Chapter – III

CHIEF AND THE VILLAGERS

In the region of Ukhrul the Tangkhuls are predominant tribe and as such they administer the village and the people through their customary laws. The village land belongs to the chief. Here we have analysed the historical aspects of the chieftainship who not only controlled the village and its neighboring areas but also shaped the politics emanating from his decisions. In several cases where the villages were isolated geographically, the chief’s responsibilities increased for maintaining his authority among his villagers properly.

The chief or headman who is known as ‘Awunga’ or ‘Anga’ stand for ‘king’ in Tangkhul and is normally, the founder of the village. He is the first person to venture into the particular place which may be infested with ferocious animals, poisonous reptiles or other dangerous unknown
factors and brave it. He is considered as path blazer. As per the Tangkhul folklore, the chief or **Awunga** kindled the first fire raising the smoke as a sign of establishment of human settlement in that area. Thus, other persons who may desire to settle in that particular village could come and after having sought permission and acknowledged his chieftainship, since he is the first family of the place, could settled down.

The chiefs commanded great respect in the village and he was regarded as the first person who dwelled in that village. In the past, when there was inter-village war and rivalry, the chief always led in the battle field and recognized the braves with awards and honors to the warrior in the form of title or materials. The village Chief was therefore, the religious head, the Chief Judge, the chief administrator and also the chief commander at the time of war and head hunting\(^1\). In fact, the whole village-land belonged to the community living in the village and was in the name of the chief. He held a high status in the village and was respected by all the villagers\(^2\). That is why whenever, there was any land dispute he would represent and swear an oath on behalf of the village before pronouncing the judgement. Thus, the **Awunga** did not acquire his position by chance but it

\(^1\) R.R. Shimray, Op cit p. 53
is he who earned it. Villagers also endorsed his emanating leadership and charisma.

In any social event, occasion or ceremony, the presence of the chief was considered as auspicious and almost indispensable. The traditional administrative activity was headed by the Awunga whose office was hereditary. Later some chiefs were elected through consensus. The Hangva (Panchayat) is the highest and the only court of justice which rendered justice to the people and the Awunga (chief) was the head of these courts.

The villagers obeyed the custom and tradition of the village and in return the chief looked after the welfare of the people. In doing so the chief and his people entered into a social contract. The chief was all-in-all for the villagers and the villages.

Normally, the chief owned a large part of the village land. Its subjects were allowed to use the land with the authorization of the chief of the village. In fact since the village was founded by the village chiefs he had the real authority to avail it at his will. With his consent only the village authorities could take any responsibility of the village. The Kuki practices were different from the Nagas. Among the Kukis the whole land

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3 M. Horam, op cit 1992, p. 74
belonged to the chief and he could sell and mortgage the land at his will. But the Tangkhul chiefs were broad minded and more generous to their subjects and thus shared and treated them equally. With the passage of time the chiefs’ land was converted into public land. The chiefs consent was often implicit but normally had to be made explicit as at that a level of transparency could be made and retained for the fact that the chief had to be above board, and treat his people equally. He was not supposed to keep the people in dark and ignorant. He had to work in consultation with his council of elders and men who mattered.

Ownership of Land

In the beginning of the settlement the village chief of the Tangkhuls had the sole authority to control the village land. It is he who settled first among the villagers and so was considered the strongest leader. He all made the villagers avail land for their cropping. The villagers occupied the land and made terrace fields for cultivation for themselves. Later the land was transferred to his son and his successors and turned into private land. Unlike terrace fields which turned into private land, jhumming areas always remained public land. There are some lands owned by the clan. A descendant of one man if he didn’t divide the land or property and the family household increased that land became clan-land in future. Such as
**Horam** clan, **Huileng** clan, etc have a clan land. Thus the land holding among the Tangkhuls have four types of ownership viz. a) public land b) land owned by clan c) private land and d) chief’s land.

**Chief’s land:**

The chief’s land is controlled by the chief. He owns the land. The land is disposed according to his needs and will. There are some Tangkhul villages where the village land is under the chief’s control, eg. Leishiphung, Ramrei, Island, etc. The Kuki chiefs are known for their ownership of the village land. In such cases the chief had the power to sell or mortgage the land at his will\(^5\).

