Chapter-II

EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THADOU-KUKI FOLK DANCES

It is not known when the Thadou-Kuki began to dance; however, expressive movement is as spontaneous as dance is almost universal, and it is so intimately interrelated with other aspects of a culture. It is possible that their folk dance developed along with the evolution of these people. “The study of material culture is based on evolution. The word ‘evolution’ etymologically means, “unfolding or unrolling”¹. “In cultural evolution, it comes from recombination of learned behavior and from invention”.² Because all cultural groups are continually changing, no societies survive today who are like Paleolithic people or who dance as they may have danced. Their dances are defined as being passed from generation, with no known choreographer and dances continue to be invented and in many cases the composer of the dances are usually anonymous. During the last few centuries, many trends have affected folk
dancing.

As the spread of industrialization brought rural people into the growing cities, dances related to agricultural activities or to communal rituals gradually lost their significant and a new improvised dance form evolved. Immigration also affected dances—frequently, indigenous forms fused with the dances of the native. Through their migratory brought their dance with them, although some dances are usually disintegrated, other are preserved. A new improvised dance forms result when dances transplanted from one country combine with those brought from other. Some of their folk dance may actually be traced to an inventions or discover made by an individual, yet many inventions and discoveries are considered too insignificant to be recorded at that time. The originality in an idea may be so small that the other individuals hardly take conscious notice of the fact that it is an innovation; the original idea may be and usually is elaborated by the addition of small increments until the final result may be very imposing. Yet we cannot overlook the fact that each bit of
originality must have been provided, even though unconsciously, by an individual.³

The last hundred years have also been characterized by the revival of their folk dances, both in their native countries and in their new homes, which; national pride and group identity continued to be asserted and displayed in their dances. Their folk dances that exist today, however, have had little or no direct contact with industrialized societies. At times, their dances may look simple to an outsider, but often they are not. Usually they form part of complicated rituals that involve highly sophisticated religious or philosophical ideas, and sometime the dancer are so attached to the dance that they are often lost in trance. However, their folk dance is usually mean for participation; they must be easy to learn. So, easier dance steps are performed and taught during the festive occasion. This improvised dance steps help in the development of their dance and acted as the harbinger of the ancient folk dance form of their society. Thus, folklores, songs, riddles etc. are the evidence of their dances that has survived from their ancient culture⁴.
The Thadou-Kuki folk dances have their own traditions of music and dance, which are central to the way they remember their past and celebrate their present. According to the earlier writer like J. H. Hutton that their migratory routes were more specific concerning the scattered settlements: for a very long times these tribes pressed from behind Kachins moving southwards from Chins, and been migrating down the course of the Chindwin River, and some turned back perhaps by the Bay of Bengal, had then moved slowly North-West and North wards again. Driving out or incorporating previous inhabitants of what are now parts of the Chittagong Hill tracts of East Pakistan, the Chin Hills of Burma, the Lushai Hills of Assam, parts of the areas of Manipur State of the North Cachar Hills and the South of the Naga Hills. Thus we learn from the historical observation that as far as specific dances are concerned their evolution has been mainly determined by historical accidents like the advent of leaders, the geographical nature of the country, cultural contacts, the difference in grade
between themselves and other cultures with which they happen to interact. So far, none of these factors is subject to any law. All of them again are extraneous to folk dance; so the main course of their dance evolution and development is determined by the un-governable and non-cultural factors. The Thadou-Kuki amalgamation with other tribes in the course of their migration developed a distinct form of dance. They have a rich oral tradition consisting of lyric folk song, shaman chants, myths, legends, and folktales, which had been passed down from generation to generation⁵. “Their folk dance includes ceremonial and songs as well as popular songs about everyday life. Former types of their folk dance were first performed for the royal ceremony of their chief, and till today in some of the dance this tradition is being continued where in other dances a complex form of dance developed that revolved around the migratory routes i.e. ‘Khulkon lam’. Both men and women wearing well-decorated traditional costumes perform this dance. The men formed a line in which women join them by forming another line, while the leader brandishing a sword
shout and chanted their ancestors name to wane away the evil spirits that might came in their way. Beating the drum profusely, they march on taking a leap at a time.

