Chapter- I

FOLK DANCES OF THE THADOU-KUKI

Folk dance can be an art, ritual or recreation. It goes beyond the functional purposes of the movements used in work or athletics in order to express emotions, moods or ideas; tell a story; serve religious, political, economic, or social needs; or simply be an experience that is pleasurable, exciting, or aesthetically valuable. Besides giving physical pleasure, dancing can have psychological effects. Feelings and ideas can be expressed and communicated; sharing rhythms and movements can make a group feel unified. Dances like *Sagol Kengkhai*, *Lholhun Lam*, *Gosem Lam* express emotion, polity and economy of their society. Whereas, dances such as *Khongchoi Lam* and *Vannoi Lam* expresses their religious belief. In some societies, dancing often leads to trance or other altered states of consciousness. Spirits can interpret these states as signaling possession; they may be sought as a means to emotional release, or to heal others physically or emotionally. In
contemporary field of folk dance therapy developed as a means to help people express themselves and relate to others.

The Thadou-Kuki Folk dances are well defined and are being passed from generation to generation. Their dances in its existence are an integral part of the community activities. Individuals learn the dances as they grow up in the society. Each dance is a living form that changes over time. Their folk dances existed as an integral part of community life. The dances sometimes linked to specific occasions and sometimes associated with specific groups of people; for example, the “Suhta Lam”, (bamboo dance) which dance is generally performed near the “Som Buh” (bachelor’s dormitory)- in which all the young boys of the village sleep together at night. The nature of hostility and practice of the tribal raids necessitated the existence of this organization, so that in time of emergency the services of all the able-bodied men might be available at short notice. They have to offer their free and compulsory services to the village. Although the main purpose of this organization is to defend the village from external dangers, in
times of peace, they render every possible service to the village community whenever required. Moreover, it is an organization for recreation of young boys. In the “Som Buh” younger boys are taught all sorts of things and they were assigned various jobs and other chores.”¹ They also learn social customs and manners. It serves as an institution of learning, discipline and other essential characters necessary for a man in future life. In some dances, however participation is limited by all, sex, skill, or status.

The various dances discussed in this chapter are traditionally performed on particular occasions or seasons and revolves around their daily task like, sowing, reaping or harvesting of crops, pounding of rice, success in hunts. “There are dances for all seasons and festivals when man and women dance for the sheer joy or pleasure of dancing to celebrate spring, autumn and success in life, viz: “Chon”, “Chang Ai”, “Sa Ai”, “Lom Sel-neh”, etc. Their folk dances are mostly associated with festival, and their performance imparts the desired festival-atmosphere to the celebrated festivals. It is this
pulsating togetherness that they wish to enjoy deeply. “Their folk dances can be classified according to the character of particular performance of the dances. They may briefly be mentioned as hereunder:


2. Ritual dances : Sielpanglap lam, Vannoilam, Lampisuh, Khongchoilam, Khulkon Lam, Tolpi Lap Lam, Salu Lap Lam.

3. Game/Martial art dances : Boncholam, Seltonim, Jangte lam

4. Dances of the Youth : Suhta lam, Vakol Lam, Khu-Sonte Lam.”

The Thadou-Kuki Folk dances are performed on the occasions of their annual festivals as well as the events of a person’s life cycle, which are marked by dancing. Harvest Festivals,
celebrated at the end of the harvest of *Kharif crop* such as millet, maze, paddy etc. usually mark by lavish feasts. Among the oldest known festivals, harvest feasts have existed for thousands of years. Their offered the year’s first ripe grains to the gods in thanks for the crops that would sustain their communities for the coming years. Their folk dances also accompany the celebrations of special ceremony like *Chang Ai*³. This festival of the Thadou-Kuki speaks volumes of the important part played by the women of the family and indicated the nature of division of labor in their society.

“The *Seltol del, Boncho* and *Lholhun* dances are performed on the third occasion, when the person is said to have assured herself/himself a safe entrance and especially selected place at “*Mithikho*” (dead people’s abode). On the day of the harvest, the man who performs ‘*Chang Ai*’, his ‘*Becha*’⁴, the Chief and his Council of Ministers formally announce to the effect that day so and so would harvest his field. So, every able-bodied person in the village is to take part in it. Along with this announcement, they carry the wine prepared by the performer
to the field together with the special wine called ‘Phuol-Zu’, (which means the wine for the field). The ‘Becha’ of the performer contributes this wine. On their arrival, the village priest does his propitiations of ‘Zu’ called ‘Zuphit’, signifying inauguration of a rich harvesting ceremony. This is called ‘Changlha kouna zuphit’. After this, the wine brought with them is distributed for drinks, after which, the actual harvesting begins. On the completion, they collect the paddy meticulously and perform dances called ‘Sagol Kengkhai’, ‘Pheiphit lam’ and ‘Saipi Khup Suh’, for three times”.

