dimasa-Hmar conflict of 2003 is not known. But I am sure it was the insurgents who caused the problem in which lives of both communities were lost. Both the communities suffered a lot. At the end it was solved by J. N. H. (Apex Body of the Dimasa) and the leaders of Hmar community coming together in order to bring peace with mutual understanding." (A teacher).

"My first experience of conflict with others was the conflict with the Karbis in 2005. But we were friends with the Karbis and considered them as our own brothers and sisters. It may be the politicians who played a violent role. If we want to bring about peace we must talk to each other and should have mutual understanding. But the main problem is with the insurgents, not with the Dimasa people as a whole."

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woman retains the clan name of her birth. She has responsibilities in the family and village of her birth, lower than that of a man in religious matters and in the decision-making processes within the village. She can never be a member of the village council.

Economy

Agriculture is the main economic activity of the district. Those who live in the hilly areas practice shifting cultivation and those in the plains have settled wet cultivation. Paddy is the main food crop. But they also grow maize and vegetables for domestic consumption and also for the market. At present tea is grown in some parts of the district in recent times many cash crops have been introduced among them are sugar cane, ginger, mustard and vegetables like chilies, yam, brinjal, radish and cabbage. These have brought about significant changes in the agricultural economy of the district.

Karbi Anglong is known for various handicrafts. Men are skilled in bamboo, cane and woodcrafts. Women are skilled in weaving and processing fibers into cloth, spinning, and sewing. These craft skills are essential for daily life. The traditional methods of conflict resolution are still practiced, and the women of the village are often involved in resolving disputes within the community.
In the course of their history, the Dimasa seem to have avoided conflicts with other communities. They seem to have moved away when they were attacked by others. In the few cases of disputes and conflicts that are reported, the king and the leaders were concerned about the welfare of their subjects and followers. Therefore, the methods adopted to settle the dispute and to resolve conflicts were negotiation and compromise.

**List of Persons interviewed**

1. Anirudh Jigdung
2. Nibash Jidung
3. Gohendra Jidung
4. Upendra Johorisa
5. Rajendra Nunisa
6. Jomendra Hojai
7. Jonon Langthasa
I am thankful to Fr. Arul S. and Fr. Nilesh Parmar for their hospitality during my field visit and interviews in N.C. Hills, and to Sr Teresa, Sr Proti, and Sr Lesi for their kindness and hospitality at Diyingbra.

I am thankful to all my fellow researchers of Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura for their generous help and suggestions. I am also thankful to all the village headmen and village elders for their kind cooperation.

I am also thankful to Sunil Terang who was my research partner for his cooperation and help during my travels. I am thankful to our Peace Team coordinator and animator for helping me in managing time and to complete my study.

Padmini Langthasa
Manja, 5th February 2010

References

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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The Karbi community and conflict

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The traditional methods of conflict resolution

the point of view of habitation, the Karbi who live in the hills are divided into three groups, namely, Chinthong, Ronghang, and Amri. These are geographic divisions, not clan names, common to distinguish between the Karbi who live in the hills and those who live in the plains.

In West Karbi Anglong, the Karbi are sandwiched between the Khasi of Ri-Bhoi district in Meghalaya and the plains of Assam. It is interesting to note that some of the Bhoi have Karbi clan names, but follow the matrilineal system. At the same time, there are some Karbi who have typical Khasi names, but speak Karbi and follow the patrilineal system. Hamren in West Karbi Anglong may be considered as part of Karbi culture because it is the base of the Karbi, namely, the Lyndok Habe system, which resembles the system of the Jaintias in many ways.

In the plains of the Kamrup district of Assam, the Karbi are considered one of the sub-castes of Assamese society. Karbi villages in this area, women take the clan name of the husband after marriage. In North Cachar Hills, they consider the leopard as equivalent to tiger because there are no tigers there. It may be mentioned that the tiger is an important symbol in Karbi culture because it is associated with the Jaintias in many ways.

