Chapter- III
CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THADOU-KUKI FOLK DANCES

“Culture is the sum total of what an individual acquires from his society, those beliefs, customs, artistic norms, food-habits and crafts that come to him not by his own creative activity but as a legacy from the past, conveyed by formal or informal education.”¹ “In cultural evolution, it comes from recombination of learned behavior and from invention.”² Man remains the same throughout the human history. His development as a social being is the result of transaction between man and nature. When a man carves in stone, composes music and dance, determines his wardrobe, he is ordering materials in accordance with an established or evolved disposition. He is judging a natural complex by contriving its structure or by modifying an existing structure within it. He is adopting one order and ignoring or discarding another.
It seems that material culture and human life in a form of folk dance have been inseparable and culture is old as human existence. The earliest manifestations of dancing, music, the use of masks, ceremonies and the organization of society into patterns that was apparently fairly complex. The various elements of culture have evolved in the society over a long period. These elements have been gradually created and developed by certain persons either by chance or by necessity or borrowed by one society from another. Generally, it is the creative ability of individuals responsible for new inventions or discovery. The idea of how culture evolves should not be confused with its geographical position, its natural flora, fauna, and its environment. Environment literally means the aggregate of all the external condition, which influence and affect the life and development of an organism. Man as an organism is grown and developed in conformity with both physical and social environment. Thus we can see that the evolution of cultures and their folk dances resulted from the influence of their own
environment. Culture is not ethereal but very real. Artistic expressions in dance and dramas, in arts, crafts, and handicraft; in music and poetry; in games are the most realistic expressions of human life from the beginning of creation. They are the epitomes of culture. Traditional culture in transition would thus seem to offer an important natural laboratory in which to explore the historical and development factors that contribute to specific organizations. What really bind men together are their culture, the ideas, and the standards they have in common.

Nature’s mystic elements, its power and unknown forces, its vastness and great silence amidst the distant forest, and the spirits of ancestors which are said to reside in sacred groves and are worshipped, have all deeply impregnated the consciousness of most people living amid nature in the raw, since time immemorial. These impressions have produced certain inner psychological responses and an awesome veneration for the secrets of nature and the universe, and created the belief in existence of supernatural powers. It is
these phenomena that have given rise to various creeds, taboos, rites, customs and ritualistic and religious practices, which have been reflected through their dance; art and craft expressions, particularly among the tribal people. For centuries they have made a variety of cultural contributions. These include a rich heritage of art, music, dance, storytelling and legends. Often these were a part of their daily lives. Some were created for everyday use and some may have had ceremonial purposes.

“Animals too play an important role in their cultural life. Their status and dignity besides the amount of wealth they possessed are usually related to animals. The largest animals hunted are Rhinoceros, Elephant, Gaur (bison or wild Mithun). Major games are Tiger, Wild Boar, Various Monkeys, Ordinary and Flying Squirrels, Barking Deer, Sambhar Deer, Mountain Goat, Porcupine, and various Rats. There are great varieties of birds, some of which are hunted for their plumage and some for their ritual significance (e.g: Hornbill).”

The deep emotional associations, which natural environment has for them, are
expressed in various ways. Animals and birds play a great part in ritual myths, in secular: folk dance, folk lore’s, and casual oral literature. These feelings are also expressed in the sentiments of several classes of secular songs and dances. To appreciate to the full the significance of hunting in their society, one must turn to his religious beliefs; one of the pre-requisites of entry into heaven is the holding of a certain number of feasts and celebration of hunting success, in which Salu Lap dance are performed. Without these beliefs, their keenness on hunting would be very much less, and his expenditure on feast of celebration would be diminishing enormously. Quite apart from the religious aspect of the feast of celebration, there is a very much sought after social position and economic advantages to be gained by performing Sa Ai. They divide the animals in his jungle into five main categories: the large carnivore, big game animals, small game animals, ill-omened animals, and the small creatures, reptiles and birds. The nature of the return from the hunt, the splendor, or moderation of the feasts of celebration, and the type of purificatory ritual performed after a hunt all
depend on which category of animal is killed. In addition to animals, there are certain species of snake, bird and bee, the collection of which is essential to carry into Pilgal (paradise) and for whose demise, SA AI is held. To them, success in hunting was regarded as one door to whose paradise is opened and this occasion is celebrated with dancing and singing throughout the night. Although, to some it is a hobby or sport, fishing is one of the means of procuring food adopted both in the pre-historic and in the modern period. There are not much religious significance attached to fishing and requires no sacrifices before or after the catch unlike animals. However, fish has a very important superstitious belief in their life. After a man occupies his new house, the next day the house builder goes to the river and nets some small fish, which he takes home with him together with some pebbles from the riverbed. The fish are symbolical of cleanliness and health, and the pebbles of strength. The fish are cooked and eaten, and the pebbles are thrown inside the house against the walls of strength.
Those who have done and accomplished the series of the feasts of merits became a **Tolso**. To be a **Tolso** it was extremely expensive as it involved a fairly large number of religious rites to be performed prior to the ceremony, each of which entailed heavy expenditure. The various feasts of merits that a person underwent before he became a **Tolso** man were, **Sa Ai, Gal Ai, Chang Ai, Chon. Tolso**- the term literally means to appear in the courtyard but in this context, it refers to a person’s preparedness to perform **Sa Ai** or **Chang Ai**. The prospective candidate conveys his/her intention to concerned persons (priest, chief, u-pa etc.) through his **becha**. Then the **becha** had a formal announcement that is called **Tolso Ding Kigo**. With this, the man and his wife have to undergo a vigorous test of self-abstinence, social restraint, personal purification etc. The ritual is carried out in three different stages. The first stage- the **Tolso Ding Kigo** must set up a separate hearth close to the main pillar of the house- **Sutpi** (this pillar is procured from se tree as it symbolizes a cosmic tree for
them because of its extreme utility). A spotless white cook for 
prognostic sacrifice and a new and yet unused wine jars are 
materials required for this ritual. The occasion lasts for one day 
during which time the candidate undergoes various disciplinary 
norms and dietary abstinence. The spouse also joins in the 
ordeal but on less stricter scale. In the second stage, the Becha 
of the family informs the Thempu of their intention to proceed 
with the self-purification rites to attain purity physically, 
mentally and spiritually. The Thempu then advises the Becha to 
arrange one spotlessly white cook and one Vohgol (growing pig) 
for the occasion, which are readily arranged and killed. This 
killing of the cook and pig was done at the inner portion of the 
house where the prospective performer of the ceremony is kept 
confined. The Zu meant for the man and wife is served from the 
same jar of Zu kept pure and clean. They prepare a big jar of Zu 
called Belpi Zu was prepared then the Tucha and Bepa of the 
performer carried the Zu to the maternal uncles of the 
performer as an invitation, this was response to such request by 
contributed in a form of chicken, dry fish, dry meat etc. On the
expiry of the third day, the **Tucha** and **Bepa** of the performer will come and offer a jar of **Zu** called **Belbing**. They will invite the Priest who declares the consecration period of the three days as closed with a dedication which is known as **Thenso**. Then the Priest declares the performer as purified. Third stage- an important feature in the final stage is the erection of **Sekon** (a growing trunk of se tree of about six feet with a branch of about two feet kept intact), thus symbolizing the completion of the preparatory rituals and his/her readiness to perform **Sa Ai** or **Chang Ai**.