Talented dancers and musicians’ dedicated their lives to embracing the improvise form of their folk dance. There is one person; who with his vision and hard work, set down new guidelines to understand and create the new era of their folk dance. This was the Late Pu. Lalkholun Haokip, who later on along with other colleagues have contributed down the years by forming Gangpijang Kuki Cultural Troupe. The creation of the Gangpijang Kuki Cultural Troupe contributed also to the compilation of archives about ancient and traditional Thadou-Kuki Folk dance as well as promoting its development and research. It was from there that their Folk dance started to reach its full splendor and an extensive expansion of knowledge and creativity of modern folk dance. There was a time when in almost every village it was possible to find a local cultural centre where they could learn traditional dances and gradually developed its own exceptional diversity of dance style,
traditional music and costumes. *Khulkon Lam* is develop and standardized by a well known choreographer (L) Pu Lalkholun Haokip an Indian Army Hon. Captain pensioner of Gangpijang in the late 1970’s. Meanwhile, *Gangpijang Cultural Troupe* popularized this dance and brought to international attention”⁶.

*Khulkon Lam* depict the migratory route of the Thadou-Kuki in which Pu Songthu along with his kens travelled from Nuoikhothim/Nuoikhomang- a cave which is believed to be somewhere in china and travelled throughout south east region. Whereas some dances viz. ‘Iholhun lam’, ‘pheiphit lam’, ‘jangte lam’, etc. are often linked to specific places and events, and develop around work activities, such as the harvest, success in hunts, and celebrations of special ceremony. The annual harvest dance ‘Iholhun lam’, is the main attraction of the ‘Chavang Kut’ festival that is held in the month of November. Young girls and boys, imitating the trashing and picking out of the unwanted weeds from the paddy-trashing sites, perform the dance. There are dances for all seasons and festivals when men and women dance for the sheer joy of pleasure to
celebrate spring, autumn and success in life. **Vakol lam** is a popular dance of the youth, performed at social events such as weddings. Love songs are sung while four couples, arranged in a square, cooperate to execute various figures, moving with smooth, somewhat shuffling steps, and then a chorus of men and women joins them in the dance. Drums and traditional flute accompany the dance. Dance celebrating the cyclical events of the year are usually relate to the economic life of the community, marking, for example, the stage of the agriculture year or the hunting and fishing seasons. Other reasons for dancing may include change in seasons, the phases of the moon, and political and religious holidays. Dance related to the events of the agricultural cycle- from clearing the land to harvesting. Dances at planting time may involve symbolism related to fertility called ‘**Changlha**’. The **Thempu** killed a fowl for the spirits of the paddy so that they could have a good harvest. The **Thempu** (priest) dance in trance to please the **Changlha** (paddy deity). Springtime rituals celebrate the first fruits and the resurgence of life, and the dances may take the
form of symbolic combats between winter and summer.

Carnivals often occur in the spring, and they are accompanied by ritual dances or secular versions of such dances. Rituals of reversal may take place, with clowns and mummers reversing the rules of the society by engaging in disorderly and satirical behavior. **Lampisuh** has a rich tradition of dances that are part of religious rituals, often performed by professionals near the altars dedicated to the gods. This dance serves as strategies for reinforcing life, fertility, and power. The principal vision shared by this dance is that human beings must vigilantly maintain a harmonious relationship with the divine powers in order to prosper and it aim at harnessing these powers and channeling them for the good of the community, and ritual is the way to do so. Ritual helps ensure a community’s responsible relationship with ancestors who are guardians of the moral order, with spiritual forces within nature, and with the gods. The dance is also well known for its trance dances, in which the dancers experience an altered state of consciousness and seek contact with the spirit world. Early spring festivals
such as ‘pol kut’ celebrate the rebirth of spring, and fertility symbols such as maypoles and greenery abound. The other frequent occasions for dancing are harvest festivals. Societies that depend on hunting, with or without agriculture, often have a yearly cycle related to animals and their seasonal habits. Animal-impersonation dances, for magic or for entertainment, are common.

Today folk dance of the Thadou-Kuki developed into many variations, which are flirtatious and social. A set or group of couples, who execute various patterns or figures with one another, dances it. It can have various formations in which a few old rounds or a simple circle is one of the commonest patterns. A circle—possibly the most common dance formation—promotes feelings of unity among the dancers and have symbolic meanings. Miscellaneous grouping of two, three, and four couples and long ways—set partners facing each other in parallel lines of men and women remained popular, gaining prescribed footwork and styling. Their folk dance also functions to create or promote a sense of community. Even when other
non-recreational functions had ceased to be viable, their dances continued to make them felt part of a national or regional group and help them to establish ties with their heritage, and developed as a means to help people expressed them and relate to others. Their folk dances are considered essential to examine their own style of movement and to develop theories about its sources. Such explanations may refer to the physical dynamics of dance motions, such as posture, as well as specific movements of the head, torso, hands, arms, legs and feet; or the theories may refer to the ethnic and other traditions. Contemporary cultural troupe of the Thadou-Kuki played a major part in the inception and development of their folk dance, and they gave contemporary audiences a chance to see an almost legendary figure perform with the undimmed skill.