References
The Bachelors' Dormitory

The bachelors' dormitory of the Karbis is known by different names such as the Terang Ahem, Terang Hangbar, Pharle and Jirkedam. In the past it was generally constructed in a central place of the village. It was a place where the youth were trained. It was in the dormitory that the youth acquired a spirit of cooperation and readiness to help others.

The bachelors' dormitory has disappeared from most of the Karbi villages because of rapid changes brought about by development activities including the spread of education. But, the spirit of offering a helping hand to the needy by the youth of a Karbi village has not disappeared. At present various youth organisations perform this role. There are, in fact, youth organisations of different types.

Youth Organisations at Present

Some important youth organisations are very active at present and need to be taken into account.

The Karbi Students' Association (KSA) was formed in 1954 to provide a platform for the youth of Karbi Anglong and to stand united for the progress of the student community.

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There are differences between them not in their objectives but in their ideologies. The Karbi Students' and Youth Forum (KSYF) was formed in May 2003, when leaders of the three factions of the KSA gathered together to stand united in protest against Clause 8 of the Bodo Territorial Council Accord. This clause made a provision for the grant of Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status to the people of Bodo community settled in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. Another reason for the formation of KSYF was to bring youth from different political backgrounds together so that they could stand together on behalf of all the students and youth of Karbi Anglong and to fight for their rights. It was meant to be a youth organisation without any political leanings and to bring youth together irrespective of their political differences.

The United Christian Youth Forum (UCYF) was formed in 2002 to provide a platform for Christian Youth belonging to different Churches to be united in spreading the message of peace. The UCYF brought Christian youth from different communal and denominational backgrounds together. It holds regular meetings to discuss and work on common problems.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A 24-hour bandh is called but ends in 10 hours.

Rockybul Hussain, Assam State Home Minister visits Karbi Anglong. UCF delegation meets him and submits a Memorandum to him urging him to restore normalcy.

5th October: 10 hour bandh called off. The Jathike Naisho Hasom, which is the apex organisation of the Dimasa tribe and the DHD blame the UPDS for the killings. The UPDS, which has a ceasefire agreement with Delhi and Dispur, refutes the allegation and accuses the DHD of trying to sabotage the ongoing peace process by killing innocent people and blaming others. The common factor in all three incidents is that firearms were not used.

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Traditional Institutions for Conflict Resolution

Like other tribes, the Karbis too have various traditional institutions. While some of them are socio-political in nature, others are economic in character. Some of these institutions have proved outdated in the modern context and others continue with modified functions.

Karbi King or Chief

The traditional Karbi chief or king, with his seat at Niz Rongkhang was known as 'Lingdokpo'. He was selected by a parliament called 'Pinpomar'. In the erstwhile Karbi kingdom a village was headed by a village headman called 'Rong Sarthe'. Several contiguous Karbi villages constituted one 'Longri', and the administrative officer of a Longri was called 'Habe' or 'Habai'. The kingdom had 12 such Longris, and these Longris were constituted into 4 'Artu', and each Artu was governed by an officer called Lingdok. At the apex of the 4 Lingdoks was the chief called 'Recho' or 'Lingdokpo'. The Karbi king or chief still exercises his traditional authority in respect of socio-religious matters.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix

Chronology of the Karbi-Dimasa Conflict

(2006-06)

(Source: Mangattuthaze 2008: 57-62)

January: Three Dimasa auto drivers aged 22, 23 and 35, belonging to Mohendi jua Dimasa village near Manja (16 km from Diphu) are abducted and murdered. Their bodies are found at the Karbi majority Ramsapather village. Autos are recovered and the third is reportedly burnt. Motives or identity of killers are not known.

February: Dimasa organisations call a 10 hour bandh in protest against the killings. The bandh is supported by the Karbi organisations.

March: 5 Karbi males are hacked to death at Phonglangso. They are from another village, but 15 masked gunmen forcibly take them to Phonglangso village, 8 km from Diphu and kill them there.

The Peace Team and Diphu Citizens’ Peace Forum convene a Fellowship to celebrate Gandhi Jayanti by involving local religious and political leaders in and around Diphu. It was a day to remember the great leader who embodied respect for all.”

