CHAPTER-IV
ECONOMIC LIFE
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The economic structure plays a very important part in the life of a community. It is the main factor for raising the social, cultural and political consciousness of the people. The economic life of the Tangkuls may be discussed as follows.

Agriculture:

Agriculture is the mainstay of the people of Ukhrul district, Manipur. Their economy is entirely based on agriculture and on some other trades. Among the agriculture products, rice is the staple food of the people. "In it wealth is reckoned and from it he obtains his food and his drink."¹ Rice has been used as food for the people of Asia since pre-historic period. It is also the main food for most of the animals, birds and insects of the Asiatic Zone. Even rice is one of the oldest and most important food for Asia and South African countries, the origin of it is not yet known. A latest investigation on the origin of rice states that it has originated from the foothills of the eastern Himalayan region. The investigation by Archaeologists has so far discovered that the beginning of rice culture in central China was in 5000 B.C. But the discoveries in the Thailand Myanmar border suggests that rice farming started from 10,000 B.C.²

The agricultural operations are oriented to the seasonal rhythm. Much of the land under cultivation is cropped once in the summer monsoon. The cultivator takes advantage of summer and get ready for cultivation. Most of the cultivators adopted the traditional method of cultivation. The agricultural method of the Tangkhul is of two types viz., terrace cultivation and jhum cultivation. Jhum cultivation is also known as shifting cultivation. Terrace cultivation is mainly practised in the north, western and central regions and jhum cultivation is extensively practised in the south and eastern region of the Ukhrul district of Manipur.

**Terrace Cultivation:**

Among the other Naga tribes, the Angami Naga, Mao Naga and some other Naga tribes of Manipur and Nagaland practised terrace cultivation. R.R. Shimray quotes from the Imperial Gazetteers of India Vol. XVIII that "The Tangkhul Nagas who live in the hill east of the valley, grow transplanted rice. The sides of the hills are cut out into succession of terraces built up with stone retaining walls, over which the water from the hill streams is distributed through small irrigation channels. It is from this tribe that the Angami Nagas are said to have learnt the art of terracing the sides." From this account and by studying their methods of cultivation, we can conclude that the Tangkhuls had been practising terrace cultivation since their ancient times.

The method of preparing land for wet cultivation is to dig and build the side of the hill into terraces from 20 to 200 feet broad or more if the ground is enough for levelling and extension. The stones taken out from the field while levelling the soil and from the riverbeds or elsewhere are used to
bank up the walls of the terraces. The terraces are watered and irrigated through long narrow drains and channels which carry water from nearby or distant streams or rivers. In most cases, each terrace cannot have its own separate channel. In such cases, water is obtained either from the next terrace above it or from one of the terraces in the same row. The "terraces being so carefully graduated that the water may flow from terrace to terrace round the whole spur."³ The neighbouring terrace owners dig together and clean the channels for running the water smoothly and perennially without diverting the water from the paddy fields. Sometimes during the rainy season, some portions of the channel get eroded. In such cases, stones are collected and bank up the channel. So channel checking is done every now and then. Water is also often carried from one terrace to another terrace in a hollow bamboo or logs passing over other terraces and channels in between.

The method adopted in the cultivation of rice has evolved from an age old experience. It has its roots in the antiquity. The first step before transplantation of rice is to dig the soil and plough. The agricultural implements are mostly indigenous but of late some of the implements like spade is being used. The plough is the same as of the early stage of civilisation. In the hills, it is generally drawn by one buffalo. The buffaloes are strong and capable of pulling alone. The field after ploughing is then cleaned and levelled evenly and water is kept at the moderate level. After having done all these things, paddy seedling is transplanted. Levelling the field is done with much care and attention so as to retain water

throughout the year. Channel checking is also done constantly so that water may not be diverted to other directions and blocked at certain portions. Until and unless the channel water runs perennially, the field will naturally get dried up. As the water fields are permanent, soil fertility is maintained by the application of natural manures and fertilizers. For this purpose, the Tangkhuls apply animal waste, rice husk, dead leaves and plants. This type of terrace cultivation is practised in "Formosa, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and other South Asian countries."4

From the time of yore, the Tangkhuls made small fishponds inside the water fields. If the size of the field is big, the number of the fish ponds are also greater. But generally the number of fishponds ranges from 2 to 5. Fish is generally caught before transplanting and harvesting. The demand of labour during the time of rice transplantation and harvesting is very great. Young and old from age 7 to 70 onwards go to their respective fields for rice transplantation and work till sunset. After a long rigorous labours of the transplantation of paddy usually in the month of July, the whole villagers would sit together and fix some dates for observing the completion of rice transplantation festival. This festival is called 'Mangkhap phanit' and observed with much drinking, eating and merry making. After the festival, the villagers would again resume their usual work of weeding and clearing the fields till harvest. For the "Tangkhuls at this weeding season, everybody would be in a relaxed and leisurely mood as the girls would do their weaving and the boys, with their musical instruments (Sipu-Tingteila),

would sit by the side of the girls who would weave before and after going 
down to the fields for the weeding work, for they would work in the field only 
from about 12 noon to 2 p.m. at this weeding season. Menfolk did huntings 
in their leisure time.”