European explorers of the North East India hardly understood either the aesthetics or the meanings of dances in the cultures they sought to scrutinize and conquer. They depicted folk dance as an expression of both ‘savagery’ and aggressiveness. European observers often focused on certain
types of their dance that reinforced their stereotypes as warlike peoples. Moreover, Christian missionaries initially forbade or limited traditional dance among Christian converts for fear of the dance’s connection to the indigenous religions. Abandoning these stereotypes, a careful survey reveals extraordinary variety in both the social meanings and the aesthetic styles of their dance forms. Meanwhile, traditional dance shifted along with its social context. As people traveled during the colonial period, their dance went with them. Because of labor migrations, people from a given ethnic group found themselves next to neighbors with very different dance styles and their dance forms gained new significance as markers of ethnic origin and identity. Christianity and nationhood have transformed their society, and new folk dance forms have developed in new social contexts. Colonial rule shifted borders, and the cash economy prompted labor migrations. These migrations, often to multiethnic towns, undermined the tight-knit communities so basic to traditional dance, though the art form has survived in rural areas and in connection with traditional ceremonies. At
the same time, urban living has given rise to an abundance of new dance forms. “Due to the powerful influence of Christianity (in the process of evangelism), the polytheistic-branded religion of the Thadou-Kuki took a new path, and dance became an essential element to convert the “new world” to Christianity. By development modified and new dance sequences they set out to convert the native. They also encouraged miscegenation in which a new form of dance call **Vanno Lam. Vanno lam**, a form of worshiped and dancing rhythmically in a counterclockwise circle is often invoked as one of the most telling contributions of Christianity to their culture. Christianity here shares a range of qualities, each to a greater or lesser extent. The practitioners of some identify strongly and consciously with indigenous religion. The strength of such identification may correspond to the degree of the religion’s ethnographically identifiable similarity to indigenously Thadou-Kuki religion. All of this religion posit a belief in God but emphasize, to a greater or lesser extent, the preeminence in earthly life of multiple spirit beings. Thus, their (in the broad sense of the Christianity) religions involve sacred
dance and endorse its role in inducing immediate contact, which might loosely be called possession, between worshipers and divine beings. Thus, modernization in the Northeast India has allowed for some continuity, but it has also encouraged much innovation. New dance forms expressed nationalism and resistance. As a stirring cultural expression, dance could both express and forge a new national identity. During the KUKI WAR OF INDEPENDENT-1917-1919, a dance called 'Han Lam’ was used to transcend ethnic identity. Han Lam is dance by men, with swords or two handled blades, expressing themes such as battle mime and defense against evil spirits. Dance traditionally prepared people for the role they played in the community. Han lam, for example, prepared the young men physically and psychologically for war by teaching them discipline and control while getting them into the spirit of battle.”

In recent year it witnessed the continuing growth of dance activity among them, which brought many presentations of modern dance, particularly in connection with festival series; ethnologic dance; and a continuing development of the
educational dance field, with respect to private academies and a general expansion in these and related activities. Modern artistic productions have increasingly drawn on traditional dances. Dance created and performed by their ancestors has become a permanent part of their folk dance, in which the contemporary dance troupes represent the diversity of the dance styles and genres. Dance troupes performing on stage have integrated traditional forms with new, improvised themes and forms that expressed nationalism and resistance against British colonial oppression. The modern transformation of their society has thus fostered remarkable creativity and diversity in dance forms. An essential element in everything, from improvised traditional performance to ritual coming-of-age ceremonies to the modern lives remains a vibrant and changing part of their life. The work of these modern dance pioneers led to the development of important new dance idioms tracing the origin and development of various dance forms is difficult because improvisation and innovation are actually important component of the dance tradition: there is no perfect rendition
of their dance forms. Still, despite the challenges, diasporic dance continues to thrive and to inspire increasingly rich understandings of its importance to the vitality of a culture, and the modern dances developed as a means to help people express themselves and relate to others. Dances, reconstructions, and restaging of older dances coexist with new works created by modern-dance choreographers. Choreographers experiment with both new and traditional forms and styles, and dancers constantly seek to extend their technical and dramatic range.