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Conclusion

Like other tribal communities in the Northeast, the Karbi have a distinct identity and culture. One of the elements of their culture is the traditional methods of conflict resolution. These methods are summarised below.

Disputes within the village were settled by the village council. The parties involved in the dispute were given a fair hearing. Attempts were made to arrive at an understanding through compromise. Principles of natural justice were observed. Usually the final decision was accepted and harmony was restored. Inter-village conflicts probably never existed because of the nature of the villages.

The Karbi have never been a warlike tribe. When there was an attack from outsiders, they preferred to move away to other villages. This is reflected in the traditional methods of conflict resolution. The Karbi system ensured that all disputes were settled through peaceful means. The traditional methods of resolving disputes were based on the principles of justice and fairness. The role of the chief or king was to mediate and help bring about a resolution.

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his people to allow the attackers to come to him. Tongklong Meji and his soldiers reached the peak with a golden sword (seranaganokjir) and the king confronted them. Realising his inevitable defeat, the king requested a last wish, namely, to have 'ingtat' (betel leaf and nut or pan) before the enemies beheaded him. But with every stroke of the enemy's sword the king grew in size. Frustrated, the enemies put him in an iron cage (ingchin a:um) and imprisoned him for three months without food or water. The king survived the ordeal. Enraged, and their frustration doubled, the enemies decided to kill his subjects instead. When the killing of the Karbi subjects started, the king asked his subjects to flee to secure places telling them that he would join them in a new avatar in his next birth. He told them to look for signs such as when humans became dwarfs, chilly plants outgrew their original size and were fit enough to be climbed, and when the wooden rice pounding staff 'longlengpum' germinated. These would be the signs of the king's impending rebirth. He would be born in the middle of Ronghang village, now in West Karbi Anglong. After listening to the king, the Karbi began to flee to safer places. This tradition or myth explains how the Karbi do not have TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

**Processes of Conflict Resolution**

With traditional methods of conflict resolution, violence is prevented at the village and various societal levels. It deals with and rectifies the social and economic problems within the community. The Great Council is called 'Meipi'. It consists of the headmen of several contiguous villages. It is headed by one of the headmen in the village based on seniority and merit. He is known as 'Habai' or 'Habe'. Disputes and crimes of a more serious nature are settled by the great council. It deals with such cases as witchcraft aimed at life and various sexual offences.

**Processes of Conflict Resolution**

With regard to the resolution of disputes and crimes, there was a three-tier system in each geographical area in which the Karbi lived. As noted earlier, these divisions were Chinthong, Ronghang and Amri. The three-tier system consisted of the village council with the headman called Sarthe, the Great Council headed by the Habe and the Lingdok headed by the Lingdokpo. Disputes within the Village

### Abbreviations Used

ASDC (P) Autonomous State Demand Committee (Progressive).
ASDC (U) Autonomous State Demand (United).
ASDC Autonomous State Demand Committee.
CPI (ML) Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).
D DYC Diphu Diocesan Youth Commission.
D H D Dima Halam Daogah
DHD-J Dima Halam Daogah - Jewel Garlossa Faction
KAAC Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.
KLNLF Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front.
DHD leaders hold talks with senior police and intelligence officials about the ongoing situation in Karbi Anglong.

Shri Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam, and Shri P.K. Mahanta, Former Chief Minister, visit some affected areas and relief camps. The Chief Minister holds an all-party meeting and another meeting of the district administration; announces an enquiry headed by retired Justice Shri P.C. Phukan and an ex-gratia of Rs 3 lakhs to next of kin of the dead and rehabilitation of those whose houses have been gutted. Peace rally organised by CPI (ML), KSA, KNCA and KCS.

The Jirsong Asong team and UCF visit relief camps to find out about the immediate requirements of the people.

11th October: 16,299 people are taking shelter in 31 Relief Camps. The District administration starts distributing essential commodities like food and clothes at the relief camps. A team of health workers visits relief camps and provides treatment to patients.