Those who have done the Sha-Ai three times perform ‘Chon’. Seven Mithun are to be killed and everything else must be in multiples of seven. Even the songs, dances and genealogical trees had to be repeated seven times. Even after the death of such persons who performed Chon the corpse had to be carried around in, Shang-Lai (a litter constructed with a bamboos bound together to a kind of make-shift platform on which the deceased could be laid) for seven times and everything pertaining to burial rites had to be done seven times.
Thus, the performance of the Chon gave the soul of that person a paramount seat in Mithikho and ensured eternal happiness.

“Sagol KengKhai is dance by forming a line intermixing both men and women who move in a circle and dangle their knees at a time slightly and strengthen them again as they move their bodies sidewise in wave. As the circle is completed two selected men and women dance in the middle, which is an animal-impersonation of a wild Boar marching through the jungle. As they dance a song is sang that runs as:

*Ka Kho Khai Ta Ding e,*

*Janggol Sabang Ka Kho Khai Ta Ding e*

*Ka Kho Khai Ta Ding e,*

*Golsa Nubang Ka Kho Khai Ta Ding e,*

*Kajem e mang lou lai je,*

*Gol Sanu Bang Kajem Mang Lou Laije.*

Free Translation:

*Let us all dangle our knees gracefully*

*Like a wild Boer let us all dangle our knees gracefully,*

*Let us all dangle our knees gracefully,*
Like the mother of a wild Boer let, us all dangle our knee

My tinge haven’t fade,

Like the mother of a wild Boer let, us all dangle our knees.

**Saipi KhupSuh Lam** in which men and women interlocked themselves forming a line moving sidewise and gracefully bend their knees slightly and strengthen them again as they move in circle as they dance a song is sang that runs as:

**Shet Lei Chunga Min Len Pen,**

**Asa Mingthang Janggui Sai,**

**Sai KhupSuh ThotaoTe,**

**Saipi KhupSuh ThotaoTe,**

**Toun Na Pupa Nam Chon Na,**

**Man Sah Pout e Namtin Phunggol.**

Free Translation:

You are the most famous in this completely wide world,

You are the most famous among the wild elephant,

Let us all dance as the wild elephant do,
Dance like the wild elephant dance,
Dance like our ancestor dance,
Moreover, let us not be way lead from our ancestors culture.

This dancing spree ends with a sound of ‘Li, Li, Li, Li’, and ‘Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha’. Mainly the elders of the village perform the dance. While they dance, the young boys build one ‘litter’ or palanquin. At the time of dancing, a song is sung in accompaniment with an instrument called ‘Pheiphit’

*Lamkol* (Plate 1) which is the most commonest form of dance, and the dance performed by a set of two to four couple, facing each other. The men spread their hands and waves sidewise bending their knees and strengthen them continuously while the women resting their hands on their hips bend their knees and move together with their male counterpart. The song sang in this dance differ in accordance with the occasion or varied from region to region. Whereas the commonest and most popular song sang in this dance is sang as follow:
Chunga Pamsol Kaheije

Noija Neogol Dam Tui Chan KaLonge,

Dam Tui Chan Kalong Na Laije,

Kihot No Changna Nou Bang,

Kihot No Somsel Mang Lunglen,

Kihot No Chahtoi Nou Bang,

Kihot No Setlei Tollai Ja.

Free Translation:

Man: I am building a castle high above,

Woman: I am flowing like a stream down below,

Chorus: we all flows like a cold stream below,

Dance like a flattering plants,

Dance like a wild mithun,

Dance like a flattering teak,

Dance to this lively world.

Lamkol is usually dance of the elders of the society which are performed during the village carnivals like Chang Ai,

Sa Ai, Lomsel neh, Kut, Hun, Chon, etc. With nightfall, they lit up a bon-fire in the courtyard of the chief or to the person who
performed the ceremony and soon the villagers were sited in circle. Then the selected man and woman started to dance in the middle with alternate couple dancing one after another or sometime this dance is performed by a set of two or more couple who dance alternately. They dance throughout the night while dancing a homemade beer prepare especially for the occasion were continuously serve by the Tollai Pao (volunteer commander). The assignment for the Tollai Pao in this special occasion is to decide and select who are to dance and vigil around to keep the festive vitality at its shrill and disciplined the villagers.