**“Sa Ai** and **Chang Ai** are on the same scale- the former performed by man the latter, by woman. **Sa** means animal and **Ai** is literally translated as subjugation, thereby denoting a ritual of subjugating or having completed dominance over the animals killed. In the same manner **Chang** (paddy) **Ai** is seen as victory over the soul of paddy. We prefer to see the occasion as the conferment of degree to a person who has qualified for a higher grade in the many modes of existences in
a person’s life. For a man it is the duty to hunt games, provide sufficient meat to the members of the family, and also provide occasional feasting for the villages. Woman on the other hand, is responsible for procuring abundant grain for the family. So, when surplus grain is accumulated for several consecutive years she is considered fulfilling her duty, thus entitled to perform *Chang Ai.*”

“In religious terms the person who performed *Sa Ai* and *Chang Ai* had earned uninterrupted passage to life beyond heaven. They believed that the *Kulsamnu-* who harassed everyone passing through but dared not touch the souls of those who had performed *Sa Ai, Chang Ai* and *Chon.* Thus, the celebrations are not show of extravaganza or wealth or skill but a preparation to enter a different mode of existence, and also a celebration that they have overcome the difficult passage towards that changeover, and such persons when they die their bodies are accorded honorable different from the ordinary mortals.”

*Chon-* a person who has completed *tolso* and *Sa Ai* or
Chang Ai ritual is regarded as Chon Bulhit (one who has fulfilled the norms). But one can also perform a ritual to mark all that has been fulfilled with a grant celebration, which is chon. This celebration may go on for several days, requiring an investment of quite a wealth. Therefore, celebration of chon is very rare and it is regarded with high esteem; the whole villagers took part in merry making - dancing and singing throughout the seven long days. Chon is the highest feast and takes seven continuous days. Before the actual day was started, the man who could perform Chon had to prepare everything, brewing Zu, storing of rice or millet, firewood for cooking etc., well ahead. Three stones for erection on the day had also to be collected and all the near relatives (Kom leh heng) had to assemble a day before the ceremony. The first day (Pansini)- early in the morning, the owner selected eight men to help the party of stone dressers to carry the three stones. The biggest stone known as Songpi was erected at the middle of the owner’s courtyard. The other one called Lomsong was erected at the side of the gate. The third stone called Nuhdosong meant for worship of predecessors was
erected on the other side of the gate. Meanwhile, Thalloh had to kill two pigs of different mothers for feast; the livers and intestines were for the party who had carried the stones. A mithun that was to be sacrificed was tied to the big stone and tortured till it was a very weak. Then the head priest of the village, dressing himself in a priest’s dress tucking a winged feather of hornbill in his turban speared slightly once and the mithun was killed. Small slices of its head, liver, kidney, lung, tongue, and ear were collected in a small basket and tied up at the top of a bamboo pole erected against the big stone. This was meant for the lost brother. Doing this the chief priest chant- let us send an invited to invite my elder brother who became a hornbill when I was young, to come, and attend the feast of merit I am holding. Thou crow who cannot call my brother, go back, and thou pigeon, bring my brother home. Two more bamboo poles were erected against each of the other two stones. At the top a kind of flag made of splinted bamboo was fitted. The priest, spinning spear in his hand danced around the big stone seven times, drummer and Dakbu (three gong sets)
players followed the priest. There were no meat distributions on the first day. However they should dance throughout the night. The second day (sapini)- Meat distribution is done on the second day. At noon, the priest and party are given lunch at the house platform. Then the priest dance in a trance as the previous day. The third day (Sa golni)- on the third day, the performer, his Bepa and Semang pa contributed pig and rice beer each. The companions of Chanu Len, Chanu Neo, Semang pa and Bepa had no role. Priest dance was continued Semang pa and Sung Nupi and other contributors had to stay overnight without sleeping. The fourth day (Chanuni)- in the morning the Chanulen, Chanu neo, semang pa, and Bepa followers bring one pig and two pots of rice beer each. The pigs were killed. At noon the priest dance was repeated as usual, which was the last dance. Then the chief priest climbed a fig tree and mutters some spells upon one branch. He cuts it off at one blow to predict the performer’s future. The skull of the Mithun killed in the feast was fixed on the inner most post of the house and covered with a blanket. The priest blanket was also hung on it.
Below it the priest’s spear (*Tengpi*) was leaned against the post. Millet chaff was burned below the skull so that the fate of the performer could be read the next day; it was thought to be a bad sign for the performer. The eyes were roasted and the chiefs priest smeared the oil on the main trophy post. After that, dance music, singing was no longer allowed. The fifth day (*Anchoini*); In the early morning the *Chanu (s)* of the performer brought steamed glutinous rice, meat, and *Zu*. Every household of the village was expected to bring any foodstuff with a pot of *Zu*. However, the performer’s *Chanu (s)* need not bring anything. They departed only after sunset. The sixth day (*Chanu-te anpeh ni*) Only the *Chanu (s)* of the performer contributed *Zu* and rice. The well-wisher and *Indawng taalso* brought *Zu*. There was no feast on that day. The seventh day (*Taitehni*) On the last day, the performer’s *Nuphal* (mother of his wife) gave one fowl and *Zu*. It was the task of the *Nuphal* to get all the stuff and dried up. Only near relatives and close friend of the performer were expected to join the sacrifice and as such they were also supposed to bring *Zu*. They departed at
sunset. Thus, the Chon feast ended. When a person completes his Chon feast, he becomes a Tolso and can add more windows to his house. The Tolso person can now wear the Thangnang pon.

They have distinctive festivals and dances, which greatly help in maintaining their social and cultural identity. Dances and festivals were the most important and indispensable part of the social and cultural life of every group of people. The festivals that are not in connection with feasts of merit, but as an annual feast of the society were: Som Kivah/Som Juneh, Lom Selkai, Voicha Kih, Ponkap, Pol Kut, Tapho Kut, Mim Kut, Khodo (Fighting the spirit of the village and the celebration of the New Year festival). “Somkivah- with the passage of time, a stage came when most of the som grew up. Some of them pursued diverse interests. Some had grown enough to fall in love with some other girls. Even the som girl had fallen in love with a boy either other than her own som members or with one of the som members. They felt that time
has come to part company and that the som be disbanded. Under such circumstances, they considered that it was best to have a farewell party provided the parents of the girl gave consent to the proposal. When such a situation arose, the question of som kivah, meaning thereby a feast of som cropped up for consideration. When such a som kivah is proposed, the members of the som discuss the proposal with the parents of the som girl. If they agreed, a date for it is decided upon and preparations start for the same. The som girl invites her close friend in preparing Zu for the celebration and the som boys invites boys from other som members, thus in accepting such an invitation each of the boy invited contributes one pot of Zu on the day. Tucha, Bepa, Priest, chief, semang pachong (Council of Ministers), and relative of the girl parent were invited and offered Sapang (head portion of the slaughtered pig). Then each of those who had the privilege of eating the Sapang brings one jar of Zu each. On the stipulated third day of the feast, the young boys and girls, belonging to some other som would come with gifts of Zu and other eatables to help
their friends who hosted the feast. In this way, they continue the feast for the third day with feasting and dancing and at the close of this day is feasting and drinking, the *som kivah* ends.”