**Public Land:**

There are some village lands which is collectively owned by the whole village. The chief along with the villagers took collective decision regarding the usage of the village land. The land is managed by the village authority. With the acceptance of village as a whole the land is utilized for various purposes, eg. Jhumming land, woodlands, forests, sacred forests, etc.

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\(^5\) Interview taken from the chief of Khambi village on 24\(^{th}\) February 2010
Clan land:

The land owned by the clan is practiced among the Tangkhul community. The whole of the clan members used the land and resources alike. In Tangkhul dialogue it is known as Singrum, it means using together. This clan land is handed down from generation to generation. In most cases the clan land are rarely sold out.

Private land:

Private land was the land that was cultivated or utilized from the early days by an individual person. These lands were handed down by the forefathers or bought from other persons or bought from the public land such as terrace fields, woodlands, forests, etc.

All types of lands were cultivated for different varieties of crops. Land use for cultivation of crops other than terrace field, is left fallow enough to regenerate its vitality, the lost manure and fertility over a period of not less than ten to fifteen years. Continuous utilization of jhum land for various purposes of cropping decreased its yield rapidly because the forests
are cut down every year for cultivation and with the increase of population deforestation increased\(^6\) due to the alarming fact of felling trees.

**Village Boundaries**

The Tangkhul village boundaries depended on the inhabitants how much they could control and use the land. It is known by the word ‘**Leiha**’ which means the area under control. It depends on the village warriors how severely they could defeat their enemies, annex and control the area. It also depended on the village settlement area. Later, with the increase of population the settlers began to define their respective territory for which each village had elaborate defence arrangements.\(^7\) If they were the first settlers in the surrounding they could occupy more area as their village territory. That is why the older villages in the area have bigger areas of land compared with the later settled villages. There were some villages which could not protect themselves from the enemies and had to pay tributes to their superior villages. The **Lahoopas**, the smaller villages, have to seek shelter from aggression acknowledging the superior allies by paying tributes to the most powerful hill villages in their vicinity.\(^8\) If they could not pay tribute frequently they were compelled to desert their village.

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\(^6\) R. Luikham, op cit p.45  
\(^7\) M. Horam, op cit p. 63  
\(^8\) R.B. Pemberton, op cit p.15
These village lands were absorbed by the neighbouring villages. It led to increase in their village land and production of crops.

Once the people settled down in a certain place a village came to exist. If one village came into existence its area of jurisdiction was marked within certain area-limits. There must be people who could protect their territory. It is believed that the size of the village always decided the strength of its defence system. These territories or areas had their extensions. To recognize their extension both the neighboring village had to acknowledge areas of and under one another. They didn’t demarcate their territory but occupied areas that they could use. Therefore, the villages that were strong and could protect their territory had bigger areas of land against the weak and meek villages who had relatively smaller areas.

In the hills every village has boundary of its own. However, in ancient times it did not have the exact demarcation as we find in the present system. In the beginning, the village boundaries depended on the area of the land used by the villagers. Since there was a fear for the Khanai rai, they couldn’t hold large areas of land for reasons of safety. Later on

9 M. Horam, op cit. p. 4
10 Inter village war among different villages in Tangkhuls
with the increase in population village boundaries were demarcated and were known by natural markers such as hillocks, rivers, streams, or ridges.

Encroachments beyond the village boundaries without taking permission were strictly prohibited and if the people disregarded then they were taken as their enemies and the villagers would fight the encroachers. When the British came to Ukhrul district they were guided by the villagers in their own territory. If they were to cross from one village to the other, the villagers had to guard them till the extent of boundary and the others would take them to their territory\textsuperscript{11}. The Tangkhuls enjoyed freedom and we did not find any folk story or tradition of suppression from the outside forces. Under no circumstance they ever surrendered their freedom. However, they paid tributes to the villagers who defeated them. But it was very rare. They were given free administration to deal with their internal village problems. Tangkhul villages were independent unit that enjoyed sovereignty. Here sovereignty lay with the people and the chief for the fact that the chief was one of them. They didn’t have notion to form a nation state. Therefore, though they conquered other villages territorially, they only left with booty. It was economic necessity rather than territorial aggrandizement. In such raids normally women and natural wealth were

\textsuperscript{11} Information obtained from Yarho, a villager from Hallang on Aug. 12, 2009; 2PM
taken away, and only sometimes, killing of the enemy was done in the stride. When the Britishers came in 1832 they found each village isolated from and hostile to its closest neighbor.\textsuperscript{12} Lot was for the fact the practice of head hunting and aggrandisement of belligerent people’s ego.