Harvest season is the happiest time for the farmers. When the paddy is 
fully ripened, the family would invite their relatives or friends to help in the 
harvest. After thrashing the paddy, the owner of the field would invoke a 
prayer to the goddess of wealth for bountiful blessings. The owner will then 
take a basket (luk), which is equivalent to one tin of mustard oil and fill in 
each of the ladies' baskets. For men, a big hand woven shawl is spread on 
the thrashing mat and paddy is poured in the centre of the shawl. Then the 
shawl is rolled up lengthwise and knotted at both ends. It is then bounded by 
plaited bands tightly and knotted at the back. Usually men carry 5 to 7 tins 
of paddy and ladies 3 to 5 tins of paddy. When some richmen's harvest, they 
made giant package called otrei which contains 10+15 tins of paddy. The 
strongest men of the village would try and carry the otrei. The otrei carrier 
walked up the steep uphill paths taking slow steps. The ladies lit the pine 
torches, feed him with drinks or water and massage his legs with oil as he 
walks along. All will say 'hao'...‘hao’...‘hao’ till they reach home and 
the party will be provided with meat, drinks and they enjoyed the whole 
night is singing and jubilation honouring the strongest men who carried the 
giant otrei.

5. Ibid., P. 149.
**Jhuming or Shifting Cultivation:**

Shifting cultivation is considered as men’s first step in the transition from food gathering to food production stage. This system of cultivation is stated to have evolved from the Neolithic age and survives till-date with some variations in several parts of the world. It is known by various names in different parts of the world. In North East India, this system of cultivation is known as Jhum cultivation. In India, it is widely practised in the hill areas of north-eastern region embracing Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.

As stated earlier, the eastern and southern regions of Ukhrul district extensively practised jhum cultivation. For this reason, the Myanmar still call Tangkhul as ‘Akhangba’ referred only to south and eastern Tangkhul which means people who practise jhumming. This method of cultivation is commonly practised throughout the hills of Eastern India and Myanmar. All the land in the hills being community owned, the jhumnia select the side on a hill slope usually before December. In some villages, the whole villagers cultivate in one block for its many advantages. It is easier to fence in a big block than a lot of small blocks. All the villagers would combine and make the jhum paths clear. However, in some villages, all the villagers do not cultivate in one block. Groupwise or clanwise select a site at different areas.

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6. Interview with Stephen Angkang, dated 4-8-78

Jungle clearing does not take long. It is done in the middle of the cold weather and families and friends help one another to finish it quickly on time. The burnt ashes are mixed with the soil which is loosened with the help of ordinary spade, dao, hoe drilling rod, etc. The land is scratched and dug with the spade and the field is ready for sowing or planting.

Once the rain sets in, soil get moistened and seeds are grown. In due course, there is a bumper crop. The soil however get exhausted and loses its fertility. So the cultivators are allowed to go back to another new jungle for a cycle of years which varies according to the amount of land available. The jhumias move to another site, from one hill to another following the same cycle. However due to the increase in population, the interval of recultivating the same site is shortened. "The jhuming cycle which spanned twenty years in days of yore has now been reduced to three to six years because of population increase". This result in low productivity of land, forcing the cultivators to live in near famine condition. It is usual for a cultivator to shift from ten to fifteen sites during his life.

The advantage of jhumming cultivation is that it can grow varieties of food crops and vegetables other than paddy. They are millet, maize, mustard leaves, beans, lin seeds, chillies, Naga onions, garlic, potatoes, cucumber, pumpkins, guard, etc.


There are also many disadvantages of jhumming which are increasingly visible. Large portion of deforestation of hilltops and slopes contribute to undesirable ecological changes. These in turn cause drying up of water sources. Besides, by its very nature, jhumming offers little scope for introduction of modern technology.

The important food crops which are cultivated by the Tangkhul cultivators may be classified as follows:

1. Food crops: Rice, maize, pulses, pea, beans of various kinds, gram soybean, yam, seasamum, etc.

2. Other crops: Cotton, tobacco, oil seeds, lin seed, mustard seed, ginger, etc.

**Vegetable Gardening and Farming:**

Cabbage, potatoes, turnip, brinjals, carrot, pumpkin, mustard leaf, squash, guard, Naga dal, tomato local tree tomato. Cucumber, sweet potatoes etc. are grwn in the Ukhrul District. Among these vegetables gardening, cabbage and potato come next to rice and planted in large scale and serves as one of the main sources of income.