*Lom selkai* - meaning thereby, fetching of the mithun for the *Lom* festivals, which is used to denote the festival itself, is decided by the members of the *Lom* for the purpose of having a feast of all the members in a year. When such a decision is taken, one jar of *zu* is offer to the chief of the village by way of putting up an application for permission or approval. Then another jar of *zu* is again place to the hose of the chief to formally place their request for allowing the chief priest (*Thempu*) to officiate in the cleaning rites of the village and dedicating himself to the proposed festival. After the matter is approved by the Chief, *semang pachong* (council of ministers) and the chief priest performs divination by cutting the leg of a chicken which is kept covered with a kind of grass-turf called *Phoipi*. The act of practicing divination is to know the future of the village and is called *Phoitan*. After all this formalities, the boys and girls of the *lom* start preparations for the festival. An
evening, preferably in the month of November is fixed for the date of the feast. This meeting is held in the house of the chief. Coupled with this, the lom leaders find out partners of a boy and a girl from amongst the lom members. When the proceedings of the meeting are in progress, the leaders who confidentially hand-picked the pair of boys and girls partner earlier, announce by surprise about the different pairs of lom members, much to their embarrassment. The purpose of such declaration of the couple is to drink, dine, dance and work together during the feast. Such arranged partners are called in pairs and are made to drink wine together that evening in the meeting from two Mithun-horns, the ends of which are tied together by a string as a token of an official announcement of the pairs being accepted as partners for the feast. Drinking of wine from the two Mithun-horns bound together signifies their obedience, loyalty, and devotion to the orders of the leaders. After drinking, the boy is asked to present the rat bundle called Julom which were hunted by the lom members for presentation in the festival to his girl partners, thereby putting their seal of
willingness to drink, dine, dance and work together during the \textit{lom} feast. With the announcement of partner the real atmosphere of the festival is created. On the erection of the \textit{selkhom}, the \textit{lom} girls brings the \textit{selzu}; contribution for the day is distributed and the \textit{lomsel} bought for the festival is tight around the \textit{selkhom}, the same day all the \textit{lom} boys and girls perform a dance in a circle mixing themselves alternately, and standing slightly bending forward. \textit{Voicha Kih-} this occasion has originated from amongst the members of the \textit{Lom} in the village. As there are very few social occasions through which the monotony of the day-to-day life can be broken, some plea is forged for organizing a social occasion for the young boys and girls of the \textit{Lom}. In the present case, the \textit{Lom} members try to find a well-to-do viler to organize a social occasion for them by working in the field in more efficient manner. In doing so, the boys and the girls of the \textit{Lom} decide that they will go to the field of the selected man for the \textit{Voicha Kih}. While working in the field they will suddenly stop the work and return home before time. They would inform the owner that they have stop the
work. Being asked, they would inform the field owner that they prefer to work in the field on some other day in an organized way and in a happier mood. When he agrees to organize the Voicha Kih, a day is fixed. On such a day, they all go to the field as on the previous occasion to work in field of the man. On this day, every member of the Lom would carry with him one lunch packet each without curry. The owner of the field on his part prepares curry by killing a pig, which is dressed and cooked by his Tucha and Bepa. This dressed pig is offered to the Lom members as mid-day-meal, in addition the Lom members work very hard to compensate for the loss they have incurred on the previous day. After a long hard day work, they return homeward carrying the owners of the field in a litter to his house. On reaching the residence of the owner, the Lom members were offered Zu and they continue to sing and dance the whole night. The next day, boys the Lom members contributed a pig, the girls contributed Zu, and the whole village joins in the merry making accompanied with singing and dancing.
“Pon Kap-” This is the occasion for merry-making and fun spinning for the Lom members. The Lom Upa approach the Chief, Semang Pachong and the Village Priest for their consent for organizing Pon Kap and contact a person in whose field they would go for the work on the day, where, they organized a shooting competition in the midst of their work in the field. The Lom boys contributed a pig whereas the Lom girls offered Zu for the day and the man in whom they are working come prepared to feed the Lom members by killing a pig, the Chief, council of ministers, priest and the Lom members all went to the field to organize the Pon Kap. On their arrival at field, the Lom members start working in the field as is done on any normal working day. They continue to do the work throughout the afternoon, i.e., till their mid-day meal is served by the man of the day. After the mid-day-meal, they became busy in preparing for the shooting competition. When everything is ready, the priest does the ritual invocation for the welfare of the family on whose field the shooting competition is organized. The ladies lungi known as Pon Lhai required for the competition are
arranged. Formalities, like drinking, eating, singing, and dancing are done after the competition; meanwhile, they prepared a litter in which the owner of the field is carried to his residence. On reaching the owner’s house the Lom members, Chief of the village, Council of Ministers, and the priest were offered Zu and they spend the whole night dancing and singing.” Other then this festival that are not connected with feast of merit are: Pol Kut- harvest festival, Tapho Kut- forest clearing feasting, Mim Kut- job’s tear festival of mourning and celebration for the spirits of family members who had expired. Khothen Ni- when the year comes to an end, this festival is observed. Generally, there is one particular drum belonging to the whole village. The drum cannot be beaten in the village, except on a particular occasion. During the forbidden period the drum is keep hanging on the rafter in the centre of the house of the Chief near the ceiling, called Inting and it will remain so until the season for Khothenso comes. On the day of Khothenso the drum can be beaten, as this day happens to be the day for collection of the villagers’ tribute of paddy-tax called Changseo and the party
called *Changseo-Juneh-Ni* is held in which the drum is beaten with profound joy and merry making. In addition, a new area for *Jhum* cultivation is decided and the villagers chose their own plots for cultivation by putting signs called *Chemtah* which bears the plus-sign of marking. Having marked their owned plots, they returned home in which the whole villages joined in jubilation for the coming agricultural year.

The supernatural-god and spirit world- are important in their religion, religious belief and practice are central to all aspects of their life. “The concept of supernatural-God who is known as *Chungmang Pathen* by them, or the source of “All Creations” that is considered to be the highest benevolent God who lives in heaven. He is believed to have created the universe and all the living beings. They believed that everything concerned with prosperity, growth and strength in life is nothing but the free gift of *Chungmang Pathen* also known as *Chungmangpa*. He is considered omnipotent and also omniscient. Thus, he is all powerful but he does not want any propitiation or worship or appeasement through sacrifices and
offering. He does well to all sundry. Therefore, the world of supernatural’s reigns supreme among them, while the other entities are related to evil and are susceptible of being appeased or placated through performance of elaborate rituals and sacrifices which constitute prayers of ‘Phuisap’ by the Priest called ‘Thempu’.