‘It was this hostility between village and village, as well as fear of any other known or unknown enemy, which gave a village its peculiar situation. The village were perched on a hilltop to keep vigil on the incoming enemies\textsuperscript{13}. Every village was headed by a chief. Village did not come to exist suddenly. It evolved through a gradual growth-path with the increase in population. There were inter village wars and the villages that couldn’t defend themselves from the bigger villages had to shift to the safer areas. Champhung village migrated to the Phungyar block, which was once in the Paosaitrung fifteen miles west of Ukhrul. The frequent fights among the villages sowed the seeds of hatred among the people. This led to fight from generation to generation. Example: Once there was a village named Champhung in the Paosaitrung, presently in Halang village, but the people couldn’t defend themselves from the Halang village-warriors therefore, they left the place and migrated to the present Champhung

\textsuperscript{12} M. Horam, op cit. p. 61
\textsuperscript{13} M. Horam, op cit. p. 45
village in the west of Ukhrul. The villagers were paddy cultivators therefore, they searched for the wet lands where there was plenty of water.

**Village site**

During the course of our field work we saw the sites of the many villages on the high hills. Almost most of the Tangkhul villages are at the summit of a hill or on the ridge of a high sloping range which provided a commanding view over the surrounding areas. It was because of this fact that the villages in the Tangkhul areas were found mostly on the hilltop considering the security of the village from their enemies. The other important criteria were sources of plenty of water. A source of water was considered by them as the basic need for survival. Therefore, the forefathers of the Tangkhul community used to select a place (site) having abundant water source. It also used to be a place which could easily be protected from the enemy. Thus every Tangkhul village is always located on the crest of a hillock rather than on the river bank or plain areas within the village land\(^\text{14}\). We were informed by the chiefs that it was due to the constant war among the villages that safety was given the first preference for choosing the site of village. The village was well protected by the thick

\(^{14}\) N. Lokendra Singh, *The land used system in Manipur Hills*, Edited by M.L. Gupta, Rajesh Publications 2004, New Delhi, p. 40
forest or the deep gorge where men couldn’t climb or go through. Huge trees and bamboo grooves guarded the village\textsuperscript{15}. There was a deep curved way out known as \textbf{Vankhur}\textsuperscript{16} in the village that is covered by big trees. When the enemies attacked them they used these routes for safety sake.

These show that the Tangkhuls took precautions for any eventuality. The big trees also protected them from the fire as below the big tree it was difficult to burn the bushes due to unavailability of dry twigs. Since the villages were in forests or surrounded by it there was fresh air which we believe created a healthy ecology. Thus the villagers were also strong and healthy.

The distance between the villages differed from each other. Some were near while the others were very far from the centre. The number of houses in Tangkhul villages varied from twenty households to one thousand or sometimes even more. Marangphung village in Chingai has about twenty to thirty households and Hunphun the present Ukhrul has more than one thousand households. During our visit we found that each clan occupied a particular area in the village known as Tang (colony) in Tangkhul dialect. The division of village into Tang or ward is based on

\textsuperscript{15} Y.L. Roland Shimmi, op cit p. 14

\textsuperscript{16} Deep curve outlet in the forest from the enemies. It is found in some of the villages of Tangkhul.
geographical territory. Bigger villages have more Tangs. The name of Tang usually takes after the name of a particular clan that dominates the Tang. If the locality is dominated by the Awunga and his clan, it is called as Awungtang. In this way, it is clearly demarcated among themselves and between the clans in the village itself. Two or more clans constituted a village, usually. Each clan occupied a definite area within the village which was divided into a number of ‘khels’ or units, one clan constituting one ‘khel. The’ boundary of each khel was clearly marked out with walls and gates separating one khel from the other. In fact it appears that the khels were like villages within a village. The gates of each khel was closed at night. The entire village was normally surrounded by a strong wall with huge and well guarded gates. All members of a clan were expected to live within their own khel but one could reside in another with due permission from it, but this was seldom done. To cite an example one can take the Phungcham village, where we can see being neatly divided into seven khels of the seven clans which go to form it. On entering the village’ we did not find the gate as it no more exists but we came to the ‘khel’ of Haramnao; to its immediate right was the khel occupied by Longleng nao. Then to the left of the first khel is the khel occupied by the Phereinao clan. Still further to the left live the Vashimnao clan and the Hongchuinao clan,