12th October: 51 Dimasa houses burnt down and one woman killed. The district administration forms a peace mission with representatives from student, women's, and political groups.

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Eastern Indian State of Nagaland and the contiguous areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur in India as also in Myanmar (Burma). The habitat of the Nagas is a compact area extending over 47,000 sq. miles and a population of approximately 3.5 million (Shikhu 2007:1). It is generally accepted that the word "Naga" is a generic term referring to the group of tribes who inhabit this area (Venuh 2005: 7).

The Nagas are Mongoloids like the Burmese, Indonesians, Thais, Japanese and the Chinese. The Nagas also have close affinities with other tribes like the Kuki and Chin peoples who inhabit the areas around the habitat of the Nagas. But the Nagas are quite distinct from them as they have a different history, culture and ethnic identity (Yonuo 1974: ix-xi).

The origin of the term "Naga" has been a matter of debate among researchers and scholars because the term appears to have been given by others and not coined by the Nagas themselves. However, most Naga scholars feel that the first reference to the word "Naga" was made in the second century by Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek philosopher and historian in his Geographia volume VII, II, 18 as "Nagaloi" meaning "the realm of the naked" (Sanyu 1996: 7). The term came into common usage during the British rule. It became popular and gained currency after the British first came in contact with the Nagas in 1832 and after a long period of resistance, finally took full control of the administration of the Naga Hills in 1880. When the British left in 1947, the Naga territory came to be known as the Naga Hills district of Assam State. On December 1, 1963, Nagaland became the 16th full-fledged State of the Indian Union. Today Nagaland has 11 districts: Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Mon, Phek, Tuensang, Kiphire, Peren and Longleng (Shikhu 2007: 3).

**TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

The village was controlled and administered by a group of people like the warriors, the oldest men and the priest along with the representatives from the clans. Among the Konyak, the chief known as the "Angh" was the most powerful man in the village. Among the Sema, the chief was the ruler and founder of the village, or a descendent of the chief because chieftainship was hereditary. This is why when a person with outstanding abilities wanted to establish his authority or had a difference with the chief of his village, he went away from the village and established a new village. Among the Konyaks, the Angh was the supreme head of the community and had the political power to rule the people. As among the Sema, Angh-ship among the Konyaks was hereditary and inter marriage was possible only between the clans of the Anghs. It was the responsibility of the Angh to keep his territory in peace and justice, initiate war or conclude a peace treaty with his enemies. His word was final in case of disputes of any nature. It was highly autocratic.

**LOTHA CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

The number of relief camps increased to 37 with 20,280 people. October: 16 houses burnt down. 3 men are feared killed in the attack, 2 women and 2 men injured and 8 persons including 5 women are reported missing. The number of camps grows to 42 with 22,111 persons. October: 69 houses in 3 Karbi villages and 54 houses in 3 Dimasa villages are burnt down.

The ethnic strife takes a turn for the worse with the Bodo community being sucked into it after a Bodo young person dies. Various Bodo organisations react angrily to it and blame the Government’s lackadaisical attitude to the strife. Karbi Anglong DC complains of a shortage of security personnel. Rockybul Hussain visits Karbi Anglong for the second time and meets various officials to take stock of the situation. The Karbi body, SKA appeals to all organisations in the state to come forward to find a solution to the ongoing violence and promises them full co-operation. SKA also appeals to the state to shift the militant DHD designated camp from...
The Christians forum of Dimapur requested all churches to observe 23rd October as a 'Day of Prayer'.

The relief camps increase to 45 with 26,429 persons.

18th October: 71 Dimasa houses burnt down.

CPI(ML) representatives submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India.

The number of relief camps reaches 46 with 26,842 persons.

19th October: Villagers from 14 Karbi villages in NC Hillary District take shelter in relief camps at Kheroni. 7 Karbis are feared killed in NC Hills district and several Dimasa houses in Karbi Anglong are burnt down.

The Assam governor visits the affected areas and some relief camps. The number of relief camps grows to 47 with 26,870 persons.