That is, religious beliefs impact the way people live their everyday lives, from what they eat (or cannot eat), the way they farm, perform daily chores, hunt, make tools and clothes, arrange themselves in families, marry, divide works among family members, educate their children, treat illness, and bury the dead. They practice both joint and nuclear types of family. The permanent type of family among them is the one in which the eldest son of a man called ‘Upa’ lives with his parents along with unmarried younger brothers and sisters compulsorily, in addition to his own children. And, sometimes the family is composed of three or four generation living together. Thus, their family is the smallest social and religious unit in which every member of the family has an obligation to
be fulfilled. “Their religious belief and practice are not restricted to one holy day each week, be it Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, but are present in the most common daily activities as well as in special ritual ceremonies. Their religions provide people with what some scholars call a world-view”. A world-view can be thought of as a system of values, attitudes, and beliefs, which provide people with a mechanism to understand the world in which they live and everyday events and occurrences. May be we can think of a world view as being like a language. Can you imagine how hard it would be to explain or understand everyday events and occurrences if we did not have language-words? Words are essential tools that help us explain and understand events and occurrences. But words come with their own meanings, we cannot simply change the meanings of words when we use them to explain or to understand events or why we live the way we do. “Words and their meanings help shape the way we see, and therefore how we explain, events. Similarly, the world-view (values, attitudes, beliefs) that an individual learns from the time s/he is a baby provides a
mechanism that influences how s/he understands all that happens to her/him, her/his community and the world in which s/he lives. They believe that there is more than one god; however they believe that one of the Gods called ‘Chungmang Pathen’ is the Supreme God who created the world and all that is in the world’¹⁰. In their religious systems, God (or the Gods) after creation were not directly involved in human society or the individual lives of the people. In the creation stories the gods were engaged in the creation of the world and all that is in the world, but after creation, the gods usually withdrew from direct contact with human beings. In the Thadou-Kuki religion, ‘Chungmang Pathen’ was an object of one-pointed devotion and worship. God as the creator, Merciful and Sustainer of the Universe, a prominent place was accorded to him alone. But the time comes when the people were inclined towards pluralistic world view by negating the one on various grounds. One of the most important factors conducive to the development of polytheism among them was ‘Power Concept’. As the problem of survival is intimately bound up with economic resources, the
egoistic tendency of man and his desire to acquire power or to be good hunter and fortunate in turn brings him to the belief that every object animates or in animate, possesses a kinetic power for good or evil. “The other probable speculation of the new breakthrough of polytheism in the society is the Egoistic Emotion – fear or phobias (fear of poverty, fear of insanity, fear of illness etc.). Whatever elements of truth it contained in the above gestures, it is difficult to give a synthetic conclusion of the same as the problem is very complex one. In fairness, it is the long religious-cultural or mystic-magical experiences of the people under varying social environments that gave birth to this pluralistic world view.”11 “The idea of disinterested God does not make the supernatural un-important in their religion. Indeed, the super natural God (who ascended to heaven or sky after creation) and spiritual realm is the most important to their religious belief. Between an all powerful god and humans is a pantheon of spirits. These spirits are directly engaged in the lives of human beings, and can act as intermediaries between god and humans”12. Spirits in their religious traditions share
some of the same characteristics of angels in the Christian, Islamic and Jewish traditions. Good spirits help to protect against illness and misfortune and assist humans by providing rain needed for crops, fish and game animals used for food. However, not all spirits are good, some spirits are viewed as evil and are believed to be responsible for illness, premature death, and other forms of suffering and death, and other forms of suffering and misfortunes. Animism: belief in spirits or the spiritual world, or the world of spirits, is central to their religion. Spirits (like Angels and demons in the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions) directly communicate with and impact the lives of human beings, as individuals and as communities.

D. Sonkhojjang Haokip: A Study on the Traditional Religion of the Kuki before the Advent of Christianity, states that their traditional conception was that all the animate or inanimate objects were actuated by spirits. This spirits associated with any unnatural phenomena were held to be empowered to do harm or good to mankind. Therefore, they went to such places and offer sacrifices. Some places which they
believe to be dwelling places of such spirit are:

(i) **Silah-Boullah**: it is a phrase of words which refers to salt springs. They had firm and unshakable faith that such spots were the abodes of ‘*Thilha*’ (malignant spirit) that could capture human soul and culminate into the death of a person concerned.

(ii). **Lithuh**: Deep gorge or pits which are unnatural and irregularly shaped in form are also regarded to be inhabited of such spirits.

(iii). **Kolse le Themko**: Strange cliffs and caves which they believed to be the inhabited of the malignant spirit called ‘*Gamhoise*’. So, in such placed sacrifices were done to placate the dwellers.

(iv). **Songpilen**: Rocks which were abnormally big in size are also believed to be the dwelling places of malignant spirits.

(v). **Tuivamit**: Convex or concave ground where stagnant water were found within a radius of two to five diameters and this place is believe to be the dwelling place of malignant spirit.
(vi). **Thingjungkai**: All the big trees extending its roots from one bank of a river to another are known as ‘**Thingjungkai**’ by the people. Such appalling offshoots of big trees are feared by the people as they believed that evil spirits are commonly dwelt here.

(vii). **Thinglubul**: Any trees of unnatural shapes or size without any leaves and branches are greatly feared by the people.

(viii). **Moullukim**: Mountain that spouted in two hills is known as ‘**Moullukim**’. They had great fear for such mounts as it was believed to be the home of ‘**Gamhoise**’. etc”

**Good spirits** provide protection against harm, misfortune, and disease, heal illness, and provide children, rain for crops, fish, and wild game, and protection for livestock. The realizations of these blessings are dependent on the appropriate behavior on the part of individuals. Good behavior, according to their religious beliefs, includes following and practicing values and behavior established by society and culture, participation in religious rituals and practices, and proper respect for family, neighbors, and community. Failure to
follow these behavioral guidelines often results in the good spirits withdrawing their blessing and protection. The result; illness, death, drought and other misfortunes. Good spirits can be divided into the following categories:

**Human spirits**: They believe that people continue to live, through their spirits, after death. These spirits are often referred to as ancestral spirits.

*Spencer and Gillen*, in their book: *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, states that the ancestors were generally representing a beneficent being; especially for the surviving members of its family. In the like manner the Thadou-Kuki believed that spirits of the ancestors remain very interested in the welfare and growth of their families and communities.

“Their religion divide ancestral spirits into two groups:

(i). *The recent dead ancestors*: After the death of an elder his or her spirits remains actively interested and engaged in the life of their family and community for many years. The ancestral spirits are most concerned about the prosperity and security of their families and communities. They intercede with
God on the behalf of their communities. However, if individual members of their families or communities as a group engage in inappropriate behavior, the ancestors show their displeasure by withdrawing their protection—their willingness to seek god’s blessing on their descendants. Although this results in illness and misfortune, it is not the desire of the ancestors that their families and communities be destroyed. Rather, the ancestors hope that illness and misfortune will be seen as a warning and result in people and communities stopping the inappropriate and offensive behaviors. Their religions hold that following social and cultural norms and values is the only way to guarantee security and prosperity.”