17 Sothing W.A. Shimray, op cit p. 60
then comes the khel of the Zimiknao clan and at the end is situated the khel of the Yangya clan. During the course of our visit to the village for interviewing some village elders we found most of the naga villages though maintaining the khel system today do not have any walls or gates to separate them. However, they have a close affinity and co-operation among themselves and they are always united to face any kind of eventuality. Originally, a particular khel was meant to accommodate a particular clan only but there is not and has never been much rigidity about the same, so that any member of a village may reside in any of the khels of the village. V. Venkata Rao has suggested that the term has a wider meaning than is usually attributed to it. Khels among Tangkhul nagas is not to be understood in terms of ‘guilds’ but fraternities. These are administrative units with a definite area of their own.

There are some villages even today that consist of only one clan and there are also some villages that consist of many clans. The different clans form the village. Every clan has its own Pipa\(^\text{18}\) who is the eldest and the head of the clan. He became the representative of the clan in the village and became the member of the house of hangva (Panchayat) in which all the village authority and the villagers resided in the village. There is co-

\(^{18}\) The eldest amongst the descendant of the eldest clan is known as Pipa
existence and cooperation extended to each other. The clan chief looked after the welfare of the clan members.

Once again when we considered the tribes and their villages in the adjoining areas of the Tangkhuls we found great similarities in the broad parameters which constituted a village with clans and their khels. As in the Phungcham village of Tangkhuls in Kohima village the Angamis lived. Their territory was divided on the similar lines of khels and clans: Linyii, suokhrie, Belho, Solo, Dzucichunuo, Kesiiezhe, Mechieso etc. in yet another village, Khonoma, clans like Savino, Hiekha, Dolie, Zinii, Whiso, Yalie, Punyii lived in organized khels. Similarly, in the Aos we were informed that they also had seven clans: Pongenr, Yimsungr, Aotang, Jamir/Chamir, Aiyir, Longtangr, etc. In the Changi village of the Aos we found another set of eight clans: Lungachari, Ungtsri, Metamsangba, Lonsanglari, Amri, Changkiri, Alingri, Metsiri etc. In the same way in the old Angami village yet another set of clans lived: They are the Lhisema, the Rhiepfuma, Tsierama, Hurtsuma, Tsutonoma, Dapfutuma, and Pfuchatsuma. During our visit to these areas we were told that usually an individual lived and died in the khel in which his ancestor—forefathers had lived and died before him but he was free to go to another khel and settle down if he so desired. One could change ones khel but permission had to
be taken from the respective chiefs. M. Horam in his Naga Polity writes
“… the clan is a friend indeed in times of need. If someone’s house is burnt
down, the members of his clan would not just stand there looking
sympathetic. They would set about with one accord to build a new one for
him. If his harvests have been poor, instead of shrugs, he is given grains for
family. If a theft occurred in his house, his entire clan would worry and try
to hunt out the thief. Thus it is his clan that would help him in every
distress not only during his life time but also in the event of his death. It
would look after and even adopt his children if that is the best thing in the
circumstances.” It thus provided security to its members for all times to
come. Adopted children automatically became clan members of the
adopting clan. Although the village may be regarded as the unit of the
religious and political sides of the life of the people of the Ukhrul and its
adjoining areas, the real unit of the social life was and is still the clan. It
has been remarked by J.H.Hutton” that so distinct is the clan from the
village that it forms a village in itself, often fortified within the village
inside its own boundaries and not frequently at variance almost amounting
to war with other clans in the same village.” So what emerges here is the
fact that a clan was a part of khel and khel was a part of the land in the
village which gradually evolved as inseperable units normally and cleared
the path for establishing powerful principalities from the status of large villages. This was the trend followed by the Meiteis in the valley also.

Instances of villages without defence arrangements were rare and since villages were in alliances with their powerful allies so very strong messages were regularly sent to the foes about the preparedness for war. Similarly, belligerent activities between villages being rare, any village powerful enough in itself and surrounded by friendly villages would not worry about defences.