**Fruit Gardening:**

Banana, citrus fruits, guava, pineapple, bear, plum, peach etc. are some of the fruits grown in the Ukhrul district in abundance.
Spices:

Chillie, ginger, turmeric, onion, garlic, coriander leaf, cardamom etc. are common spices grown by the Tangkhuls.

Farmers have also the knowledge of mixed cropping. They earn their money to meet their daily expenses and to support by selling their cash crops like potato, maize, soybean and, cabbage, etc. But due to poor communication, many farmers cannot sell out their surplus products and hence they lose incentive to produce more than what they need.

Agricultural tools and implements:

The agricultural tools and implements used by the Tangkhuls are mostly outdated. They still follow the primitive system of cultivation. Most of the implements are manufactured by the local blacksmiths. The implements are very simple and a little skill is required in making them. They are : (1) Rake (karphang), (2) Plough (langon), (3) Sledge (kangpot), (4) Axe (ngaha), (5) Smooth harrow (hokai), (6) the Toothed harrow, (7) Sickle (changkhui), (8) Fan for winnowing the chaffs out, (9) Thrasing mat, (10) Spade or hoe of various sizes. There is also a peculiar implements which is being used in the Veikhang range consisting of Khangkhui, Nungshong, Choither and nearby villages. Regarding this implement, Verrier Elwin wrote: "one curiously clever agriculture implements, however, I saw in use near Khongui. This was an implement to free the ground of weeds. It consisted of a hoop of iron about half-an-inch in breath the diameter of the hoop being about one foot. To each end of the hoop, a handle was attached and the implements was to held in the hand that when
dashed on the soft soil it passed completely underground, cutting off the roots of all the weeds. This I regard as a much more expeditious weedner than any hoe I have ever seen in Europe. As far as the Manipur tribes are concerned I saw it only amongst the Tangkhuls."¹⁰ This implement is still in use in Khangkhui village of Ukhrul district. It is called ‘Huishí’ in local dialect (Khangkhui).

Livestock:

Rearing of animals like cattle, pig, poultry, dogs, cats, etc., are also an important occupation other than agriculture. In the past, the best stocks are killed during any festival or village religious sacrifices. The Tangkhul Nagas are meat eaters and the animals serve as the best item of entertainment during festivals or important functions. Cattle like buffaloes and cows are kept in plenty, as the climate is congenial for maintaining a good pasture. In the olden days, riches are counted not by money but by animal wealth, property, land and paddy. People who can store a huge pile of paddy, rear numbers of buffaloes, mithuns, etc., are counted and considered as rich. The animals are sometimes counted as the medium of exchange on the occasion when fines are paid and disputes settled.¹¹ During slack agricultural seasons, cattle are let loose. The buffaloes or mithuns are generally kept in a protected jungle in groups in a semi wild condition. The selected jungles for keeping cattles are found and checked by the group members of the cattle. In the olden days, pigs are reared very extensively and special fodders


are also prepared for them. The reason for giving special attention is that pork serves as one of the best items of food which is cooked on any special occasion like engagement, marriage, feast of merit, rope or giant bed pulling, festivals, etc. The Tangkhuls also keep a number of poultry birds and usually they do not raise special pens for keeping poultry birds. They are kept outside the main house which are generally attached to it. Poultry nets are suspended on the porch. Nowadays with the dawn of civilisation, pig-stys and poultry pens are raised at a little distance away from the main house. Uptil now such domestic animals are reared both for home consumption and for sale. Modern poultry and piggery farming are also being taken up. Herds of cows are reared and have made good income out of the sale of milk. Even the poorest widow rears pigs and poultry for their economic value. By selling these domesticated animals, she earns her living and tries to meet her daily needs. But due to lack of modern farming facilities and financial constraints, this backyard rearing cannot meet their demands. Besides the above-mentioned animals and birds, buffaloes are counted as one of the most useful animals. They are strong and used for dragging out timbers from the jungle, ploughing fields and for other various purposes. Moreover, buffaloes and cows serve as the best item of food. Besides these, cats and dogs are rare at home by every household. Dogs are generally reared as house guards and for hunting.
In the olden days, bull-fight especially of buffaloes were a luxurious game. Only the chieftain and the rich men could afford to do it. There was no betting or monetary bargaining. When the two owners, mutually agreed upon for the bull-fight, the animals were dragged out in the open space and it was witnessed by the local people with much gaiety and enthusiasm. The owner of the winning animal felt supreme over the rival. In case, the animal was killed during the fight, there was no compensation. It is all a matter of prestige and honour.

Fishery:

The practice of paddy-cum-pisciculture was in practice since earliest period. Generally, small ditches are dug inside the wet paddy field for keeping fish. Fish is generally caught twice in a year before transplanting and harvesting. Fish is caught at any time by using nets or by hand without letting out the water from the field. It also serves as one of the best items of curry. Now-a-days, fish rearing has become an important occupation for the Tangkhuls because of its economic value. In Ukhrul district, the more scientific and extensive rearing of fish began in the year 1970. A general survey of the fisheries was conducted and found that there is vast scope for the development of fisheries in the district.