The celebration of Kut like Changvang Kut (autumn festival), is celebrated when they are free from whole year pressing labors. “Since every community, tribe and nation in the world has its own festival with a specific reason, they have different Kuts. To mention some of them are: Pol Kut, MimKut, Lholhun Kut, Chavang Kut. Pu L.Z. Sailo said that no one can give definite account of Kut, however it is believed that the first Kut was said to be Chapchar Kut, which is celebrated in Chin Hills in Myanmar in and around 1450 to 1700. Pu W.L. Hangsing
also expressed his opinion that Kut was celebrated right from olden days and it was as old as the moon and the stars. From these two viewpoints we can conclude that the origin of the Thadou-Kuki Kuts were not new to them and is celebrated with great prompt in olden days. Ganpijang a sleepy village in Saikul Sub-Division had been celebrating Chavang Kut since 1961 and claim to be the first Kutters in Manipur. As state level Kut is concerned, the first ever Kut was celebrated in Manipur in 1979 at Keithelmanbi, Sadar Hills under the leadership of Pu Holkhomang Haokip and Pu (L) Major Pagin Kipgen⁸. This is the days of remembrance and thanksgiving to the Almighty for filling their houses with good things during the ingathering.

Pol Kut (spring festival), the spring season is the time to pray for the spring crop as well as to give thanks for the redemption which occurred at this time. In addition, since the harvest depends upon the prevailing between the spring and the completion of the harvest that serve as the thanksgiving for the spring. The grain harvest festival was a thanksgiving celebration for the goodness of the crop, and the fruit-harvest
served the same purpose for the fruit crop. During this festive time, they put on their proper dress and ornaments, and every family would try to get a little meat for the *Pol Kut* feast. To feast to their heart contend was what everyone aimed and there would be *Zu* (wine) in abundance. The *Pol Kut* is celebrated with singing and dancing. *Mim Kut* (first harvest festival), they brought their first harvest together and celebrated for the bountiful harvest. This festival directly connected with mourning and celebration for only a day. On this day, every family offered the first fruits of their *Jhum* fields to the spirits of their family members who had expired. They offered fruits, maize, millet or Job’s tear to the spirit of the deceased person. The millet were made as cake and offered on this occasion whereas, *Zu* (wine) is provided while they dance throughout the night. *Tap Pho Kut* (Forest clearing feasting) is also a kind of festival celebrated sometime in the beginning of the spring season. This festival is directly related with the completion of *Jhum-cutting*, which is the most arduous task of the *Jhum* operation. This festival is celebrated for three days in
which the boys and girls put on their festive dresses. During this period the villagers prepared a common feast for the members of the village. The festival starts with dancing and singing at the selected place. In that particular place boys and girls will sit in rows facing each other and they play a kind of game or making-merry in which they try to put hard-boiled eggs into each other’s mouth and drink Zu. These festivals had innovated varied form of improvised dances. Most of the festivals had lost its important but, Changvang Kut, a harvest festival that has been passed down through generation has popularized and developed many dances as dance for the audiences.\footnote{Changvang Kut traditional secular festivities involved careful planed programs, outpourings of respect, rejoicing, or high revelry, established by custom and sponsored by various cultural groups or organizations. These secular celebrations differ from religious festivals and it is the commemoration of important historical and cultural events. The festival is marked by different kind of activities, apart from singing and dancing sports like: high jump, long jump, short-put, javelins throw, tug}
of war, and a sportive events of high jump over the Mithun by young boys and men who know the skill of high jump is a well distinguish events. On the day of the celebration of Kut a pillar known as Sel Khom is erected at the middle of the ground and there, the Mithun especially arrange by the Lom members of the village is tied in it. Then, the priest symbolically appeases the Mithun which is called Sel Lhai Na. After propitiating the Mithun, the young boys of the village wrestler with the mithun which is called Sel Bot. Thus, when it is found sufficiently yielding, the Mithun is made to stand erect for high-jump competition called Sel Kal Ki tet. He who jumps the highest is praise and recognized by offering Zu- wine made of fermented rice and water. There are festivals like: Chapchar Kut, Mim Kut, Chang Kut, Lholhun Kut, Hun, Lom Juneh/Kivah, Chang Ai, Sa Ai, Chon, Vangkho Nitnom etc. celebrated with joy and merry making. On these occasion sportive events such as Suhkho, Khaoloi, Kangkap, Kangchoi Kap etc. are played and different kinds of dances are performed throughout the night\textsuperscript{10}.  