_Pheiphit dance_ is accompanied by playing a musical instrument made of small bamboo pipes, one end of which is cut open at the mouth. There are several sizes of it and the different size of the slantingly cut mouth produce different sounds to harmonize with various notations of the songs. Each man holds a tube and blows into it at regular intervals to harmonize with the sympathetic note played by another man. Then they form long ways-set partners facing each other in
parallel lines of men and women bend their knees slightly and straighten them again as they move their bodies sidewise in waves in accordance with the harmonize notes played from the tubes. Then the performer of the festival is carried on the palanquin from the field to his house. As they march homewards, the whole gangs harmonize their pace with a rhythmic quartet called ‘Heijam Sap’ all through the village.

*Saipi Khupsuh, Sagol Kengkhai* and *Pheiphit* dances are danced three time each while the feast is being prepared, but *zu* (wine) is being served all this time on the ceremonial occasion of ‘*Sa Ai*’ performed by a man who have killed different kinds of wild and dangerous animals in the hunt. He must have killed a *humpi* (tiger), *muvinlai* (an eagle), *vompi* (a wild bear), *thoche* (a kind of squirrel) and *vengke* (wild fowl). These dances are meant for general participation, they tend to contain simple movements composed of short phrases or patterns that are repeated many times. The dance suggestively depicts the aspects of human life in which one has to struggle hard to attain a peaceful, prosperous and happy life. Whereas,
‘Boncho lam’ is performed by the able male members of the one who did the Chang Ai ceremony. The selected male members start brandishing their sword stamp vigorously and execute spectacular leaps, then their leader shouted out loud, saying:

*Kathang e Kathang e,*

*Chung leh Noijah keima loijang Kathang e,*

*Kapen nin Kapa in loijang eicho e.*

*Kathang e Kathang e,Takchapa Kuki chapa Kathang e.*

**Free Translation:**

*I am victorious and my victory spread far and wide, my fame spread high above the sky and down through the core of the earth; my beloved father held his head with pride the day I was born. I’m victorious that I am the descendants of the great Thadou-Kuki clan.*

*“Boncho”* dance movements involve more parts of the body, and men and women movements are usually different: men may stamp vigorously and execute spectacular leaps while women’s styles are generally less energetic, calling for graceful movement, with smaller steps.
Siel Pang Lap dance is performed after the killing of the Mithun at the time of ‘Chang-Ai’ and ‘Seil-Ai’. The village priest having observed all the formalities and the ceremonial rites, the Mithun is killed. Before the meat is dressed for cooking, all the able-bodied married male persons form a circle joining their hands through the arms and over their shoulders. As they do so they start singing, a song called ‘Seil Pang Lap La’, which is symbolical for the farewell of the soul of the Mithun. The song runs as follows:

Siel Lo Mang

Sah Le LhangTeng

Siel Lo Mange,

Siel Lo Mange,

Khovai Pheilam Siel Kalo Leh,

Siel Lo Mange

Siel Pang Lamme,

Thangbon Sonlou,

Siel Pang Lamme.
Siel Pang LapuTe,
Kajo Jangsom Siel Kalo Le,
Siel Pang Lamme.

Free Translation:

Mithun, you are dignified, You are already well known far and wide, Mithun, you are indeed famous. Mithun you are dignified, despite all humiliation, Mithun, you are indeed dignified. Mithun, you are magnificent even in death, Irrespective of fame and in fame, everyone dance in praise of thy greatness. Let us all dance beside the Mithun, the Mithun of my father which I have slain, Come, let us all dance to commensurate its magnificence.

While they sing the song, they bend their knees slightly and straighten them again as they move their bodies sidewise in waves. This is symbolical for the farewell of the soul of the Mithun. The Mithun, which was propitiated by the village priest, and fully yielded for the feast is finally brought forth to the courtyard of the one who performed Sa Ai, Chang Ai, Chon ceremony. Then the young and able men who gathered for the
ceremony tide **Sel Khou** (a rope especially mean to tide the Mithun) round the neck of the Mithun on both side. Then the Mithun is pull with all their might on one side and then pull over the other side and chanted **Li, Li, Li, Li, Li And Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha**. This movement of the able young men tug of war with Mithun in uniform steps is called **Seltol Nim**. Right after the **Seltol Nim** dance is performed the young men of the village wrestler with the Mithun known as **Sel But**. They dance and sing throughout the night moving in circle around the ‘**Lhumpi**’ (bonfire) and end the dance with a sound, ‘**Li, Li, Li, Li, Li**’ and ‘**Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha**’.