The village was well protected and the enemies could hardly enter the interior village. Strangers coming to the village put their head on the soil near the village gate to prevent themselves from disease and bring acceptability to the law of the land. Incidentally If fowl and dog gave birth to young ones then strangers were not allowed to enter in the house. Any outsider coming to the village was though given hospitality, they too were cross checked and the visitor’s intention were to be made clear.

A village may have any number of households and today the number may vary from as few as ten to a thousand or more. The largest village among the Tangkhuls is Hungphun (Ukhrul) which has about 800 households, it has been opined by the chiefs that among the Tangkhuls the number of villages is more but the number of households in each village is
less. This shows the outgoing nature and broad mindedness of the Tangkhuls in the region. An element of tolerance is also inherently displayed in allowing new villages to be established as there would be division of land between the parent village and the new ones.

**Law of inheritance**

Like most of the monarchical system, the chief in Tangkhul villages followed the pattern of hereditary lineage which traces on male line. Normally, the eldest Naga son inherited chieftainship which was strictly based on customary law. He not only inherited the chieftainship but also had the lion share of the properties of a family. However, if the right heir happened to be incapable or had mental and physical infirmities chieftainship could go to his brother. In case of the chief having no son, the nearest kin of his clan would inherit his chieftainship. In case of death of the chief, the chieftainship went to his eldest surviving son or if he had no son, to his next brother and so on\(^1^9\). But the Tangkhul traditions never permitted the women to inherit the chieftainship or the property of the father. However, no other qualification is specified to be the head or chief of the village. In recent years, the wave of democracy pervades even in Tangkhul political system leading to introduction of elected head, known by different nomenclature *viz*, chairman, Acting headman etc. by and large.

\(^{19}\) M. Horam, *op cit* p. 50
the prestige and image of the chief has dwindled. Therefore, in order to uphold and preserve the lofty position of the chief of the Tangkhul, The Tangkhul Naga Long has enshrined some provisions approved in the Long Assembly on the 9th December, 1997 which states, “The chieftainship cannot be sold and bought”. This particular provision intends to restore the past glory of the chief to some extent.

According to Tangkhul laws of inheritance the chieftainship, ipso facto, went to the eldest son. The eldest son in the family prepared himself to shoulder much of the responsibility of the family after the death of his father\(^20\). However, there are some villages where the chieftainship was given to the younger son. The reason could be the refusal of the eldest son to take the burden of the chief. As all the responsibility was shouldered by the younger brother, the chieftainship became hereditary by the younger brothers’ generation. Later the elder descendent claimed the chieftainship but it could not be returned easily as the crown of chief was taken under several processes of religious rites and sacrifices. Thus, there were several problems which arose in many villages over the issues of chieftainship, some claiming in their own rights, or under the provisions of the newly enacted laws.

\(^{20}\) M. Horam, op cit p. 45
**Tarung (Genna Post)**

Genna post is a trunk of a tree which is Y-shaped. It is chosen from among the trees in the jungle. Normal practice is that the people searching for the tree would mark on the foot of the tree and go home. ‘Two or three of them would then listen to dream as to the name of genna post’\(^{21}\). Accordingly, the genna post was given the name as *Amei, Achui, Aleng* and *Achei.* These terms mean

The genna posts are different from one another. It is also separated as man and woman and is garlanded with shawls. If it is men they will tie the foot of the tree (genna post) with *Haora* shawl and if it is woman with *Changkhom* shawl. After a few days the people would go and bring the Genna Post. All men folk of the village would participate in the ritual while bringing home the genna post. It was in the past and is even today difficult to bring home the whole tree trunk at once from the jungle. So the villagers took part in dragging the tree. They brought the stones and the tree trunks from the jungle and when they brought the Genna post every villager enjoyed wine and rice beer provided by the owner.

\(^{21}\) R.R. Shimray, op cit p.110
Erection of genna post was performed by the chief and the eldest of the clan. The function was made known to all the villagers by the oldest and the eldest of the clan. On the day of bringing the genna post the owner would fast and not take food, accept wine and/or meat till the genna post arrived the destination. The stone or trunk of a tree was erected to display the wealth and power of the chief, nobles and well-to-do families. On the day of erection, the son was carried on back and similar holes on the ear were made and after that they put thatch stick inside the hole. Man made holes at the lower part of the ear while women at the upper part. This was the practice of the Tangkhuls from the ancient days. It was erected with great fanfare and rituals in front of the house or in some prominent sites of the village. (See fig. 12 of Genna post).
Fig. 13: Showing Tarung (genna post)