The origin of secular or communal celebration is a matter of conjecture. Thadou-Kuki folklorists believe that the first festivals arose because of the anxieties of the early peoples who did not understand the forces of nature and wish to placate them. General agreement exists that the most ancient festivals and feasts were associated with planting and harvest times or with honoring the dead. These have continued as secular festivals, with some religious overtones, into modern times. Secular festivals and feasts have many uses and values beyond the public enjoyment of a celebration. In their prehistoric societies, festivals provided an opportunity for the elders to pass on folk knowledge and the meaning of tribal lore to younger generations. Modern festivals and feasts which, centering on the customs of nation or ethnic groups enrich understanding of their heritage. Contemporary festivals relate to regional developments and fulfill an informal educational function. Harvest festivals are an inheritance from the ages when agriculture was the primary livelihood. The whole villages brought their harvest together, the celebration goes on for
seven days, and harvest suppers climax a happy event.

**Changvang Kut**: harvest festival is celebrated at the end of summer harvest, usually marked by lavish feasts. Among the oldest known festivals, harvest feasts have existed for thousands of years. Ancient peoples offered the year’s first ripe grains to the God in thanks for the crops that would sustain their communities for the coming year. In autumn, after farmers have gathered all of their harvest, they hosted a ‘harvest home’ feast for members of their community. Customarily, participants in the feast would use the last sheaf of grain to make a corn dolly called **Chang Lha**, a symbolic or decorative figure made of braided straw. They would hold the dolly aloft and carry it with great ceremony to the feast. People believe that the dolly contained the spirit of successful harvest, so when the feasting had ended, they took the dolly to the farmhouse where they stored it until the next harvest supper. The harvest festival includes varied forms of improvised dances like; **Lholhun Lam, Saipi khup Suh, Sagol Keng khei etc.** throughout the night beside the bonfire especially prepared for the occasion.
Seasonal festivals are determined by the solar and the lunar calendars and by the cycle of the seasons. The coming of spring, set by the lunar calendar is a time of gaiety, parades, dances and individual performances. Many other kinds of seasonal festivals, ranging from the winter carnival, marking the beginning of the winter season are a time for joy and gaiety. Historic customs are often perpetuated in seasonal festivals. Festivals such as *Mim Kut*; honoring the dead had been observed for centuries and many modern peoples continue age-old customs to honored national heroes and the deceased members of their own immediate family groups. These festivals of the dead include family reunions and ceremonial meals at the ancestral tombs. They decorated the graves by offering flowers, earthen pots of food, toys, and gifts, along with the burning of bamboo-torch and incense. Existence of life after death- Bodily death is not the end of life. It is only a change in the mode of existence. The festivals reflects both community and family observances a spirit of reverence and remembrance.
“Immediately after the death of a person a ritual is performed which is called Thimit Phoh? Thimit means total extinction of life, phoh means to proclaim. It is a ritual of lamentation. Thimit phot constitutes two separately by men and women. The women continuously weep and wail. The male relatives express their grief by observing the kitom. Kitom signifies challenge to the Death through expression of defiance. The male members stamp on the floor with loud exclamations. Then they jump vigorously holding their daos and other weapons including fire arms in their hands. This is done to express their defiance to killer death. A person in a Kitom may utter anything that may come to his mind during his expression of grief and anger at the death of his dear one. These words signify his anger against killer death. He become so furious that he starts saying loudly about how many wild animals he has killed and now he can now kill the foe that has caused death to his relative. Furiously he jumps in the air holding his weapon in readiness to kill the invisible foe. In his rage, he actually strikes the dao against the pillars, doors and door-frames. At the time
of a person’s death the Tucha of the decease performed Kitom-stamping with great force and with loud exclamations, jumping vigorously holding Dao, Spear, Gun, axe etc. striking the pillar of the house or the frame of the doors etc. by way of challenging the unseen spirit. The utterances during the kitom:

Takchapa Thadou-Kuki chapa

Koi na him kanu kappa ka u kanao that na,

Mutheihinlanghitihinnaloleng e,

Kiphong in kiphong in.”

Free translation of kitom:

I am the descendant of the great Thadou-Kuki, who the devil are you to snatch away my father/mother/brother/sister etc, from our midst? Where are you? Reveal yourself, I challenge you. If I were able to see you with my naked eyes, I would have done to you like this and like that-brandishing what is in his hand.
“The act of *Kitom* on the part of the near kens or *Tucha* who goes to convey the sad news is an act of solidarity, love, affection and loyalty towards the members of the deceased family. A person in a *kitom* may utter anything that may come to his mind during his expression of grief and anger at the death of his dear one. He becomes so furious that he starts saying loudly about how many wild animals he had killed and now how he can kill his foe. This act is supposed to be a substitute for crying.”¹² The belief is that by doing so the soul of the death has the backing of the kin to overcome the difficult passage on his/her way to *Mithikho*.