**Khongchoi lam** is performed on the day of the ‘**Khongchoi**’ ceremony that concerns the religious rites involving young boys and girls directly in competition with the evil spirit, called ‘**Thilha**’, in order to earn fame for the ‘**Lom**’ or young organization of the village, which combines with a sense of festivity. On the day of the ceremony the ‘**Lom**’ members, start congregating at the ‘**Khomol**’. Having thus assembled, the Priest starts his invocation for appeasement of the; **Khomol**, called
‘KhomolLhai’. After propitiations, he sprays a mouthful of ‘Zu’ at the Khomol. This is followed by formation of a circle by the ‘Lom’ members. As they do so, the selected boy for the dance starts brandishing his sword, and then the selected girls join him in the dance. Then all the lom members who form the circle start dancing and singing. The song sang on this occasion runs as follows:

(i) Kalenchon toh somil la vailou kon ing e: itam lhangbe lhanghui thin nalethen.

(ii) Eitanlhang se lhanghui thin nale thenlang chom pa tohnit nom mol khosong e.

Free translation:

(i) As I start going for work to the field at khomol, along with my drum, may all devil and other devil agents that may harm me be swept by the wind.

(ii) May all the devil and other evil agents that may harm me be swept away by the wind, so that I may fulfill with success my desire to have a good time with my drum.
Their folk dances are as varied and changing as the community that creates them. Although many types of their folk dance incorporate spirited, vigorous movement, there are others dances that are more reserved or stylized. Their folk dances vary widely by ethnic community— it varied widely in the movement of the dance, costume and tradition. In addition, there are numerous dances within a given community. Traditionally, their dance occurs collectively in a community setting. It expresses the life the community more than the mood of an individual and marks key elements of communal life. Their folk dances are sacred or secular as religion pervades all the society activities. Almost all ritual dances, however, have a social element, and many dances formerly performed for ritual reasons are today danced simply for recreation. Their dances celebrated the cyclical events of the year are usually relate to the economic life of the community, marking, for example, the stage of the agricultural year or the hunting and fishing seasons. Other reasons for dancing may include changes in seasons, the phase of the moon, and political and religious
events. Dances relates to the events of the agricultural cycle—From clearing the land to harvesting are extremely common”7.

During my interviewed on 27th June 2011 Pu Otkokhai Haokip talked about the different kinds of the Thadou-Kuki folk dances. Khulkon Lam (Plate 2) depicts the migratory route of Nuoikhomang (cave) believe to be somewhere in China.8 And pressed southwards from Chins, migrating down the course of the Chindwin River.9 Both men and women dressed in colorful costumes, distinctive headgears and unique beads, forming different parallel line of men and women perform this dance. Men jump profusely clearing the weeds that comes their way while women pick up the weeds cut down by the men and throw it away. In the middle Pu Chongthu brandishing his sword and occasionally beat an idiophone, command his kinsmen to pressed on till they reached their destination. The two male leaders shout aloud to wane away the evil spirit that may come their way while women dancers are known for their graceful and sophisticated dance style.

Pu Chongthu chanted Han Laa, which runs as:
Khul a kapennin o,
Kachun leh kajon ihem lhangchem bang icho je
Kajon ichoije, namchem phabang ichoije,
Kachun ichoije koltupha bang ichoije
Kathang’e, kathang’e!
Namtin khoveipheilai a keibou lojang kathang’e
Kathang’eKathang’ e,
Kapu lumbom kosoh tang’e
Thangtu temanotang’e
Thangtuite ma lhangvuma’e
Chin toh huivabang ga mou ine

Free translation of Pu Chongthu Hanlaa

The day I was born in the cave (china), My Dad and Mom held me high like a Sharpe sword, My Mom held me like valued tribes sword, My Dad held me like a chins sword, I am victorious, I am victorious.

Free translation of khulkon Lam Laa:
Let me worn my forefather muskets, Let me pressed upon the Thangtuis, The Thangtuis are pressing toward the hill, I can see the Chins and Thangtui mingling in peace.

*Tolpi Lap Lam* is a dance in celebration of being liberated from the cruel Chinese king and in commemoration of arriving to a new land known as *Chungvah Gam*. This dance is especially mean for the strong and able men who interlocked their arms and bend their knees in accordance with the beat of the drum; the beat of the drum altered occasionally to half-beat.

*Pu otkhkai* further states that when *Chongthu* arrived at *Chung Vah Gam* with his relatives, he had to face many barbaric tribes on his way. Therefore, in order to fight these barbaric tribes he had to keep a strong and able army. Thus, *Suhta Lam* is dance in order to recruit strong and able young men to his military unit. It is a dance performs with the help of a wooden pole, which is used for the husking of paddy. Four young men holding the wooden rod claps the wooden pole against the ground while four able young men dance encircling
the wooden rod. Later on this dance is introduce to the member of the Som: a dormitory of young boys and girls. The dancer dances between four men or women who face each other from opposite side of a square, each pair holding two bamboos one each in one hand. As the one pair close their bamboos together, the other pair parts theirs at right angles and so in alternately in varying time. The dancer has to skip from the spaces formed by the closing bamboos into those formed by the parting bamboos in time to the singing and with enough agility to save his or her ankles from severe confusion. From then and now, Suhta Lam is dance in front of the Som Buh to punish the wrong doer among the members of the Som.