(ii). The spirit of the long dead: As time passes, the spirits of the recent dead gradually withdraw from the lives of their descendents and communities. It is believed that these spirits live with god. However, some ancestral spirits remain actively engaged for many generations. This is particularly true of the spirits of important individuals. It is believed that the spirits of great rulers or founders of nations maintain their
interest and power for a long time, perhaps centuries after their deaths. These ancestors are most interested in promoting the longevity of their kingdoms, nations and communities. As with the regular ancestral spirits, these spirits intervene to protect their communities.

_Singkhawkhai_ in his book “Zo People and their Culture” interpreted the word, _Pusha_ as the ancestor god and not the kind of spiritual being that exist in association with human spirits. Therefore, in their traditional religion, ancestors are not gods and they are not worshiped, but just as living elders are given great respect, even more so the spirits of the ancestors are remembered and respected. Moreover, ancestral spirits are not feared. Although their blessings are important to personal and community well-being, appropriate behavior is all that is required to maintain social harmony, longevity and ancestral contentment.¹⁴

_Nature spirits_: Natural spirits are spirits that inhabit or live in nature. These spirits are important since they are believed to control natural elements such as rain, wind, sun,
which is essential for the raising of crops and animals. Water spirits are also very important since they are believed to control the animals that live in the water. These spirits (Natural Spirits) are believed to protect people and to provide them with the essentials of life. In order to guarantee the good will of these spirits, they practice rituals and ceremonies that honor these spirits. They performed ritual sacrifices in place where they believed that such spirits dwelt, like; **Shilah/Boullah** (Salt Spring), **Lithuh** (Deep Ponds), **Kolse leh Themko** (Strange Cliffs and Caves), **Tuivamit** (Convex or concave ground where water gathered) etc. They do not worship rocks, trees, the sky or rivers. Rather, important spirits who control these forces of nature are believed to live in the sky, rocks, trees, rivers.

**Malignant spirits:** Their religious tradition holds that just as there is good in the world, there is also evil. Goodness is the result of the blessing of god and the spiritual world is response to good behavior on the part of individuals and communities. Malignant spirits intervene when there are
instances of inappropriate behavior on the part of individuals or communities,

The Malignant spirits comprise of:

(I) Joumi (Dangerous male spirit), it is said to be elastic, which can become very tall and can also be short at will. The Joumi is very fond chicken, it kills by throttling their neck and suck its blood dried.

(II). “Gamhoise (The king of evil, who inhabits in the densest forest on the highest mountain top)”\(^{15}\), if a sickness is believed to be caused by ‘Gamhoise’ immediately a buffalo is to be offered along with rice-beer, a cock and uncooked rice to appease him.

(III). “Gamkau (Jungle ghost): Gamkau is an evil spirit of a particular place of a jungle which can cause serious illness to the person who meets such spirit”\(^{16}\). It appears in the night in the form of a much powerful light, single and concentrated, as it swells and subsides. In contact with such spirit causes dangerous consequences.

(IV). Maltong: A widow, lame, lone and cruel. Anyone who
worshiped and pleases her was blessed with immediate and rapid richness but soon loss the richness even up to the extent of having no heir to the worshipper.

(V). *Kulsamnu*: Female spirit or witch who is in charge of to keep up the souls of the individuals who passes her residential quarter on their way to *Mithikho* (dead men’s village). It was traditionally belief that any soul proceed to ‘*Mithikho*’ after death shall pass the residential quarter of *Kulsamnu*. She cannot stop the soul to *Mithikho* but can delay the journey if she is not appeased. Moreover, it is belief that she dare not keep up the souls of person who had performed ‘*Chon*’, ‘*Sa Ai*’ ‘*Chang Ai*’ and Lovers.

(VI). “*Kaose*: They live in a great dread of vampires, men who can so project their astral bodies as to enter into those they wish to and devour their internal organs, particularly the liver and heart, and can also convert such person into a different personality, changing the voice, the behavior and strength. The *Meiteis* of Manipur also have a similar belief in the vampires which they called ‘*Hingchabi*’, and the Maori also
believe in vampires who send its atua to enter a man’s body and slowly eat away his vitals”\(^{17}\).

(VII). “Lhadam (Men’s Souls/Ghosts resulting from unnatural death): Lhadam is the soul of death people which remains on the earth before going to dead man’s abode. It is the common belief that, the soul of death people does not go to mithikho directly. It stays on this world for certain days and maintained the family chain and continues to visit their house at night and produced some sounds but invisible”\(^{18}\)

(VIII). Lhangnel (A python having seven nostrils who lives under water): the python can caught human being and animals through its vibrating magical power. It was believed that this python had seven nostrils and lives under water.

IX). “Lashi (Female fairies, who appeared in the form of a beautiful ladies and are regarded to be the care-takers of wild life)”\(^{19}\): it is believed that young man who falls in love with these alluring fairies often became famous hunters in their life time.

(X). “Chomnu: Female spirit, who is believed to be physically short. She seldom causes any trouble to mankind and
considered to be harmless spirit”\(^2\).

(XI). **Kaomei**: Evil spirit that flies at night like a fire-fly in a much bigger volume of fire-ball. It is a dangerous spirit for if anyone be it human being or animal resulted in severe illness.

The evil spirits are responsible for causing much of the misfortune that individuals and communities suffer. The Thadou-Kuki society has specially trained professionals who through special medicines and communication skills intercede with the ancestral spirits to provide protection against the wiles of evil spirits.

**Religious Leaders**: Every religious tradition has individuals who perform specific religious tasks and duties. Each religious tradition has special titles for religious officials- Rabbi, Imman, Pastor or Priest. In their religious tradition, there are many categories of religious duties, these include priests, rain-makers, healers (diviners, herbalists), however, most of the religious duties are performed by an individual named as the ‘Thempu’. “There are two types of Thempu or priest in their society. One type of Thempu is appointed by the village chief in
consultation with his councilors. The other type of *Thempu* is the one who voluntarily assumes the mantle of priesthood, these comprise of like, the exorcist, diviners and herbalists. The officer priest called ‘*Kho-Thempu*’ has an official status in the village administration and is traditional prerogatives.”²¹ The role of the priests varies between religious traditions. One of the most important functions of priests is to officiate at religious ceremonies and rituals. Religious ceremonies and rituals are important in maintaining religious and cultural traditions. Ritual ceremonies celebrating birth, transition to adulthood, marriage, death, planting and harvesting, hunting, or commemorating the life of a deceased ancestor, are vital to maintaining a close-knit community. Such rituals also help to reinforce values and appropriate behavior within the community. “The Priest, who officiates at these rituals and ceremonies, plays a central role in fostering a strong and united community. How do the ancestral spirits communicate with the priest? A priest will enter into a trance during which time it is believed that the spirit of the ancestor enters or possesses the body of the priest. During the
period of possession, the ancestor directly communicates with
the priest, using him as a medium of information to the people.
The rites of propitiation can be classified into, rites of
appeasement and rites of warding off evil-spirits which cause
illness. The rite of appeasement involves the offering of animal
or the image of So’longnupa (slaves), Sel (Mithun), Dakpi
(gong), Sumeng (coin), Khechang (beads), etc”22, which are
made of clay as these articles are regarded as valuable in terms
of wealth and treasure. “The rite of expelling or warding off evil
spirits is in the display of magical power on which the sorcerer
chants magical words having the force of energy”23.