The next ritual that follows is known as *Thilhah le Sempet*. The dead body is bath with a hot water in a container and rubs with a particular type of grass called *Thibel* which has a pungent smell. The smell of the grass drives away the foul odor of the dead body and it is also believed that the souls of a person who died in the past had an odor similar to that of the grass. This would enable the soul of the dead man to merge in
those of the persons already dead. A sort of bamboo chair is made to hold the dead body. It is so made that on it the dead body can be placed in a recumbent position on its back from the hips upwards, with the leg stretched straight over the lower fold of the chair. The chair is called *Sang*. The *sang* is made by cleaving into strips a solid piece of a bamboo. A cross bamboo bar is fitted at the top of the chair. The two ends of the cross bamboo bar are partially cleaved. Two chickens, one each end of the cross bamboo bar is wedged into the slits by their necks and die a slow death due to strangulation. Then the two chickens are given as food to the dead person, which is called *Ah Lhap*. The priest has to perform a ritual called *Thitui Peh*. He holds a little clay-pot in right hand and starts the conversation. The conversation takes place between the priest, God of heaven- *Chung Pathen* and the god of *Noimang* called *Noimangpa*. Here the priest is temporarily embodiment of either a spirit or a deity of *Chung Pathen* and *Noimangpa* and dance entrances with the sole aim of invoking a spirit or a deity to possess their body. Once possessed the priest dance is
transform into the invoked spirit or deity. He also behaves and talks like the gods in whom he is being invoke. It is a kind of self-hypnosis under which the dancer goes into a deep trance.

“Thus, in the self-hypnosis the priest began the conversation with the gods- Chung Pathen and Noimangpa. It should be noted that the Priest spoke on behalf of all the persons engaged in the conversation. Below is given the conversation of Chung Pathen, Noimangpa and the Priest:

*Thempu:*  
*Vangelju a tuite chunga*

*Chung pathen leh noïja Noimangpa*

*Kaju ning hung kian nin,*

*Chunga pathen, na mi semna mi sah*

*chung ahin*

*Thimpi a jingtai I ka lo ding hitam?*

*Chung Pathen:*  
*Noïja Noimangpa kidoh in.*
Thempu: Noija Noimangpa, namihem namisah
chunga hin thimpi a jing tai I kalo ding
hitam?

Nomangpa: Chunga Pathen kidoh in.

Thempu: Chunga Pathen, noija Noimang pan
chung a pathen kidoh in ati, I kalo ding
hitam?

Chung Pathen: Chuti ahi leh noija umjouse Noimangpa
thu ahin chunga umjouse keithu ahi,
Masanga najet lam a napeh ahin tu a
kon in navei lam in petan.

Free Translation:

The Priest: The spiritual wine is sweet, o God of
heaven and o God of Noimangpa! Come and drink this wine.
(The Priest sprinkles a few drops of wine near the death body)-
O God of heaven! Dark clouds are floating around the dead
person you created. What should I do now?
**God of Heaven:** you had better ask the God of *Noimang*.

**The Priest:** O God of *Noimang*! Dark clouds are floating around the dead person you created. What should I do?

**God of Noimangpa:** You ask the God of heaven.

**The Priest:** O God of heaven! The god of *Noimang* has told me to ask you, the God of heaven. What should I do with the dead person?

**God of Heaven:** Everything that exists in the world belongs to the God of *Noimangpa* and all those exist in heaven belongs to the God of heaven. Make your offerings to the dead person by your left hand instead of your right hand from now on.