Most of the people of Ukhrul district have wet paddy fields with perennial source of water supply. These ready-made wet paddy fields serve as a stepping stone for the introduction of paddy-cum-pisciculture in the district. According to 1977-78 Administrative Report, the pisciculture practice comes to 950 and 200 hectare approximately. It is also worth mentioning that Ukhrul district of Manipur is the only district in the state or
even in our country where paddy-cum-pisciculture is successfully implemented. Most of the beneficiaries are now able to sell about 50/60 kgs. of table fish annually. The only factor which obstructs is the inconvenience of transportation. Many Tangkhul villages do not have even a cart road upto the district headquarters. To reach Ukhrul, people have to cover a long distance of narrow uphill foothpaths and rugged terrain. Due to prolonged journey, fishes die on the way and cannot be sold at the market rate. Inspite of all these constraints, many Tangkhul villagers are undertaking paddy cum-pisciculture farming. The introduction of this scheme has shown improvement in the economic lives of the people of the district.

There are also a good number of rivers abundantly populated with local species of fishes. But these rivers are often exploited by the local people in an uneconomic manner by means of poisoning, dynamiting, etc., thereby killing all the fishes along the stretch of the river. Many villagers are earning by catching fishes from the river. In Ukhrul district, Chatrik river fish is in great demand due to its unique taste. The dry fish costs Rs.180/- to 200/- per kg. In spite of its high price, people throng to buy the dry fish because of its high delicacy.

**Forest:**

For the Tangkhuls, forest products have a great economic values and form a principle source of revenue. In the Tangkhul society, forests are traditionally owned by the local village as ancestral property. Forests provide fire-wood, building materials, barks and leaves for using as dyes and drugs. In the olden days when modern dyes and drugs were not known, the people of those times made dyes and drugs out of wood barks and leaves for
dying thread, handicrafts and on the front beams of the main building where they carve out human and animal figures.

The forest of Ukhrul district exhibits multifarious species of fauna and flora. There are rich varieties of flora. The world famed Shiroi lily is grown on the Shirui Kashung (Tangkhul call Shirui not Shiroy) which was discovered by Mr. Kingdomward. Over 50% of the geographical area of Ukhrul district is covered by forest which ranges from tropical rain forest to sub-alpine forest. They are mainly of pine, mixed with oak, chestnut, older walnut, uningthou (Pheocha – Hen siana), fir and mixed evergreen forest. In lower altitudes, the most common species are oak mixed with chestnut. Teak is common to the slope overlooking the Kabo valley. Wild tea plant is found in Kamjong sub-Division of Grihang, and Ningchou area. A small area of about 2300 sq.km. in the Angoching, Khayangphung and Khamasom forest bordering Myanmar are mostly inaccessible due to difficult terrain and has therefore remained untouched and forms a natural habitat for a large number of rare and indigenous flora and fauna. Thousands of species of flowering plants and trees grow in this area.\(^{12}\)

The forest in Ukhrul District is traditionally owned by the local villages as ancestral property. Only a small area under Litan Forest Range of about 20 sq. miles and another 18.8 sq. miles known as the Yaingangpokpi Reserved Forests are declared Govt. Reserved Forest vide Govt. Order No. 55/7/84.\(^{13}\) The forest area of Ukhrul district has been assessed to be about 2680 sq.kms.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
The forest of Ukhrul gives a huge income to the people from their export of agor, wood, sal, teak uningthou, timber, firewood, etc. Some persons are exclusively engaged in timber and forest business. Even in the olden days, forest was considered as a village wealth and preserved by the villagers. Deforestation was strictly prohibited due to its economic value. For the purpose of the preservation of forest, a special act called ‘Meiyan’ was enforced. According to this act any person setting fire to the jungle would be fined according to the Tangkhul customary laws.

**Handicrafts and Weaving:**

Handicrafts and weaving play a vital role in the village economy. During their recess of field works, handicrafts and weaving serve as their best occupation. The Tangkhuls are by nature hard working and laborious. They are always engaged in various works throughout the year. The art of handicraft is mainly concentrated on men but there are also a good number of women who are adept in knitting fishing nets, rain coats (made from plum leaves) baskets, etc. Usually old women are seen knitting fishing nets and raincoats in Khangkhui village during recess time. Weaving is chiefly women’s art and business. Men are not allowed to do weaving. Let us examine some of the important handcrafts of the Tangkhuls.