Erecting genna post was a practice not only among the Tangkhuls but also among the other Nagas. Some people erected stone megaliths in place of wood. We see in the Makhel megalithic stones a place of dispersal of all the Nagas. Stones being imperishable have remained till today. As wooden material is perishable, most of the Tangkhul wooden genna posts have perished. Only in some villages of Tangkhuls we find these wooden genna posts.
Social life

Family is the most important institution of social system in the Tangkhul society. It is the social unit of the society, or for that matter, of the village. These have normally patrilineal and patriarchal traits. The family consists of father, wife and their children. Father is the head and the protector of the family. He, represents his family in the clan meetings and in courts. In the event of the death of the father the eldest son succeeds. The succession differs among the sub-tribe of the Nagas. Among the Tangkhuls as well as the Aos, the eldest get the parental house whereas among the Angami Nagas the elder forfeits this in favour of his youngest brother. The eldest son has the responsibility to shoulder the burden of the family problems and concerns. Thus, the eldest inherit the properties of the household. He also shares among his brothers where he retains a lion’s share.

The Tangkhul custom primarily rejects the inheritance of father’s property by women. They do not practice dowry system like the other communities. However, the presents are given in marriage to the girls.

23 Gangnumei Kabui. Tribal profile of Manipur centre for Tribal Studies Manipur University Canchipur, Imphal, p.51
24 M. Horam, op cit p. 45
which are widely prevalent among the Tangkhuls. Women work from
dawn to dusk. They looked after the household chores and worked in the
fields. They played an important role in running the family. They are
looked upon with respect and they have the liberty as men in many cases at
the home front.

The Tangkhuls desired large families in the past. The wife gave
birth to many children, as many as she could. Birth of a son was welcome
but daughter was also given the same importance. There was equality
between men and women. But in some cases the women were not allowed
as it is even today to take part as men in the discussions of village matters.
They were also not allowed to participate in the village councils. But in the
family matters and rituals women’s presence was indispensable. They
played an important role in shaping and moulding their society.

The Tangkhuls living in Ukhrul and adjoining areas have the same
culture and ways of life. *Their is an open society. They are egalitarian in
nature*. The Tangkhul’s have rural society and they even fought with each
other, till very recently. The coming of the British in Manipur brought a
drastic change in their life styles. We find every village has its own
language. No doubt the language is different from one village to another. It

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25 A.S.W. Shimray, *op cit* p. 57
is due to the constant hunting of human head that they deliberately changed their language to maintain certain secrecy. It is said that they thought of their safety to the most and therefore, took measures in which their enemy could not speak or understand their dialects. It was a defence strategy. The closeness of tribes to each other, we understand, can be seen in their dialects. The Naga tribes and subtribes have many common traits also resemble each other to a great extent. The Semas and the Tangkhuls have an affinity of language, clothes, folk-songs and marriage-customs. Again the Tangkhuls and the Angamis have similar methods of cultivation, terrace cultivation and house building. The Semas and the Angamis have an affinity of language, origin and social customs specially on questions of inheritance, adoption, taking of oaths etc. The Chinjaroi Tangkhuls speak the same dialect as the Angamis and the Chakesangs. These two were once one group but recently in search of a separate identity have emerged as two distinct Naga groups. Also we find that the tattooing system and its accompanying beliefs are the same among the Aos, Tangkhuls, Semas, Rengmas and Sangtams. Yet again the Sangtams and the Aos are similar to the Konyaks in many ways. So ultimately we come to this conclusion that all these people in the Ukhrul and its adjoining areas have had a common base in the past and its different ramifications become overt often. Any close appreciation will always reveal similar traits. Our research data has
also revealed very close similarities between the Tangkhuls and the Meiteis on one hand and on the other with the Aos. It appears that if the politics of retaining individual identities is kept aside for a while then all these groups would appear as belonging to a monolithic unit.

The Tangkhul villages even today remain isolated from one another. But the villagers did have close ties among themselves and had a concern for each other which has been deeply reflected in their culture. In the wars between two or more tribes one who brought more human heads was regarded with great honour in the society, as it proved their prowess. Victory over their enemies was followed by merry making. Every event of war was narrated through folk song during the celebrations of their victory. We find their social history interesting which carries the impression of their joyous merry making practices. Before they went to the public gathering they looked at their faces in water which they placed in a wooden plate and used it as mirror.