The sacrificial rites and the rites of propitiation can be
classified into three viz. personal rites; that concern with
individuals, household rites; that concern family and, communal
rites; that concern the entire village.

1. **Chang Kithoi Na** (Individuals sacrifices):

   (a). “**Khaolang Kithoi**; If a person is suffering from symptoms of
   Typhoid or Pneumonia, the traditional term of sickness i,e,
Khaolhang is used. Meaning- that the individual’s health is endangered. Either a Mithun is sacrificed but if for some reason it can be substituted by the skull of another Mithun. Therefore, the rite of Khaolang is sometimes called ‘Siel Luhom Kithoi’ (rites with Mithun skull)”

(b). Inneolang Kithoi; the word Inneolang denotes the direction from where the particular sickness comes and Kithoi is the rite of propitiation. Therefore, the rite is performed to appease the spirit that dwelt in the direction of Inneo, who is supposed to cause the illness.

(c). Lhanlam Kha; If the spirit of a deceased person frequently appears in the dreams of any one of his family members, a ceremony called Lhanlam Kha is performed. The simple meaning of Lhanlam Kha is blocking the path of the graveyard. It is a precautionary measure taken to prevent or protect the dreamer from death.

(d). Kilha Lah Na: This ritual is performed for a person who is suffering from the symptom of yellow fever or Yawndise. It is
common belief that the soul of such person have been seized and detained by the demon called *Gamhoise*. One black hen is slained by the priest and offered to the malignant spirit who had captivated the sick person’s soul. The rite of ‘*Kilha Lhona*’ is normally performed early in the morning, at the place where the malignant spirit called ‘*Gamhoise*’ is believed to inhabited.

(e). *Milha Kou*; The literal meaning of *Milha Kou* is the calling of the human soul. The practice of calling of human soul is of two types:

(I). *Milha Kou* (The calling of sick a person’s soul); If a person falls sick after returning from hunting or from the jhum field, it is believed that the person has lost his soul. Therefore a ritual expert *Thempu* is immediately summoned to call back the wandered soul; otherwise the sick person may die.

(II). “*Chalha Kou* (Calling the souls of offspring); If a woman is not blessed with offspring her father performed a sacrifice called *Chalha Kou* or *Lhalho* which means, interceding for
blessings of his daughter, so that she may be blessed with sons
and daughters”

(f). **Gul Doi**: If a person suffered from sores and sore throat, it is
believed that this sickness was caused due to a snake having
been seen or killed. Thus, this rite is performed by killing a dog
or a fowl, which is offering it in sacrifice.

(g). **Golkhen Na/Ui-Theng Kithoi/Ui-Hap Vat**: If a person has a
sudden change of behavior and becomes abnormal in his way of
talking and movement. It is believed that the person is under
the influence of an evil spirit called ‘Thilha Vop’. The **Thempu**
has to perform a sacrifice and ward off the evil spirit that has
possessed the sick man.

(h). **“Hampalang leh Pasanlang**: If a child is found suffering
from the symptoms of whooping-cough, measles, high-fever
etc. it is believed that the sickness is caused by an evil spirit. In
this ritualistic sacrifice, grasses of different varieties were
sometime collected and used as items of sacrifice. The ritual-
abstention such as, social restraint, personal purification etc, will be keep up for five days”\(^{28}\).

(i). \textit{Kholailang Kithoi}; this ceremonial rite has three stages, Viz, \textit{Saphephou (Nehboh), Sagojon} and \textit{Khengsum Lhah}.

(I). “\textit{Saphephou (Nehboh)}; if a person is believed to be attacked by \textit{Kaose} (Vampire), a piece of meat, rice, salt, chillis, tobacco, nicotine-water (\textit{Tuibuh}), rice-beer, banana, maize, fish, animal skin etc. are gathered and placed on a mat. The priest then sprays a mouthful of \textit{Zu} (wine) on these edibles and chants incantations. The priest then asks the sick man to spit into the edibles that were placed before him and then, throw it away. The idea is that the sick man spit out the \textit{Kaose} into the gourd-spoon or on the mat that is lying before him”\(^{29}\).

(II). \textit{Sagojon}: After \textit{Saphephou} sacrifice the second stage of ceremony to be performed is \textit{Sagojon}. Two posts are erected on the left and right sides of the village foot-path. These two posts are joined together by a wooden frame called \textit{Jol} which is to be decorated by feathers of a cook and edibles items like
meat, rice, salt, chili, rice-beer, banana, maize etc. which are inside a container (Pocha) which is hung. In addition, a black chicken is killed and tied on the frame where the edibles are hanging.

(III). Khengsum Lhah: The rite is, in fact, an attempt made to kill the Kaose, who is believed to be the cause of the illness of a sick person. They believed that if Khengsum Lhah is performed to a Kaose, the latter would either die or be wounded. So, Khengsum Lhah is the last weapon used by the Thempu against Kaose, when the first two rites, i.e. Saphephou and Sagojon fail to produce any positive result.

2. Household Rituals:

1. Indoi Sacrifices: The word Indoi literally means ‘house-magic’ and is the name given to the deity of individual household. It is, therefore, a family deity, though community is invited to take part in various phases of its activities, when a particular man performs Indoi worship. Here, active participation, besides the performer, is the priest who officiates
in the ritual ceremony concerning the religious aspects of the rites. The *Tucha, Becha*, the *Village Chief, Wife* and relatives of the performer are actives in so far as the fulfillment of the individual social role is concerned. Each house-holder has its own *Indoi*. It serves the whole family so long as the members all live under one roof, but on separation new *Indoi* may be made. There is no fixed time for this and it is usually done when a separate household feels that it is suffering from a lack of health or of wealth and they believe that *Indoi* may be the cause. Thus, in making a new *Indoi* the *Thempu* plays an important part. The various ingredients that make the paraphernalia of the components in *Indoi* Institution are:

(a). *Doikhom* or *Sekon* (a young *Se* tree to hang *Indoi*) – On the yearly atonement day called ‘*Hun*’ everyone is busy with this ritual, which was much like the ritual of the first time induction of *Indoi*. “A young se tree of about six feet with a branch of one-foot length kept intact just below the top juts out at approximately at forty-five degree from its stem is erected in front of the house”\(^{30}\). “This young se tree is to be a healthy one
without any trace of worms infesting it.”\textsuperscript{31}