Khupsonte Lam (Plate 3) is a dance of the youth. This dance is performed as game or recreation during the village festive seasons. The dance is performed by intermixing both boys and girls resting their hand upon their knee, bend their knee and strengthen them again. In this way, they move in circle and sing a retorted song, which runs as follow:

Khupsonte khupson chaloi let,
Lailente lailen chaloi let,

Alaije e um eimo,

Thangphon cha cha Laija cha cha um e.

Free translation:

Let us all dance with our hands resting upon our knees,

Those who are away from this jolly moment let them be,

Are you dancing in the middle?

No, he who is unwanted and messy are in the middle.

Vakol Lam is a dance in which four couple arranged in a square cooperates to execute various figures. While the girls move with smooth shuffling steps, the boys brandishing their sword move with bending their knees. These shuffling steps continuous for three times and then a chorus of men and women who formed separate parallel line join them in the dance. Along the dance a song is sang

which runs as:

Chunga Jangkol gol Lam e,

Noija Khannou gol Lam e, gol Lam e,

Jangkol Valla vangnei Pa,
Tongdong  Lou injangkol Valla mollepTa.

Free Translation:

Oh, Hornbill high above you dance gracefully,

Moreover, we the youth of your age dance below to your steps,

You are such a lucky bird, who flies freely,

Without lingering with you for a moment, you are gone.

Vakol Lam is a popular dance of the youth, performed at social events such as weddings, childbirth, village festivals etc. The humming activities of the youth all year round obviously monotonous in finding expression in various forms of social celebration like Som kivah-a feast of the Som cropped up for consideration and Lomsel neh-feast of all the members of Lom in a year to their longing for a life away from hard labor. This celebration/feast Som kivah and Lomsel neh last for at least for three to four days of singing and dancing. They performed dances such as Suhta Lam, Vakol Lam, Khupsonte Lam etc, the selected boys and girls for the dance continue to
dance until they do so for three round. Then, on the final day of
the feast all the members of the **Som** and **Lom** sit drinking
homemade beer and dancing throughout the night. The
institution of the youths known as **Som Buh**-Young Men’s House
is well-recognized social and educational institution in their
society. **Som** is a means to initiated education and played a
significant role in manifesting the way of life they lead.
Moreover, **Lom** is an institution that acted as the basic
economic life giving system and reverberate the basic concept
of community-base economic system of their society.