The Tangkhul society enjoys different kinds of festivals and games such as **Luira phanit** (seed sowing festival), **Yarra phanit, Mangkhap** (post trans-plantation festival) **Dhareo phanit** (pre- harvest festivals) **Chumpha phanit** (festivals of thanks giving). Apart from these festivals they have some events on occasion of festivals like **Tarung Kashun.**
this festival the trunk of a tree or stone is erected in front of a house. Strict observance of the custom, genna tradition and festivals are part and parcel of their cultural life and in every festival, there followed the offering to the deities of different types according to their beliefs\(^{26}\). Thus they have different kinds of festivals which bring them together at one common platform and they enjoy to their hearts content. In most of the festivals the Tangkhuls dance and sing songs about various happenings in their life.

**Administration**

Administering the villagers and their land was not a difficult task in the Ukhrul region because Self government was well pronounced since the ancient times among the Tangkhuls. The chief was the head of administration. His words and decisions were to be taken seriously and observed. There was no authority to control him except the village council of elders who normally gave advice but it was not always binding on him to accept. The villages were independent from each other. At some point of time in their historical evolution they evolved machinery for self governance through the village council consisting of a chief (Khullakpa).

\(^{26}\) P. Peter, op cit p. 63.
and his council of elders. The word ‘**khullakpa**’ has Vedic connotation, which means the protector of the Kula or the **Khula**.

The village councils differ from village to village. It depends on the number of the clan that exists in the village. The members of the council are mostly seniors’ and elders from different clans. Theoretically, the head of the clan is the permanent member of the village council. The **Awunga** is assisted by the representatives of each clan in the village called **Hangva**. The house of representative is known as **Hangashim**. Entire village matters are discussed in the **Hangashim** pertaining to legislative, judiciary and executive. All these powers were vested with the king. Justice was enforced and realized at the earliest possible. All the major issues such as **Shangzansa kasang** (clan membership) **Ngala kapang** (divorce), any dispute on land ownership etc. were to be reported to the **Awunga** or **Hangva**. The village couldn’t carry out their work without the concern and knowledge of the Chief (Awunga) and the village **Hangva**. The administration and village affairs were maintained by all the villagers. It must also be noted that the village affairs were not only the responsibility of Awunga and Hangva but also of all the people of the village. To safeguard the village all the males who could handle spears had to take part.

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27 Sothing W.A. Shimray, op cit p. 61  
28 Dr. Khashim Ruivah. Social changes among the Nagas, p. 149  
29 Sothing W.A. Shimray, op cit p.62
in the defence of their village. Peace and prosperity of any village depended on the ability of the village to keep enemies and attackers at bay.30

The villagers and the chiefs are inseparable. They had a cordial relationship. They, together, protected their villages and administered the affairs of the village. Though the chief was considered as their leader there was unanimous decision in the administration of the village. Therefore, we can maintain that they had democratic form of administration.

The village council performed certain administrative functions in areas like water supply, construction of village footpath guarding their village, etc. though the specific work allotments were not defined well officially, their day to day allotments were given when they sat together. They didn’t neglect their duties if they were given any charge and their cooperation with the chief always showed their sincerity.

**Law of the land**

The main source of law emerged from social customs, public opinions, orders of the chief, religious practices etc. The social custom which has its genesis from the beginning of its existence plays a very

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30 M.Horam, op cit. p.81
important role in the Tangkhul society. It was unwritten, but the custom that was followed could not be violated as it was considered sacred. The breach of such tradition was and is considered a desecration of social norms as such committing a sin. The commitment of such sin is feared more for supernatural intervention than the punishment meted by the society. Thus they feared to violate the social customs as according to their belief the wrath of the supernatural would fall on those who had defied the social custom. The tradition bound society could not go against the belief system. The Tangkhul society as well as individuals therein feared any violation of their law.

The Tangkhul society had high regards for public opinion. The public opinions played an important role in the decision making of any problem that arose within the village and even outside. The decision was taken by the chief after he had heard the people. Often the public opinion became important force for the source of law for the future generations. The traditions, taboos, custom etc. were also sanctified through public opinions.