(b). \textit{Vomgui} (a wild creeper of the grape family) – This creeper called \textit{Vomgui} is used to bind the \textit{Indoi} bundle to the \textit{Doikhom} or \textit{Se-kon}. The selection of this creeper rope was as usual eulogized in the incantation. In terms of durability as a rope it may be average. “The fruit is undoubtedly one of the best in taste among wild fruits. What is amazing is that its stem remains juicy inside even though the outer skin looks dry. Moreover, it possesses medicinal quality.”\textsuperscript{32}

(c). \textit{Se-boh} (A se branch with thick foliage) – the exceptional thick foliage found in the \textit{se} tree add a particular quality to the symbol making activity of their religious system. “Moreover, the \textit{se} tree was a cosmic tree or world tree for them because of its extreme utility.”\textsuperscript{33}

(d). \textit{Gopi-tul} (a goad made from gopi) – \textit{Gopi-tul} also called \textit{Chon-tul}, is an implement for killing the Mithun or pig especially if they are for rituals. \textit{Chon-tul} is not made as and when one wishes but has to be obtained from \textit{u-pa} (elder brother per genealogy). To make one without the knowledge of the \textit{u-pa} is
to sever relationship and the same applies if the \textit{u-pa} denies \textit{chon-tul} to the \textit{nao-pa} (younger by genealogy).

(e). \textit{Go-boh} (a branch of bamboo leaves) – A branch of \textit{gopi} leaves along with \textit{se-boh} was tied to the \textit{doikhom} while \textit{Indoi} was hung on it for three days. The historical reason for including \textit{gopi} leaves was the same as given above. \textit{Gopi} is cultivated at home and is different in various aspects from those that grow in the forest. The trunk has minimum humps in the knobs and therefore more handy for various implements. It has more shoots than other tree species during the sprouting season. The foliage in the \textit{gopi} is thicker than other bamboo species, and most importantly, \textit{gopi} does not die in the flowering year when all others bamboo species wither.

(f). \textit{Ah-Kang Mul} (feather of a spotless white cook) – On the \textit{Hun} occasion the \textit{Indoi} bundle was taken down from its original place and hung on the \textit{Doikhom}, which was then meticulously decorated with feathers of a white cock that had no single spot. “The worn out ones of the preceding year were removed and new feathers were pasted with the help of wax. With the
agricultural year beginning a fresh commitment to Chungmangpathen represented by the Indoi was proclaimed, accompanied at the same time by prayers for blessings for the ensuing days of the year.”

The three occasions when Indoi is invoked are: the first time induction of Indoi for a new household, second – the annual re-enactment day known as Hun, third – the occasional therapeutic rituals when Indoi is taken down from the original place called Sutkhom which is the main pillar of a house in the middle row which has to be a se tree for the occasion. In the events of sickness in the family, preparation is made for a ritual involving a sacrifice of a pig or Mithun. “On this occasion the Indoi is taken down from its original place, hung on the Doikhom (sacred post) until all the necessary and obligatory rituals are performed. The prayer offered on this occasion is the same as those on the other two occasions, except that on this occasion there is a prayer also for the recovery of the ailing person. When an illness besets one or more of a family the
Indoi is meticulously inspected so as to determine what sacrifice is required."\(^{35}\)

Components of Indoi- Various articles are put together from animals and vegetation in a certain manner of reasoning that gives shape to, not only the Indoi proper but also to the paraphernalia surrounding the institution. The fact that they were influenced by their environment is best reflected in the procurement of components of Indoi.

(a). "VohpiMaikem (a slanted skull of a mother pig)- It is a myth appertaining to God’s command that this particular animal be used. Pig is a domestic animal that is easily reared and its life-span is comparatively short apropos to other domestic animals like the bovine, canine or hircine. Among the domestic animals porcine is found to be the most fecund and therefore easily available for any ritual requiring the slaughter of animals. Many rituals requiring animal slaughter have to fall back on the pig which in course of time developed into the norm."\(^{36}\) The skull of the mother pig thus selected for Indoi should be a slanted one, which in other words means, to
procure one that has been reared for many years. The longer
the animal lived the more slanted its forehead become and such
animals were the most sought after. But in practice it was no
easy task for each and every one to procure such a perfect
specimen. Therefore for performing the ritual, any female pig
skull is used but for the incantation the skull used has to be a
slanted one.

(b). Kelchal Ki Kiheh (a twisted horn of a he-goat) - The goat
played a very important role in their socio-religio-cultural life. A
goat can be used as a substitute for the Mithun, which is more
expensive and not easily procurable for a poor family. In
addition, the preferred part for Indoi was no ordinary horn but
the curled one, which meant that it had to be procured from a
he-goat grown to maturity.

(c). Um Cha (small gourd)- In olden days when there were
no metal utensils available the ripe gourd with its outer skin was
left to harden and used as a household utensils. The gourd after
its interior was thoroughly cleaned served as a very durable
container, and this quality must have influenced the people to
use the gourd for religious purposes as well.

(d). **Gopi Chao** (Bangle made from Gopi)- Bangle is an ornament highly esteemed in their socio-cultural life. Possession of bangles symbolized prosperity of a family. The bangle made from brass would be a very expensive commodity for each household to own. Only the wealthy had such a rare commodity in their possession. Hence, the substitute bangle for **Indoi** was made from a peeled **Gopi**, which is made in such a manner as to resemble one.

(e). “**Chemkol** (Knife made from Gopi)- The same logic of a metal knife being applied as a substitute was used as bangle. The knife is an indispensable implement in the household for performance of all kinds of chores. It was not only a weapon used for defensive purposes, but its indispensability was the main reason for being included as a component of **Indoi**. The importance of the knife cannot be over-estimated as they were living at a time when the land had not been hesitated and was teeming with foes. It’s used was also necessitated by the prevalence of continuous tribal feuds. So, protection from wild
animals, human foes as well as unseen foes occupied their minds.”

(f). “**Teng** (A spear made of Gopi)- in the same manner, in the incantation of **Indoi** it was a spear made from **Kol**, (Myanmar) that was preferred because of its durability. But it was rare and hard to obtain, so a substitute made from **Gopi** was used. Spear also constituted an indispensable defense implement used for hunting as well.”

(g). **Miluh/Pothul/Pocha** (a small Basket made from bamboo) - the utility of each of these three is of the same nature, all of which are in their own way indispensable as a household utensil. Whichever one may be the original basket it has to be made from strips of **Gopi**. “Here again the rationale for its inclusion can be deduced from the following: i). the item plays an important role in household management, and ii). It is made from the sacred **Gopi**.”

(h). **Khaopi** (a cord made from a fiber tree called **Khaopi**) – **Khaopi** is a wild fiber tree species whose cortex is intertwined to make ropes of various kinds. For binding the **Indoi**
components about nine Lams (a lam measures the length of the fingertips of the left and right hands stretched straight at the shoulder level) are prepared. When the right length is achieved the Khaopi rope is used to bind each component to the other and to the spike made from Gopi called Gopi-Tul.