**Bamboo and Cane Works:**

Basketry is a very important cottage industry as baskets are made for a variety of purposes. The art of handicrafts is restricted to men. Split bamboo is the usual material used for both mats and baskets. Baskets are in wide range and numbers with different shapes and sizes. They are used for
different purposes as containers for crops and other household goods and used as packages for carrying luggage and merchandise. A favourite basis for a basket is a length of bamboo, say 4 to 5 feet long. The piece of bamboo slit down into a number of fine slats, which are held together by the joint at the bottom for carrying miscellaneous articles and for carrying husked rice.\(^{16}\)

The basket, especially for carrying firewood is called ‘Pengkai’, in Tangkhul which is a loose basket with a broadest bottom and still more broader at the top. For carrying miscellaneous articles and as a daily carrier to the field, these baskets are woven more neatly and closely than other baskets. Some baskets are woven in an “open lozenge shaped or hexagonal rush cross-warped and twined at the top and at the bottom.”\(^{17}\) The Tangkhuls made various designs of baskets or containers for storing rice and paddy. Some are very big with covers which are generally kept inside the house. The big containers which also serve as a little granary can store at least 10 to 20 tins of paddy. The other containers or baskets for storing rice, vegetables fruits, etc., are naturally much smaller. These baskets called ‘Luk’ in Tangkhul are woven in the twill, chequer and wicker pattern. Another special kind of basket which is used for mixing rice beer or other of such kinds are also woven closely in the twill pattern.

The Tangkhuls also made a special type of boxes for keeping their clothes, costly ornaments and articles. It is made of cane and woven neatly and tightly. It is covered by lid which cannot be opened easily. Every family

\(^{17}\) Ibid., P. 65.
usually possesses 2 to 4 boxes of such kind. This type of long boxes are called Tabu. It is a little smaller at the bottom and wider and larger at the top. Other baskets are containers for keeping and storing fish, dry meat, etc. A special type of small boxes with covers are used by women for keeping their yarn or needle called ‘Langkheo’.

Special baskets to be used at the times of marriage or on any important functions, are woven neatly and closely to make it virtually air tight. Mats which are used for various purposes like for drying paddy in the open sunshine or mats which are suspended in the kitchen above the hearth for the purpose of drying paddy, chillies and for thrashing paddy during harvesting are also made.

Headband (kashai) for carrying loads are plaited usually in the chequer pattern from finely shredded bamboo thongs. Necklaces, armlets and leggings are woven from fine strips of dyed cane and bamboo. There is also a specially made cane table which are decoratively woven. In the later years, this cane table serves as dining table for the family. There are various sizes and designs of such kind.

Now-a-days, many handicrafts in cane and bamboo works are made and developed. Experts are earning their income by selling their finished products. Now-a-days, cane chair sets are in great demand but due to lack of modern technical knowledge and application, the village industry cannot develop much and compete with others in the open market. If modern artistry and technical equipments are applied and available, they can produce a far superior quality.
Wood works:

Timber serves for multiple purposes. The most exquisite production out of wood are dishes, soucers, plates, cups, husking or pounding table, called Shingkhur, liquor vats, bamboo mugs or cups, etc.

The carving on wood is usually of conventional design. "The best wood carvings are to be seen on the village gate, in the Morung and in front of the house of the rich man or warrior." The working instruments which are used for wood carvings are dao, chisel, axe and adze. Among the Tangkhuls, the figures which they generally carve out are human heads, mithun, buffalo heads, birds, etc. All these figures have got a symbol of bravery and valour. Mithun or buffalos heads are the symbol of wealth and riches. Among the Tangkhuls, a poor man also carved out his house but the design of the rich man is different from that of the poor. All the rich men's houses from post to pillars are engraved with bulls or mithuns heads and human heads. By watching the carvings on his house, one can judge his position in the society. In recent years, with the spread of Christianity, the art of wood carving has suffered. Nowadays, wooden plates, cups, bowls, spoons, jugs, etc., are in great demand. Wooden necklaces are also introduced and the modern girls are crazy after it. Some experts are now exclusively engaged in all these trades and making their income.

**Black Smithy:**

Blacksmithy, though comparatively of recent craft is very popular among the Tangkhuls. The village smith produces the normal requirements of the village like dao, axe, sickle, spade, spear pin, knives and knife’s hook, etc. Production rates at certain villages may have been greatly reduced owing to the availability of the cheaper agricultural tools and implements from the markets.