**COSTUME:**

During my interviewed on 24th September 2011 **Pu
Thonghem of Molvailup Village** asserted that the Thadou-Kuki
dfolk dances incorporates traditional costumes, in which men
knots theirs hairs and wear a headgear decorated with feather
of hornbill, **Chaldep, Jouchal, Tupa, Bilba, Khicheng, Delvom,
Khaineng Kio, Selling, Bomand, Vakulga**. Women worn
ornamental necklaces- **Khechang, Khepi, Chao** [Plate 4 (a)], **Hah**
[Plate 4 (b)], Khichoun (Plate 5), Khiba (Plate 6), Khimu Mitnei, Longchang Kikop. Men worn necklace having a tiger’s tooth and a few fowl’s feathers attached where women worn necklaces of blue or red beads and a spiral brass fore-armlet. Both men and women use the hairpins called Tukkil and Samkil. Both tied their hairs in a chignon fashion, on the nape of the neck. It is held in place by this heavy brass hairpin, which is sharp like a U shape. The prongs are drawn out to sharp points and vary in length. Skewers of ivory, bone and metal about six to eight inches long are also worn. Earrings- All children shortly after birth have their ears bored and consequently men as well as women worn earrings. Their ear has a small hole punched through it with a needle or porcupine quill. The earrings are brass rings and ivory disc (Saiha). Women worn bracelets called Hak and Chao. The bracelet worn around the arm is called Hak and Chao being worn beyond the elbow at the wrist. Besides this, unmarried girls worn a spiral brass fore-armlet, which starts at the wrist and goes up within 4 inches or so of the elbow. The spirals are flat internally on the flesh and are convex
outside with a breadth of half an inch roughly. Just above the elbow an armlet of bell metal is worn which is about 600 gm. in weight and 1 ½ inches in diameter, the section being circular. Necklaces of blue or red beads are worn and a hollow ring about ¼ inch wide. To make the ear capable of carrying these rings they pierced their lobes and extended them by putting in rolled leaves of gradually increasing dimensions. The ring is of bright metal or silver. The men worn cornelian bead in each ear tied with a piece of cotton to the lobe of the ear, which is pierced to admit it. The bead hung about an inch from the end of the lobe. These beads are much treasured by them and often form an item in prices paid for brides. Khi (necklaces)- a numbers of Khi are found in their society, most of the common khi found are: Khiba, Khi Vom, Khi San, Khi Kang, Gial Khi, Khi Nal, Khi Mu, Khi Kilnei, Simkhi and Keimeichang (Plate 7)."¹⁰ Besides these, even pearl beads were used. The old necklaces are made of very dark amber, beautifully clear and the beads are sometimes two to three inches long and over an inch in diameter. The men made necklaces of the claws and teeth of
tiger or dog. These were also believed to have magical properties. There is a unique type of ornament called *Tuikep Khi* (conch-shell) with a pattern of small circles with a dot in the middle of each. To make the pattern, two sharp thin pieces of iron were tied together with string which were used like the two legs of a compass. The dot in the centre is made with the fixed leg; the other leg-moving round makes a small circle. The dots and circles are then colored lamp black. A hole is bored at the wide end of the conch-shell, through which passes a string whereby the shell is attached to a necklace of beads preferably *Khi San*. When the *Khi San* are worn, the *Tuikep Khi* are also worn at the back of the neck suspended from the strings of beads, which hung down in front. These ornamented conch-shells were rare and were highly valued. Another bead, which is highly valued and treated as heirloom was the *Pumtek*. These beads are black and white sometimes round and sometimes oval or flat in shape. The round beads resemble peppermint bull’s eyes. According to the legend of the Thadou-Kuki it relates that old *Pumteks* were the droppings of goat. When the goat’s
owner fed him well, the goat produced *pumteks* of great excellence; if the quality of the food fells, *phumteks* likewise deteriorated.

Men, wear these beads used on women’s necklaces, as part of the ceremonial garb during the performance of rites and celebrating their killed of dangerous beasts and human enemies and at funerals. “Old and beautiful *Phumteks* are articles of great exchange value and prestige for the family who had them. They are obligatory payments (actually, or in name, payable as an equivalent amount in currency) in several categories in the marriage price, payments that go to men of the bride’s agnatic lineage, and also to such women as the bride’s father’s sister.”

The clothing worn by men varied from a dhoti known as *Delchen* [plate 8 (a)] and a petticoat called *Boitong* [Plate 8 (b)], whereas ‘*Sapho*’ made of Rhinoceros hide is worn by eminent persons like Chiefs, great hunters and a cloth is hung around their shoulder called *Thangnang* (Plate 9). Women worn a traditional lungi called *Khamtang* (Plate10), *Pondum* (Plate11), *Ponmangvom* (Plate 12), *Ponloupi* (Plate
13), Nihsan and a shawl called Pasal SaipiKhup (Plate 14) and Numei Saipikhup (Plate 15).

“Khamtang: This is a combination of black (5 cm and 0.3 cm), pinkish red (0.3 cm) and white (1 mm and 4 cm) and yellow (0.3 cm).” On the bigger white are woven the Sampi Zem (the upper belly portion of the Python). “The legendary beliefs about the Khamtang pattern were that, during 500 B.C., there was a place called Khovanthat in which lived a lady name Chongnu who fell in love with a Python-god. Before she joined him in the realm of immortality, she caused her lover to lie by copying the markings of her lover’s body and sang a song that runs as:”

I sat weaving upon the rock,

Placid stream runs below,

I copied the markings of my lover’s skin,

To which I added with crab markings.

Saipikhup: This cloth is black as a whole and on the borders are woven the design that resembles elephant knee. Hence, it was called Saipi (elephant) Khup (knee). It was used as
an upper garment. *Thangnang pon* is woven in the *Goshem Zang* design, taken from the shape of a gourd musical instrument called *Goshem*. The other is a diamond like design symbolizing the belly portion of the python.

The women worn *Khamtang* made of loincloth, which is wrapped round their waists and reaches a little over halfway down their thighs. Attached to the cloth, is a string which is past round the waist and to hold it up. In addition, they wear a breast cloth, which is wrapped around the torso, the outer corner being tucked in at the top spot between the left breast and the armpit.\(^{14}\) **Lewin, Wild Races of S.E. India**, state that the Thadou-Kuki woman are carefull to cover the breast until they have borne a child, after which it does not matter exposing them. The same rule is observed by the *Lusheis*, the *Toungtha* and the *Tipperas* of the *Hill Tracts of Chittagong*\(^{15}\).