The priest then poured a few drops of wine into the mouth of the dead person holding the wine container in his left hand. Next, the relative of the dead person and other that are present offer wine to the dead persons in the same manner. Thus, end the ritual of *Thituipeh*"^{13}. 
It is believed that after death the souls of the dead persons move upward towards the abode of the dead called *Mithikho* which is supposed to be situated in heaven. They believed in the existence of three heavens. The first is called *Lengvan*, the second *Thangvan* and the third is called *Vansam*. The last one is supposed to be the supreme heaven. The part leading to *Mithikho* is called *Thijon Iamtou*. Just after a man die the soul goes to *Mithikho* (a village of the dead). They believed that the path leading to Mithikho is blocked by a devil known by the name of *Kulsamnu*. She is particularly fond of torturing the soul of children by subjecting them to clean her worm-infested head. Therefore, it is customary to insert a tobacco seed in the nail of a death child (by crushing the seed it produces a sound similar to crashing a worm, thereby deceiving the devil). The festivals of many ethnic and national groups are credited with the preservation of unique customs, folklores, costumes and culinary skills. An interesting recent development is the merging of the arts, lore and customs of various tribal (*Chin-Kuki-Mizo*) regions in North-East India and abroad in the
cultural festival known as **Chavang Kut**. This festival engages people of all ages, young and old, men and women dressed in their colorful costumes, distinctive headgears, and unique beads, singing traditional songs accompanied by beating of drums, gongs and cymbals. Moreover, it is celebrated with feasts, songs and dances. Parental organization plays the key role in this celebration, which stresses family unity and cultural self-determination, responsibility, purpose, creativity and faith. As societies change, the characteristics of their traditional festivals and feasts may also alter; new ones often emerge as others decline in popularity. Most likely, however, some festivals will remain unaltered for generations. Certainly communal celebration- in its various forms- is part of the lifestyle of all peoples and contributes to the living history of modern civilization. The contemporary dance troupes combined and fused techniques drawn from social dance and modern dance and choreographers also borrowed just as freely from modern dance. Choreographers vary widely in their specific procedures. Some formulate the dance fairly completely before
working with the dancers; others create most of the dance by observing and guiding dancers’ improvisations while trying out ideas; still others develop a general structure and decide on specific combinations of steps by working them out using the dancers’ bodies. With more people dancing, there was a decided trend toward standardization of steps. A shifting population carried their favorite dances throughout the Thadou-Kuki inhabited regions. The main reason for the development of their dances was that many folksongs and lore were revived and ameliorated in recent time. The harvest dance showed growth in popularity during the year. Because the basis of the dance is easy to learn. Dancers with well-developed senses of rhythm find it simple to do the basic steps once they have seen them. Properly done, the dance requires a lithe styling, a definite up and down bending of the knees. Men and women interlocked themselves forming a line sidewise, gracefully bend their knees slightly, and strengthen them again as they move in circle. In some dances, they form a line intermixing both men and women who move in circle and
dangle their knees at a time slightly and strengthen them again as they move their bodies sidewise in wave. These forms of dance enhance the dancers to learn faster and thus, it contributed to the development of their folk dance. Recent rejuvenate in harvest and seasonal dance like *Lholhun Lam, Lamkol, Sagolkeng khai*, etc. with the fast growing popularity of cultural festivals and widespread of the improvised form of these dances intensified in the development of their folk dance.

“*Som Buh* acted primarily as a dormitory wherein all the young lads of the village were expected to sleep in the night. The psychological bearing of the fact that of their sleeping together in a place away from their parent’s houses and yet, within their easy reach set up in their ‘lifestyle’. In addition, this acted as the foundation of their community-based life and provided them with the necessary ability to decide quickly on issues involved in warring claims of the family and the society as also self and the group. It also sowed the seed of their wonderful philosophy of life expressed in *Khankho* (behavior in
one’s lifetime) and Tomngaina (the principle of being dutiful).

Even though the Som Buh was primarily a place for young people of the village, the old ones who would often sit by the Som Fire frequented it for hours together in recounting their experiences as also in providing anecdotes about the brave warriors and great hunters of the past. They performed a useful duty in shaping the younger ones."¹⁴ The most important social fact that flows from the institutional assemblage of all able-bodied young man of the village in the Som Buh is the conspicuous place, youth occupied in the shaping of the social mores and the perpetuation of traditional culture. Even though the Som Buh had no formal arrangement for the education of its inmates, the practical life activities enjoined on them throughout their stay in the Som Buh. This gave them very vigorous training for playing an effective roles in their own lives and in the society of which they were to form an integral parts in their lives to come. It satisfied the psychological need of the child in his adolescence to be more a part of his peer group than a lone entity in his family group. “It also prevented sibling
rivalries to a large extent, thus, contributing to the prevention of various types of mal-adjustments and aberrations in their future life.”

The Mizo retained this institution (som buh) under Zawl Buk. According to N. Chatterji: Sombuh/ZawlBuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society, state that the Zawl Buk acted primarily as a dormitory wherein all the young lads of the village were expected to sleep at night. It is to be located almost invariably at the most central place in the Mizo village. Situated within a stone’s throw from the chief’s residence, it is used to be a very large dwelling place capable of accommodating all young men and boys in the village. “The young boys of the village has to keep up the of firewood for the Zawl Buk, this duty continuing till they reach the age of puberty, when they cease sleeping in their parents’ houses and join the young men in the Zawl Buk. This attitude of the youths in the Som Buh gave them a new zeal in celebrating their life by dancing and singing by the Som Fire during the village festive seasons.