Usually, the rusted and second hand iron and implements are melted and are forged into various tools and implements. It may be worth mentioning that at present, village blacksmith makes use of springs and often mechanical devices in place of old piston bellows for supply of air to the forges. 19

**Pottery:**

Pot making is also an important trade which is in great demand now-a-days but it is still carried on in a traditional way. In Tangkhul area, pot making is concentrated in one particular village called Longpi (Nungbi). The art of making Longpi pottery is very unique and natural. The raw materials are collected from two different places of the village. The serpentine rock is collected from a place called Kaphungram and the weathered rock from a place called Salah which is 10 km. each from the village. The raw material is dried up and made into powder by pounding in a

local made pounding table. It takes a long process of hard labour. Three persons from this village have already been awarded the National Award. They are Shri Machiha:n Sasa (1988), Shri Yaomi Sasa (1998) and Shri Luiram Diamond in 2000. Pots of various designs and sizes are made for various purposes like liquor vats, water pots, cups, mugs, cooking pots, bowls etc. Later on, improvements are made in designing and now it is more mordernised. They have introduced Lungpi ham pressure cooker, container of various designs, flower pots, vase, jugs, etc. Lungpi pots are exported outside the state and any foreigner coming to Manipur will buy Lungpi hams (pots) for decorative purpose. Still now every Tangkhul from high to low is demanding Lungpi ham for cooking purposes for its unique taste.

The Tangkhuls also practiced some other art and trade like the minor enterprises made of ivory, horn and bone work etc. This practice is done in a limited scale. Nowadays, it is rarely done. They make beads of seeds and from ivory, they make out designs such as bracelets, wristles and other ornamental designs.

They also make musical instruments out of bamboo, wood, animal horn – dried guard etc. the musical instruments commonly used by the Tangkhuls are tingteila – two strings instruments, trumpet (talla) (made of animals horn), drum, flute (sipu), etc.

Weaving:

The art of weaving is one of the most important occupations which comes next to agriculture in Tangkhul society. This art was known to them from the earliest times. However, the thread which they used was not as of
to-day. They made yarn out of jute and from some wood fibres. During head hunting period, collecting jute fibre from the jungle was a risky job since many heads were taken while collecting jute fibres. They made jute fibre into yarn by using some rude primitive tools and by putting the fibre on their thighs and by pressing forward and backward with hands to make the fibre finer and stronger. It is a time consuming process. After this process, they rolled the finished yarn into balls and set the looms ready for weaving. This method is common to all Naga tribes. During those days, each village was like a mini republic in which the village chief was the head. There was no free trade and communication with the neighbouring states, as there were many fueds and were all after the human heads. Moving alone was very dangerous. So they moved in groups. As such, they were completely cut off from the outside world and seldom moved out from their villages. So, there was no import materials coming from other advanced outside world. In such a condition they were forced to collect jute fibre from the jungle risking their lives for making clothes. They dyed their thread which they prepared from leaves and black mud and out of some wood bark, etc. “Fibre cloth undoubtedly proceeded cotton cloth and among the Changs too there are villages where cotton clothes are not known, while those that have taken to cotton are eschewing fibre. They have a tradition that a few generations ago even fibre clothes were not known, and women weaving plaintain leaves for petticoats carried their children in net bags on their backs, leaving no other clothes for their children. This tradition no doubt indicates the development of cloth from nets.”

Even among the Tangkhuls, fibre clothes preceded cotton clothes and only in the later years cotton plants were grown. During their recess of field works people from Yang (western) villages went to buy raw cotton from Khaorui people. Later on, Yang people also started planting cotton on the hill slopes and when the season for collecting cotton balls come, the women carried their big neatly woven baskets on their backs and put the snow-white cotton balls in their basket. They then carried joyously down the slopes in a zig-zag winding path. When they returned with the gift of the new cotton balls, the girls in their hearts merrily planed the number of shawls (kachon) and blankets, etc., which she can make. She also plans to make the best traditional cloth for presenting to her fiance.

The newly collected cotton balls are then first dried up in the sun for removing coton seeds. The earlier use of seeding out cotton is called 'Sanglei' in Tangkhul. A flat wooden stool called 'Sangkung' is placed on the ground and the cotton balls that are dried in the sun are placed on it and pressed hard by the iron roller called 'Sanglei'. After pressing and rolling for two to three times, the seed comes out from cotton balls. Then in the later years another device for seeding out was introduced. It is called 'vatkharit' in Tangkhul. It is a wooden machine like a mangle. It consists of two wooden roller which rolls with a crank. All the seeds then come out. Hutton says that "now-a-days a little seeding machine consisting of two wooden rollers gared to revolving in opposite directions and turned into a crank is coming into common use."21 According M.C. Dougall, a similar machine is in use in Borneo.

The cotton having been seeded, is then carded by flicking with a little bow called 'kazak' in Tangkhul and is then rolled like a sausage of a convenient size for spinning. After flicking the cotton, it is spun on to a spindle. This spindle (haorui) is made of a long spike of bamboo with a point at the bottom (it is like a knitting stick called mui in Tangkhul) and a small thin wood is inserted to prevent the rolling of thread beyond that and keep the thread which rolls in the centre. The spike is then placed on the potshered and some people even covered with a rag, to keep it from wondering. The thread is gradually wound round the wooden stem as it is spun. From the spindle, the thread is wound on to a 'double T' shaped stick called 'raruithing'. From this, it is unwound and dipped in hot rice water, hardening as it dries and when dried it is wound onto a light bamboo frame called 'raishithang' and made to spin readily round a central upright. From the raishithang, it is wound into a ball called 'kazaira khaluikahai'. It is then ready for loom.