*Thangnang, Saipikhup, Ponnangvom and khamtang*- In olden days the cloths mentioned above were not allowed to be woven by the *Chagas* (commoners). Only the Chief and his counselors’ families were allowed to weave these cloths. It was also
forbidden to put on these cloths while crossing a big river. It was feared that the cloth might attract the snakes to the weavers. “In course of time after a few generations the institution of priesthood came into vogue. During Chongthu’s time the institution of priesthood did not exist. Subsequently when the institution of priesthood was established it became customary at the completion of weaving of the cloths to invite a priest to perform a rite called Lhalho in which the priest sacrificed a hen. During this rite the priest used to utter the following incantation:

(The name of the weaver) amah in aponkhon hi,

Taneng, Tachin, Neichong amaho khon patna akho nahi,

Atialun dam lo hen,

Amit ahan phatlo hen.

Free Translation:

This woman (The name of the weaver is mentioned) has woven this piece of cloth. In the past Taneng, Tachin and Neichong wove such cloths. May the weaver’s head and body...
remain hale and hearty? May her eyes and teeth remain sound?”

The clothing worn by the dancers may affect the nature of their movement. On the other hand, the dancers can manipulate some elements of costumes, such as full skirts, leg-guide, handkerchiefs, and decorated capes. The visual appeal of the dancers may be enhanced by brightly colored traditional costumes. Thadou-Kuki Woman decorated their clothing bags and pouches with intricate beadwork, using a variety of bright colors and patterns. Magnificent masks were made by artists and craftsmen for use in religious and healing ceremonies. Pots (made of Bamboo) created for daily use, was often decorated with beautiful designs. Pipes smoked in ceremonies were carved with symbols, which held special meaning to them. Beautiful artwork and handmade crafts are still created by the Thadou-Kuki today.

**MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT:**

Folk dance of the Thadou-Kuki requires aural accompaniment and music is always extremely important. Their
dances are intimately related to musical form and, in particular, to musical meter and rhythm. The accompanying music of their folk dance is provided by the following:

(i). “**Khong**”(Plate 16): a drum, made from a hallowed section of a tree trunk covered with the hides membrane for which the skin of a *serow* or a barking deer is preferred as they are thinner than the skins of other animals available. The hides membranes are laced together with a cane lashing that runs backwards and forwards across the barrel of the drum. A small hole is often made in the centre of the membrane. The wood of *Vong Thing* (*Gmelina arborea*) is preferred.

(ii). ‘**Kuli**’-flute- There are several type of *Kuli*. One is the ordinary flute made from internodes of bamboo in which one node is retained. Just below this node is the hole into which the musician blows. Above the open end are four holes, the upper two stop by the first and second finger of the right hand, and the lower two by the same fingers of the left hand. The other types of flute are devised to give extraneous assistance to the player by directing the air current for him. The musician blows into one
and the wind leaves it by a hole just above the dividing node and passes into a conduit made of a small bamboo, split and attached to the instrument by wax; this conduit conducts the wind past the node and redirects it to a second hole back into the lower inter-nod. This artificial redirection performing the same service as that performed by the lips of the flutist when playing on the simple flute; for the rest the instrument are similar having the same four stops. In the other variety an identical effects is obtained by using a single internodes, but retaining a narrow projection about an inch long above the node which forms the upper end; another bamboo is tied to this leaving a narrow aperture between the two into which the musician blows. This projecting portion going bodily into his mouth; as before the wind directed into a hole just below the node, and the usual four stops are found lower down.

(iii). Chapang Kuli- small boy flute- is still a more simplified form of Kuli consisting of two separate sections of bamboo. One which fits inside the other and has a hole at the point of contact and has a node above this hole; by blowing into the upper tube
the air is directed by its lower edge at the point of contact with the lower and inner tube into the hole in the latter. There are no stops, so vibration in note can only be obtained by modulation of the lungpower, and the instrument is no more than a whistle.

(iv). *Changpol Kuli*- Paddy’s stalk flute- the stalk of paddy, generally after the harvest, is plucked and made into a simple instrument. They blow air into the stalk and certain music is produced. The harvester would just play with the improvised instrument at leisure, while harvesting in the *jhum*.