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31 Sothing W.A. Shimray, op cit. p.62
32 Keithellakpam Indramani Singh, Political and Economic Changes in the hill areas of Manipur, p. 24
Religion has a special place in human life which cannot be avoided or overlooked. The Tangkhuls believed in the Nature Gods before the accepted Christianity. They believed that the wrath of god fall on those who die unnatural deaths such as getting drowned in the water, falling from a tree, attacked by a tiger, or commit suicide. *What gives validity to these unwritten laws is the vague fear that something may happen if the traditions are broken. Something, or some meanings were always attributed to terrible deaths of a tribesman.*

They had faith in the supernatural power and were afraid of curses. Therefore, to please their god the deceased’s properties were destroyed and the survivors were driven to jungle in the hope that it would avert all possible source of danger. The compliance to the rules and regulations connected with the name of deity was made compulsory as that of a law which generally none dared to disobey. The violators are known by the word ‘**Sharra**’

Which means ‘do not’ or ‘not to commit’ any violation of established rules. It was used only when serious matters arose. The common people allowed ‘the earth and the heaven’ judge when the case was beyond their understanding or hands.

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33 Y.L. Roland Shimmi, op cit p. 124
34 Stephen Angkang., Hau (Tangkhul) customary law, Published by DHARCRO 1999. P.1
Tangkhul Naga society as found in its villages was a compact and well-Knit society where rigid customs and disciplines were observed. No one dared to violate the customs as it was the greatest crime and the violators were given heavy punishment. The land was not only to be respected but also to be feared. As the village was an independent unit, the customary laws were supreme and dispensation of punishment was quick\textsuperscript{35}. Without any discrepancies and impartialities justice was enforced and given. Citizens were all equal before law.

In the administration of justice importance is attached to the establishment of guilt through evidence. Among the Tangkhuls there are many forms of oaths. To deliver justice to the people at different stages of references were made to the oaths taken. The most common custom among the Tangkhuls to decide the case was through \textbf{Ngalei Khamakei} (biting of soil), Tara kazang (Submersion in the water) and through duels.

If both the parties tried to plead their rights and couldn’t decide who was right or wrong the matter was decided through oath. Ngalei Khamakei (biting of soil) oath was common in any boundary dispute. They arbitrators would go to the disputed land and both the parties will bite the soil that was dug out from the disputed land. The offender would die first, they believed

\textsuperscript{35} R.R. Shimray, op cit p.44
that Ngalei Khamke ‘never leaves the offender from being punished by their Creator. Hence, they dared not to take the oath unless they were sure of themselves about the matter. Many number of cases have been decided through this method since the early times and still, it is practiced by the Tangkhul union apex judicial courts.

Another form to decide a case was through water submersion. The two parties were taken to the river or a lake which they thought had enough water where body can be submerged in water. It is common among the Tangkhuls. In this form both the parties had to submerge themselves in water and the person/persons who could stay longer in the water, won the case. They believed that the offender will not be able to stay in the water for long as the almighty is against the wrong doer. This form of ordeal of deciding cases is still prevalent and it is accepted by the Tangkhuls. This is considered as decisive justice or natural justice.

The justice was dispensed by the chief with the help of councilors. If any case arose within the village, the chief had to call both the parties and try to solve by examining the nature of the case. If both the parties had claimed in their own rights and the case couldn’t be decided amicably, oaths were taken as mentioned above. Thus the Tangkhuls were afraid of
taking the oath as they believed that the curse of their god was severe and that it may fall on generation after generation. The Tangkhuls believed in their Gods and worshiped them. It was this God fearing quality and their faithfulness and obedience to the revelations’ of God through natural omens that made Tangkhul Nagas good citizens of the old village states.36

The cases of murders were settled through imposition of fines of buffaloes or by killing the members of the family or clan. The quarrel often led to inter village feuds and in some cases the chiefs declared war if it was from villages other than their own. The chiefs punished the murderer by overrunning the village.

One interesting case on record is that a man named Harkhonla from Marem village murdered one person from Kalhang village. These two villages were neighbours. So they decided to solve the problem with the help of their neighbouring villages but they could not come to a solution. Therefore, the neighbouring villages come to two different camps beside each other. They fought the war and the Marem villagers came out victorious37. Thus, there were certain cases which could not be solved through mutual understanding and so war was the only solution.

36 R.R.Shimray, op cit p. 230
37 Interview taken from HI. Wungmaling ,the chief of Halang village on 26th June 2009.