The looms of the Tangkhul is the same as those of Nagas. Ling Roth wrote about primitive looms: "the pattern used by the Aos is common, to all Nagas as well as the other tribes in the same area weave in the same way. The most nearly related looms outside Assam and Burma seem to be the Dusun and Iban looms in Borneo, while the Santa Cruz loom and the Bhailia loom are pretty near. Both the Dusun and Iban weavers however, use the spool form of shuttle, whereas Nagas use the unleashed shuttle form, used by the ancient Greeks."22

The art of weaving is solely carried out by women. A girl is laughed at and considered unfit if she does not know the art of weaving. In the olden days, when currency was not available, they practised some sort of barter system in exchange of shawls or shirts with foodstuff or any material. At present, the best products are from the western villages of Ukhrul district.

There are various kinds of shawls and skirts:

Shawls for men:
1. Thangkang
2. Luirim
3. Samcheng
4. Chonkhom
5. Haora (Ruirim)

Shawls for Ladies:
1. Khuileng Kachon
2. Phanga Kachon
3. Thangrui Kachon
4. Chonkhom etc

‘Pheiphir’ and ‘raivat’ kachon are common to both men and women.

Women skirts (Kashon):
1. Phangyai Kashan
2. Yamraki Kashan
3. Lengui Kashan
4. Kasin Kashan
5. Seichang Kashan
6. Phophuk Kashan
7. Thangkang Kashan
8. Chonkhom Kashan
9. Chonphor Kashan
10. Zingtai Kashan
11. Khaorui Kashan
12. Lungkhai Kashan
13. Khuileng Kashan
14. Kamo Kashan
15. Kongshang Kashan
16. Angamla Kashan
17. Rose Kashan
18. Keireila Kashan
19. Taraolo Kashan
20. Raivat kashan, etc.
For the menfolk the only garment in addition to shawl is Malao (kilt) of about 10" width which they wrap a round the waist to cover their private part. The women usually do not wear blouse but wrap it around their breasts and body tightly with a loose black cloth and cover upto the waist. Above the wrapped cloth, hangs the artistically arranged varied combination of colourful necklace called kongsang which almost covers the breasts.

Broadly, the Tangkhul garments can be classified as under:

1. Daily wears
2. Festival dress
3. Singing and dancing dresses
4. War dresses
5. Special shawls for meritorious Persons.
6. Harvest shawls etc.

Since time immemorial, weaving has been a great economic source for the Tangkhuls. They earn their livelihood by exchanging their woven clothes with other living or non-living objects or things according to ones needs in the form of barter system. For instance a piglet for a shawl, 3 to 5 tins of chilli or paddy for a shawl, two baskets (special type) and a paddy thrashing mat for a shawl or skirts according to the quality and type of shawls and skirts. New ones are always costlier than the second-hand ones. In Tangkhul region there are a large number of villages embracing the central zones touching a big portion of northern zones and some parts of eastern regions where the art of weaving is not known or seldom practised. In such areas, barter system was necessary. Moreover, these regions are experts in

25. Ibid., P. 217.
other trades like, pot making and handicraft works. Even to-day, weaving is one of the main sources of income for many families. Moreover, majority of the Tangkhul women depend a great portion of their daily wears upon their weaving works. The Tangkhul shawls are in great demand even in Manipur and outside the state irrespective of their high cost price. As mentioned earlier, weaving is entirely confined to womenfolk who besides shouldering the domestic affairs and cultivation works weave clothes for their dress and for sale. Even in this 21st century, weaving is being done on traditional way and hence, it is time-consuming and production rate is very low. To weave seichang kashan (women skirt) with its full designs, it takes for an adept weaver, one month. Due to all these constraints, production rate is very low and cannot face the open market. Over and above, modern girls are abstaining from weaving and are crazy after the latest fashions and western dresses.

The economic condition of the Tangkhuls to-day have undergone a tremendous changes. In the olden days, village and family economy entirely depended on what they produced and was available in the village. They exchanged articles or foodstuffs in the form of barter system. They were self-sufficient and hardly imported anything from outside. It was possible as they led a very simple life. But modern Tangkhuls have entered into a new phase of living standard and through the coming of civilisation into this land, there is a great transformation in the socio-economic lives. There is also a wide gap between a-farmer and an affluent living standard due to differences in economic position. The affluent ones are those after having modern amenities, luxuries and wealth. A farmer's economy is more or less the same as yesterday in regard to production. In the olden days, wealth was counted
and kept in the form of foodgrains, animals, landed property, etc. Begging
was not known to them. They produced what they needed. The only
difference between the new and old is that their living standard has
improved, become more civilised, profess a new religion and are more
inclined towards modern sophisticated lives. There are also a new class of
families who are holding posts under Government, Semi-Government and
Non-Governmental organisations, etc. These employees who earn like the
gazetted or non-gazetted ranks thus form another new class. They are
definitely richer than the village farmers. Outside these two classes, there are
bureaucrats, businessmen, politicians, contractors, technicians, professionals,
etc., whose economy varies from family to family. However, compared to
the olden days, it is observed that a sea of change has taken place in the
socio-economic lives of the Tangkhuls.