20th October: About 50 Dimasa houses and 19 Karbi houses burnt down.

The number of relief camps increases to 49 with 42,627 persons.

21st October: Bodies of 9 unidentified persons are recovered in the Hojaipur area.

An All Party Delegation visits the district and meets representatives of both the communities. Our government offers to repair the damaged infrastructure and provide financial assistance to the affected communities.

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The Karbi community and conflict resolution

Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution

This essay is an effort to identify the traditional methods used by the Lotha Nagas to solve social conflicts of various types. The first part of the essay presents a general picture of the tribes of the Naga family. The second part situates the Lotha tribe within the Naga family and presents a general picture of the Lotha. The third part deals with the traditional methods of conflict resolution used by the Lotha Nagas. The essay is an effort to identify the traditional methods of conflict resolution used by the Lotha Nagas.

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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4. Chang</td>
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<td>7. Konyak</td>
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<td>8. Lotha</td>
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<td>9. Phom</td>
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<td>10. Pochury</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Rengma</td>
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October:
More than 400 Karbi houses burnt down near Diyangbra in NC Hills. The NC Hills Autonomous Council condemns the killings and violence in Karbi Anglong. The DC of NC Hills has been providing food, shelter and healthcare to about 3,215 inmates, both Karbi and Dimasa at relief camps in the district.

Bibliography


parts of the district; 2) Sanis Range or Middle Range, which covers the middle part of the district; 3) Bhandari Range or Lower Range. It is the outermost part of the district and extends from the Japukong range of Mokokchung district and gradually slopes down to the Assam plains in the north western side. Two of the most fertile valleys are in this range and they are the Baghty and Tchiying valleys.

Demographic features
The total population of the district in 2001 was 161,223 of whom 83,670 were males and 77,553 females. The sex ratio was 927. The literacy rate was 80.55, with 85.35 for males and 75.32 for females. However, educational levels were not very high as only 5,988 or 5.34 percent of the literates were graduates.

The entire district is classified as rural, having 107 recognised villages with VDB, though according to the Census of 2001, there were 128 inhabited villages. The rural population was 123,587 (76.66% of the total). The only urban centre was Wokha Town, the district Headquarters.

The wife went away for no fault of her husband, she would have to repay the cost of the marriage to her erstwhile husband. If the wife went back to her parents, they would have to make the payment. If the husband drove away his wife because of her infidelity, then she would get only a small amount of money from her husband as divorce cost, but the husband would get back a part of his marriage expenses. If she went away with her paramour, naturally he would bear the cost. However, in some villages her second marriage had to be recognised by her erstwhile husband because of the traditions of those villages. In the Lotha tradition, each village has a set of local traditions and practices known as “Yanthi”, which literally means the “fruit of the village”. The “Yanthi” of some villages gave the erstwhile husband the moral authority not to recognise the second marriage of his erstwhile wife. It was not mandatory for the erstwhile husband to exercise this authority. But the fact that such an authority was given to him in cases when a woman went away with a paramour, even after making the payment of the costs of the marriage, the erstwhile husband was seen as the wronged party in the divorce.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION
Extramarital relations on the part of a man could be with a married woman or with an unmarried woman. More important is the case of a married man indulging in extramarital relations with an unmarried girl. If the relationship does not result in having a child, nothing really happens except disquiet at home and some social scorn. But if a child or children are born, the man may take the woman into his family and give her the status of his second wife, or the girl may live as an unmarried mother and claim the cost of bringing up the children.

In some villages, if an unmarried girl gives birth to a child, she is blamed for the inglorious and infamous situation. Anyway, cases of unmarried mothers or widows giving birth to children are found in the Lotha society, though they are not very common. Unmarried mothers and illegitimate children are not looked down upon by their society.

A case of extramarital relations may be settled by the families concerned, and usually ends up with imposing fines. In many villages a fine is in the form of money. The amount to be paid as a fine is not fixed. It varies according to the gravity of the offence. In some villages a fine may be in the form of goods. For example, in the Lotha society, if a man mistreats his wife and she leaves him, the husband will have to return a part of his marriage expenses to her. He would also have to give a small amount of money as a fine for the second marriage of his erstwhile wife to her family.