Som Zuneh (Festival of youth dormitory); there is no
fixed time for the observation of this festival but normally it was
done after the harvest in winter. A group of inmates of the
dormitory engaged some of the villagers to rear five or more
pigs that would be killed and feasted upon after the harvest.
The members of the dormitory paid the cost of rearing in kind
from the Jhum produces. When the harvest was over they killed
the pigs, and at night they drink Zu and there was much merry-
making, singing and dancing near the bon-fire especially
prepared for the occasion. On these festivals and on the feasts
of merit, there was much dancing and singing. The various
dances performed had no special attire, but the younger
generation revived the dresses worn by their ancestors in those
days as special attire. Some of the dances performed on this
occasion are Lam Kol, Jangte Lam, Khongchoi Lam, Suhta Lam,
Pheiphit Lam, Khulkon Lam etc. Thus, Som Buh acted as the
harbinger in the development and standardization of their folk
dances.

“The interaction between the gospel of God in Jesus
and their culture seemed to be at the exterior level, which was
to said that it is adapting certain unavoidable customary norms within the Thadou-Kuki Christian Community. It is also important for us to mention something about the new context requiring a formulation of a new relevant theology. Head hunting is the much talked about their culture which the Christians should do away with, and which, they eventually did.

The main resistance of the gospel stemmed from their Chiefs who were the custodians of customary law and order, for whom Christianity was a potential threat to their identity. It was only after many Thadou-Kuki chiefs were arrested in connection with their fight against the British Government in India (1917-1919),"^{17} that the masses could boldly embrace in large numbers and when all the young ones had turn to Christianity, the Chiefs and old folks began to see the futility of resistance. They eventually fell in line with the trend. As of today, virtually all have become Christian. “The gospel Centenary in Manipur was celebrated at Imphal in 1994 with great reverend under the guidance of Manipur Baptist Convention to commemorate the hundred years of Christianity in Manipur. The pioneer
Missionary William Pettigrew arrived at Imphal on February 6, 1894, but being denied work in the valley went in search of place to start a mission work in the hills, and finally settled at Ukhrul in 1896. The new faith in Jesus tends to remain foreign and is need of indigenizing, which according to A.P. Nirmal is a contradiction in terms. One cannot simply indigenize things which are not indigenous.”18 What is needed is rediscovering the liberative elements in the primal tradition so that they contribute to the formulation of Gospel of God in Jesus meaningful for the people. There are inexplicable practices adopted by the first Christians of Thadou-Kuki community. “The first converts were at the outset required to cut off their Tuhcha (a hairstyle of the Thadou-Kuki male which they grow a long hair combed backward and tied in a bunch at the nope). This effectively cut them off from the community to which they belonged. They were also instructed not to participate in any of the traditional festivals. The inexplicable restriction to the new convert brought an evolution in the praise and worship pattern. The new convert now adapted a new form of dance called
Vannoi Lam in praising and propitiating their new found God in Jesus. Vannoi Lam which slowly evolved in their Christian society, developed and standardized by the newly youth converts. Moreover, the Youth Conference held every alternate year also popularizes this dance. Now, they are looking for a new meaning that emerges with primal vision contributing to the very formulation of the gospel. The Thadou-Kuki Christians need no more dependence upon alien concept to grasp the meaning of Christ-event; it is there already in their primal tradition.”

Contemporary society, which strives for better advantageous than their neighbouring communities do help in the development of folk dance. Folk dance is a traditional dance of a particular region or community and this water tide community work together in bringing their culture and customs in par with their adjoining or immediate community. These ethics of humankind enhanced in the revolution of their dance, find ways, and means to develop and elevate their own traditional dance. In recent years stirred competition among different
community bring about many changes in dance forms by blending traditional dance form with those of modern dance form. Whereas, Choreographers experiment with both new and traditional forms and styles, and dancers constantly seek to extend their technical and dramatic range brought about many changes and development in dance forms among their communities. With urbanization and the impact of western culture, traditional dance is still practiced and regained its originality and trend. New idioms have emerged, however, that combine traditional and western elements, yet, due to their cultural importance, and however, preservation of traditional dances are given special attention in their sub-continent.
Notes and References


5. Hangshing, Sehthang, *Chairman Vengnom Cultural Troupe* interviewed on 15th February 2012.