The main cause of economic backwardness can be attributed to poor
communication. Most of the villages are not linked up even with jeepable
roads. Even footpaths are in a deplorable condition. To reach the main road
and district headquarters, one has to pass through thick jungles infested
with leeches and insects. Sometimes hungry lions or tigers awaited the
passers by. One pathetic condition is that villages situated in the extreme
corners of the Indian border (Myanmar) carried their sick people on the
sketchy wooden stretcher crossing rugged and uphill thick jungle paths and
rivers which take two to three days, passing 5 to 10 villages on foot to reach
Ukhrul. Some people died on the way. One of the nearest village from
district headquarters which has so far no road is our poor village
‘Khangkhui’ which is 13 kms. only away from Ukhrul town. This village
has gifted fertile land especially for growing potatoes, cabbage, linseed, soya
bean squash etc. People thronged to buy cabbage as it has unique taste. Our villagers, mostly women will carry a basketful of potatoes or cababbage and go up to district headquarters before dawn and returned late in the evening with one bottle of kerosene oil or one K.g. of sugar. Sometimes they carry their vegetables in a non-stop manner for at least one month and get their children admitted in schools and buy some books. Even after 50 years of India’s Independence, there is no change and any new road linking up to the village. In this situation, every citizen from young to old are led to think that they are not treated like a full citizen of India but third class citizen of India. The state Government is also responsible for neglecting the tribals and for the misuse of tribal funds allocations. No Indian prime minister or cabinet minister has even landed in these remote border areas. Due to the negligence by the State Government and Central Government, the region has become a nest of insurgents and feel as neglected citizens of India.

As a consequence, our farmers cannot export what they produce. In this situation, they have no incentive to produce more than what they need. To sell their surplus products, the farmers have to carry heavy loads on their back passing through rugged hills, rivers and uphill thick jungle paths. After a tedious walk, people reach Ukhrul in exchange of their basic needs which are not available in their villages. But one can imagine how much profit he/she will get by selling the things which she has carried from the village. Sometiems, if people do not buy what they have brought, they will again sell it at a low rate, as they do not want to take it back to their respective villages. In this way, farmers are exploited. On the other hand, if the roads are connected with all major villages, their economic conditions would be
much better off and could bring a great transformation in the socio-economic lives of the people.

Another serious problem facing today is the large number of unemployed youths. Parents sell out their properties accumulated with their hard labour to send their children to schools, colleges, and universities, etc. But after the completion of their education in various disciplines, majority of the students do not get jobs. They also do not like to work with their parents in the fields. Poor students are frustrated as employments in the various departments are not done on merit basis. These educated youths after spending a huge amount of their parents’ wealth, simply stay at home and loiter aimlessly. Out of frustration and helplessness, some resort to evil habits and anti-social activities. We can cite an example of a boy who was looked after by his widowed mother. After passing his matriculation from his village, he sold out their only lifeline paddy field. He took the whole amount of money to study outside the North East. But due to his ill fate his money was robbed off in the train after crossing North East. The young boy returned home empty handed and the youth looked blank and frustrated sensing his future ahead. If a student could recoup what one has spent, then the economic condition will not suffer and it will lighten the burdens of their parents.

In order to solve all these problems, Government should look into the miserable conditions of the villagers; take up developmental schemes and programmes for the upliftment of the villages, give attentions to improving communication, give proper employment to the educated youths, check the greasing of palms, etc. Every nation-loving citizen should feel and work that
a developed welfare state can only be achieved through development from the grass-root level. A country where there is a regional economic imbalance that country can never be termed as a developed country. India is a glaring example of this situation. It is now high time that India understands, give special attention to the poverty striken people whether they are in the South, East, West, North or in the extreme North Eastern region. Among the regions, North Eastern region is the most backward and the most trouble-torn region of India. Even among the North Eastern people, the tribals are the most economically disadvantaged group. What Indian Government should feel about the North-East is that it is situated at the strategic point and until and unless the borders are secured and developed, the nation can never be at peace. Secondly, when the stomachs are empty, the hearts groan that land has no peace and tranquility. The spirit of uncertainty and frustration looms the eastern sky and hope of peace and prosperity becomes gloomy. It is necessary for the government of India, the State Government, bureaucrats, intellectuals, social workers, religious leaders etc. to pay serious attention to the growing problems so as to ensure peace and development in North East India, particularly Manipur and Ukhrul district.