Conflicts Based on Land
Conflicts based on land and natural resources are more common than any other type of conflicts. We shall study some cases where conflicts broke out over land and other natural resources and see how they were resolved.

**Case Study 1**
In a village, a man had a plot of land bordered by two small streams. A dispute broke out between him and his neighbour when an approach road was being constructed. While the road was being constructed, loose soil filled up the small streams and the traditional boundary was obliterated. This led to confusion amongst the owners of the two plots about the demarcation of the boundary. Both sides marked their own boundaries and each claimed that his boundary was the actual one. Thus a conflict broke out between the two neighbours.
the Loths are generally slim and moderately tall, and women, as usual, are a little shorter than men.

The language that the Loths speak among themselves is also known as “Kyonyi”. This language has no dialectal variations, except for minor differences between the Upper Lotha and the Lower Lotha. This is not the case with Ao, which has significant variations between regions. With others Loths speak Nagamese, which is a simplified form of Assamese. Many Loths who have studied Hindi at school also use Hindi for communicating with outsiders. The educated class can converse in English fluently.

There are some cultural differences between the Loths in the three ranges but such internal differences are not significant. In general, the lifestyle of the Lotha Nagas is simple yet fascinating. It is simple because of their simple understanding of life, fascinating because their traditions are undergoing changes due to modernisation and westernisation.

The staple diet of the Loths consists of rice, bamboo-shoots of various types, fermented or dried fish, yam, vegetables, and meat, which is a delicacy. Food is mostly boiled and spices are rarely used.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts Based on Divorce and Extramarital Relations

In Lotha society divorce was recognised, but unlike marriage, it was not a common event. Divorce was settle within the community. Efforts were made to find a solution first at the level of the families concerned, and then at the level of the council of elders. The traditions of the village and local customary laws were followed. The guilty party was punished through restitution of expenses and fines, which could be in cash or kind.

Two factors have brought about changes. The first is the conversion to Christianity. The second factor of change is the introduction of new systems of administration after the formation of the State of Nagaland. At present most Lotha Nagas are Christian and do not easily go in for divorce. Divorce is an option, but is disapproved by the Church, and for that matter, by their society as a whole. It is treated as a social evil and can result in ex-communication from the Church. Civil society including the custodians of the customary laws, tend to impose some fines. The traditional law prevails over the new administrative and legal institutions. Thus, individual conflicts are now not common and are heard in court. The judicial process is in the tradition of the customary law, and to this day, in customary conflicts, the head of the family plays a role, but is disapproved by the Church, and for that reason, the family member may go to the court.

Conflicts Based on Land

Land is a vital resource in Lotha society, and conflicts over land are common. There are four types of land with regard to ownership: 1) village land which is owned by the village, 2) khel land owned by a khel of a particular clan, 3) family land owned by a family which is passed from father to son, and 4) individual land owned by an individual. Village land is owned by the village as a whole, and the products and things produced from this land are shared by the villagers. House building materials and other things which are of general use of the villagers are taken from the village land. The Village Council takes care of the village land.

Clan land is owned by a clan. In almost all the established villages of the Lotha Nagas, every clan has its own land, which is controlled by a few representatives from among the members of the clan or by the head of the particular clan. The production and use of the land is for the use of the members of that particular clan. The products of this land are used by the members of the clan and are shared by the villagers. The Village Council takes care of the village land.
Social Organisation

Every Lotha village is an independent unit, but leagues of villages were formed in the past for purposes of war. In the past, each village was ruled by the village chief known as the “Tongti” with the assistance of the village elders. Mills (1922: 96) observes that in some villages the chiefs had the privilege of free labour of the villagers for cultivating their fields. The chieftainship was hereditary in the family of the man who originally founded the village. But chieftainship had practically ceased already during the British period and the village came to be ruled by a group of elders (Mills 1922: 96).