(v), ‘*Theile*’ (Plate 17)- a rudimentary flageolet, the flute reversed as it were, and played from the open end. The node of the bamboo being at the lower end with two holes just above it stopped by the first two fingers of the right hand. The mouthpiece is the node-less end which is cut away so that the upper edge of the musician’s upper lip and the aperture is fill by the lower lip which is flexed to allow the passage of air into the tube; immediately below the upper edge and opposite therefore to the musician’s lower lip is a square hole of the edge of which divides the blast, part going down the tube and part outside.
(vi). ‘Lhemlhai’- Jew’s harp- a simple form in which the tongue is made to vibrate the string tied at its root. This is a kind of musical instrument that produces very sweet sound but limited sounds. It is made of a small piece of bamboo. It is narrowly incised length-wise and a very thin and soft bamboo piece. Which serve as the reed, is fixed to the left of the incision. A soft blow or a hard breathing over the reed coupled with the pulling of the threads at both ends of the instrument produces the desired sound. Women use it.

(vii). ‘Gosem’ (Plate 18) mouth organ- is a familiar instrument consisting of a gourd, the stalk end of which is fitted with a mouthpiece made from a node of small bamboos. It consists of a gourd into which seven hollow bamboo reeds of various lengths are inserted, one; to serve as a mouthpiece, the others, which are of various lengths, have small holes cut in them. The bamboo reeds are fixed with wax to one side of the gourd in two rows- four bamboo reeds in the front and three in the rear. It produces seven different sounds while inhaling and another seven sounds while exhaling.
(viii). ‘Shillangdah’- a three-stringed fiddle played with a bow strung with horsehair. The resonator has roughly the shape of a flying bird the tail only being cover with parchment while the wings make an uncovered hallow resonator. The end above the keys is carved into a sitting bird. The bird represented was said to be a dove or a pigeon and the whole body of the instrument is carved from one block of wood.

(ix). ‘Shumkon’- a trumpet made of successive sections of nodes of bamboo one fitting inside the next to produce a diameter gradually increasing from the mouthpiece onwards.”

(x). “Dah - a large Burmese gongs valued according to the clarity of the notes, and its reverberation when the gong is struck on the boss. There are four different types of gongs that are highly valued and the number of this possession estimates wealth. They are:

(a) Dahpi (Plate 19): the biggest one called Dahpi. They varied in size from six to ten spans in circumference. It is used in all occasions. A loud and long vibration is there when it is struck in the centre.
(b) **Dahbu** (Plate 20): three gongs of equal size and about 30 cm in diameter, each with a separate note, on which three skilled performers can produce something resembling a tune called *Dahbu*. It is used on important occasions.

(c) **Dahchal** (Plate 21): one of the small gongs is called *Dahchal*. It is used in the dance occasionally.

(d) **Dahkop** (Plate 22): along with the *Dahpiit* is used the cymbals called *Dahkop.*

(xii). **”Selki”** (Plate 23) - an idiophone made of the horn of Mithun.

(xii). **”Pheiphit”** - a musical instrument which consists of ten simple bamboo tubes of graduated lengths, the notes are produced by blowing at the open end and has only four notes, viz., G (Soh), E (Me), D (Ray) and low C (Doh).

(xiii). **Pengkul** (Plate 24) this is a trumpet made out from the rare species of bamboo called *Gotha* and *Mithun* horn. It had successive sections of nodes of bamboo, one fitting inside the next so as to produce a diameter gradually increasing from
the mouthpiece onwards. The trumpet is blown with a loose lip, the mouth piece being kept in position against the lips by holding the right hand around it and as near to the end as possible, the thumb and the forefinger keeping contact with the performer’s mouth.

(xiv). *Diengdong* - a xylophone consisting of six solid wooden slats laid across two cords. These are fastened at one end each to a big toe of the foot on the corresponding side and at the other together behind the player’s back, resembling in effect the back-strap of the Indonesian tension loom, the slat with the lowest note being nearest to the player’s body and the others receding in ascending order. They are played with two miniature wooden clubs held and manipulated as drumsticks are by a kettledrum player.”

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Notes and References

1. T.S. Gangte, op. cit., p. 133.


3. This was usually done by the wives of chiefs’ or of very wealthy men who had harvested not less than 500 woman’s baskets (Bangs) of paddy.

4. A person whom an ego considers good and who can go along with him and can stand by him in times of joy and sorrow, may be chosen as ‘Becha’. A man of wisdom, versed in customary laws and tradition, and expert in interpreting culture and social values, may be selected. This last relative is to act and speak on behalf of an ego, as if he is the ego himself, and is, therefore, regarded as the representative of the ego when discharging the social, economic, religious or political obligations.


6. Festival which is considered the most highly prized feast and everything has to be done seven times each.

7. Pu Otkhokhai Haokip, President Gangpijang Kuki Cultural Troupe, interviewed on 27th June 2011.