Among the Lothas, there are no specified hierarchical divisions and no caste-like system of social stratification. The community is divided into phratries and clans. They are also divided into two territorial divisions, the Northern Lothas and the Southern Lothas. Some minor dialectical and cultural differences are observed between them. Among the different clan groups, no specific economic and religious relations are observed.

Traditional Institutions

Prior to the coming of the British and the establishment of their administration, the Lothas had an efficient village-centred administration of their own. In every village, there was a body of elders known as “Tongti” representing every khel in the village. They were also known as “Ephyo-Esan” (spokesmen) of the village. They were responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the dispensing of justice. Any problem or dispute in the village or with other villages was settled by these elders.

LOTHA CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Traditional methods of conflict resolution deal with the traditional methods of conflict resolution. But an effort has been made to explain the changes that have taken place in these methods due to the forces of modernisation and recent developments.

Excommunication and expulsion from the village or locality is a very serious matter. This kind of penalty evolved from the idea that if one is banished from one’s own village or locality, he/she will have no protection whatsoever. In former times, when tribal warfare was continuous, an exiled person became an easy target for hostile head hunters. There was also the danger of being exposed to wild animals. Thus expulsion was, in practice, equivalent to the capital punishment of the present day. It was also an indirect elimination of the guilty for the offence committed by him/her.

It is very hard for a person to become a member of another clan or village. A person cannot be simply admitted or welcomed by another clan or village. In former times, it was believed that evil times or things would befall the clan or village. In case a village decided to welcome a newcomer, they would perform various rituals. One such ritual was passing through the fire. The host clansmen would gather at a place and make a huge fire and the person to be welcomed into the clan would have to strip off all his/her belongings and jump above the burning fire from one side to the other. This would be followed by other rituals and chants. Only then the host clan or village accepted the newcomer.

Social Organisation

Every Lotha village is an independent unit, but leagues of villages were formed in the past for purposes of war. In these leagues, each village was ruled by the village chief known as the “Tongti” with the assistance of the village elders. Mills (1922: 96) notes that in some villages the chiefs had the privilege of free labour of the villagers for cultivating their fields. The chieftainship was hereditary in the family of the man who originally founded the village. But chieftainship had practically ceased during the British period and the village came to be ruled by a group of elders (Mills 1922: 96).

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peers were established during their stay in the Morung. This system has changed and modern educational institutions have taken the place of the Morung.

Marriage, Family and Status of Women

The Lotha follow monogamy and clan exogamy. Rules about marriage are strictly followed. In the past there seems to have been the practice of marriage by service in which a boy served the family of his prospective bride before marriage took place (Singh 1994: 113-114).

The nuclear family is the norm. The older sons establish independent households when they marry. The youngest son continues to stay with the parents even after his marriage and inherits a major portion of the property. The head of the family is respected, feared and obeyed. Thus the system was patrilineal and strongly patriarchal.

The position of women was high. Women had almost equal status with men in society because in every field of physical and domestic work, their work was of equal value. In fact, women worked more than men. There was no discrimination against women at home. But in matters of the public domain, they were expected to follow the norms and customs of the family.

Conflict Situations and Remedial Measures

Conflict is universal and is found wherever people live in groups: in the family, neighbourhood, community and society. Conflicts take different forms like disagreements, disputes, quarrels and clashes, with or without violence. Whatever their form, conflicts are harmful because they lead to disharmony, tension and even destruction. Therefore, like conflicts, methods or mechanisms for resolving conflicts are also universal. In modern societies important mechanisms for dealing with conflicts are laws and courts. But before the establishment of modern courts of law, most societies, especially tribal communities, had their own mechanisms and institutions for resolving conflicts. We shall look at the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of the Lotha Naga tribe.

Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution

If a person got into the habit of stealing even after being warned several times, he/she was dealt with more severely. Some villages banished the culprit from the village, other villages imposed a very high fine, and in some villages, a special ritual was conducted for the culprit in order to make him/her give up the habit of stealing.

This ritual or ceremony is known as 'Pungrum'. This ceremony was not found in all the Lotha villages. Where it existed it was performed according to the ‘Yanthi’ of the village. It was a scary ceremony and was performed by the elders of the village. The ceremony began by selecting a huge pig. It was slaughtered in the kitchen of the culprit. Then the pig was cut into pieces without removing the hair. The pieces were distributed among the elders of the village.

Children and youngsters were forbidden to eat the meat out of fear that they might inherit the bad habit of the culprit. This ceremony was performed for various reasons. In the first place, it was to condemn the wrongdoings of the culprit. Secondly, it was to scare him so that he would mend his ways out of fear. Thirdly, it was believed that such a ceremony would make the culprit give up the habit of stealing.

In some villages like Longsa, whether one was killed intentionally or not, the matter was referred to the Yitso ki. The Yitso ki in this case consisted of the elders of the village who were either selected or came from the hereditary lines of the village. Even if the crime was committed accidentally, the offender was tried by the Yitso ki.

As far as possible, the members of both families tried to settle the whole affair between themselves. But if they were not satisfied with the settlement, they proceeded to the Yitso ki for justice. In some villages like Longsa, whether one was killed intentionally or not, the matter was referred to the Yitso ki for justice.

If the crime was committed intentionally, the punishment was very high. The offender, and in some cases, the entire family of the offender, was asked to leave the locality and the village for a specific period or even permanently. The guilty were condemned by the entire society and no mercy was shown to him/her. He/she became unwelcome in the entire society. If a person was killed inadvertently, for example in the course of hunting, fishing, playing, etc, the matter could be settled by the families of both the parties (the victim’s and the offender’s). As far as possible, the members of both families tried to settle the whole affair between themselves. But if they were not satisfied with the settlement, they proceeded to the Yitso ki for justice.

The Yitso ki in this case consisted of the elders of the village who were either selected or came from the hereditary lines of the village. Even if the crime was committed accidentally, the offender was tried by the Yitso ki.
verdict of the Council, bites a sacred object and swears that his position is the correct one. Among the Lotha Nagas, the sacred object in this case is the tooth of a tiger. Like other tribals, the Lothas hunt wild animals, including tigers. When they hunt a tiger they extract the tooth to be preserved as a prized and sacred object. In the oath taking ceremony, the person taking the oath, holds the object between his teeth, invokes the spirits of his ancestors, and asserts that his position is correct and just. The implication is that if he makes a false claim, he will be killed by a tiger. It is believed that if he makes a false claim, he and his family will, sooner or later, suffer various types of misfortunes like sickness and even death. This ceremony is so solemn and serious that young people, especially children, are not permitted to come anywhere close to the place where the ceremony takes place. An oath taking or swearing ceremony is the final and irrevocable step in the settlement of a dispute, and very few people dare to take such an oath.

Case study 2

In a village, there was a dispute between two persons over the boundary of their land. After many attempts to solve the dispute, there was no solution. Then the two parties went to their village council for a final settlement. The council of elders listened to the parties and examined the evidence, and then gave a verdict. The parties were not satisfied with the verdict. Therefore, they turned to the modern courts in the district and the High Court in the State for a final settlement. This shows how the modern legal system has become more popular than the traditional customary law in resolving disputes.
can be seen from the two cases that there are well established traditional methods of conflict resolution. The elders and the traditional courts or the councils play a definite role. They are expected to be impartial and fair. The parties are given an opportunity to state their case. If the decision of the court is not accepted by any of the parties, there is recourse to the traditional practice of oaths. However, people are not always willing to swear an oath because of their fear of the spirits. Even today, in Naga societies recourse to oaths is considered the ultimate means for solving disputes of all types.

Inter-village Conflicts

In the past disputes and conflicts between Lotha villages were rare mainly because land was abundant and population was thin. If a dispute did arise, messengers were sent to the villages in order to fix a day for a meeting of the elders of the villages concerned. On the appointed day, the elders met on the path half-way between the villages. If the dispute was caused by the action of an individual, and if he was found to be guilty, he was fined. The settlement of the dispute culminated with the elders eating together.