2. Hun Ceremony: Having placed an Indoi in each household the annual re-enactment ceremony known as Hun is observed. No precise date was fixed for this, but usually it fell at the time between the month of May and the beginning of June. The Thadou-Kuki being Jhum cultivators determined the dates of their ceremonies and rituals in relation to their agricultural calendar. The occasion was very important in religious terms but was also a time of merriment and festivities. Wine and other delectable items are especially prepared for the occasion. The healthiest piglet was kept aside and reared, slaughtered on this occasion and a blameless white cock too completed requirement. Having instituted an Indoi each household regularly observed the annual re-enactment ceremony known as Hun. No precise date was fixed for this, but usually fell at the
time between the month of May and the beginning of June. Being a Jhum cultivator determined much of their ceremonies and rituals in relation to their agricultural activities. Hun was fixed at the time when paddy sown on the Jhum field sprouted out from the ground, which in their terminology is called Changnel Kai Phat. The induction and re-enactment of Indoi last for three days accompanied by feasting, singing and dancing throughout the night. Particularly dances such as Lamkol, Jangte Lam were performed in the courtyard of the person who performed Hun. Children would visit their maternal uncle to partake of the feast especially prepared for them, taking along with them gourd Jars filled with wine. In addition, this is a time of gaiety and jollity; they dance and sing in celebration to be at their maternal places and performed a dance called KhupSonte Lam.

3. Daiphu Ritual; after a field has been harvested and then the sable burnt, Daiphu is performed. For this the Thempu has to make small earthen images of the following:

Saipi Ha Som (Ten Elephant’s teeth)


So’long Nupa (Slaves)

Vengke (Patridge)

Thoche (Squirrel)

Sel Lim Som (Ten Mithun)

Khichang Som (Ten pieces of ear beads)

Dahcha Lim Som (Ten gongs)

Together With these he takes an egg and some cotton and goes to the field and asks Pathen to forgive the cultivator for all the damage he has done to the field by reaping the harvest and burning the stubble of the land. All the objects are then placed below the tree near the field-shed Called ‘Lou Buh’. In the middle of the circle, a kind of bamboo called ‘Laothe’ is put to which the following herbs are tied by a creeper called ‘Vomgui’.

(I). Daikham

(II). Chonbeh

(III). Luonglao.

“The Thempu then returns to the village. The next day no activity is performed but the day after that the Thempu
goes to the field to see whether the objects which were placed there were still as he left them. If the images are missing or broken it meant that someone of the household would either die or suffer an illness as *Pathen* considers the damage done to the fielders excessive. Consequently *Kilhalho* will be performed in the village to ward off any ill effects which may be expected from the *Thempu’s* interpretation of the *Daiphu*.

4. “*Chang Nungah Poh* (Paddy Deity); this is a kind of paddy that is grown sparingly in the field. These paddy plants never sprout flowers or fruits. People believed that this variety of paddy helped increase the fertility of the soil, and also augmented production. When such paddy plants grow in the midst of other paddy plants, they are carefully preserved, even after the harvesting as they believed that it is a sign of prosperity and good fortune. This particular paddy plant grows very rarely. If by chance such a plant grows, it is reverently treated and certain rituals are observed in order to appease the ‘Deity’ in charge of paddy, such paddy is called *Chang Nungah* and it is worshipped.”
5. “The Ancestor Sacrifice;” the sacrifice performed to the Ancestor-god is a part of the household rites, and it is of two kinds. One is the annual sacrifice offering of a pig, the other is the sacrifice of a Mithun. The main objective behind performing such sacrifices is to seek the generous beneficence of the ancestor Gog and to appease the spirits of the dead or else they may call down malignant spirit of illness on the family members who have not propitiated them. The rite of ancestor sacrifices involves animals, cereal offering and Jupi (rice-beer) offering. The preparation for these offerings needs some ritual services. The rite demands the participation of household councils that consists of ‘Tuchas’ and ‘Bechas’. The sacrificial rite of ‘Pu-Sa’ (appeasement of ancestor spirit) ritual is to be performed at night in the innermost of the house belief to be a sacred place (the sacred place covers the space between the main post called ‘Sutpi’ and the back post; where common people are not allow to enter. The animal to be sacrifice is taken out from its den. After being cleansed, it is brought in and place by the main post called ‘Sutpi’. The priest after saying his ritual
prayer, kill the animal (usually a pig) by piercing below the left armpit, aiming at the heart with a sharpen instrument called ‘Satul’ (bamboo spike). The carcass is then cut into pieces in accordance with the customs and boiled. The organ part of the lung, heart, kidney, intestine, etc. are boiled in the innermost of the house, which is specially meant for the household councils, the priest and chief of the village. While the remaining meats are boiled in the family hearth, this is for the people who come to participate in the ritual.”

6. Chon: This festival or ritual considered auspicious and everything concerning it has to be done seven times. 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 corpses had to be carried around in, Shang-Lai (a litter constructed with bamboos bound together to make a kind of make-shift platform on which the deceased could be laid) 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 premier seat in Mithikho and ensured eternal happiness.

7. Tolso Rituals: Those who have done and accomplished the series of the feasts of merits become Tolso. To achieve this status was not easy as feast of merit were a great incidence on income as they involved a fairly large number of religious rites to be performed prior to the ceremony, each of which entailed heavy expenditure. The various feasts of merits that a person performed before he became a Tolso were, Sa Ai, Gal Al, Chang Ai, Chon. Tolso- the term literally means to pass through lengthy and elaborate rituals to undergo a vigorous test of self-abstinence, social restraint, personal purification etc. Thus, a man has to attain the ritual status of purification by stages of ritual performances as it refers to a person’s preparedness to perform Sa Ai or Chang Ai. The prospective candidate conveys his/her intention to concerned persons (priest, chief, u-pa etc.) through his becha. Then the becha made a formal announcement called
‘Tolso Ding Kigo’. Thereafter, the man and his wife had to undergo a vigorous test of self-abstinence, social restraint, personal purification etc. The ritual was carried out in three different stages. The first stage- the ‘Tolso Ding Kigo’ involved setting up a separate hearth close to the main pillar of the house- sutpi (this pillar is procured from se tree as it symbolizes a cosmic tree for them, because of its extreme utility). A spotless white cook for prognostic sacrifice (sacrificial ritual which had been planned before) and a new and yet unused wine jar are other materials required for this ritual. The ritual lasts for one day during which time the candidate undergoes various disciplinary norms and dietary abstinence. The spouse also joins in the ordeal but on less stricter scale. In the second stage, the becha of the family informs the Thempu of their intention to proceed with the self-purification rites to attain purity physically, mentally and spiritually. The thempu then advises the becha to arrange one spotlessly white cook and one growing pig (vohgol) for the occasion, these are arranged and slaughtered. This killing of the cook and pig was done in the
inner portion of the house where the carrying out of the ceremony are kept confined. The Zu meant for the man and wife is served from the same jar of Zu kept pure and clean on the very first day of the Tolso ritual. “They prepare a big jar of Zu called Belpi Zu was prepared then the Tucha (when an ego marries the daughter or sister or aunt of a man he earns the relationship of his children and becomes the ‘Tucha’ of his in-laws. If an ego has to perform a social, economic, religious or political duty, the Tucha is to be found at his back and call to do all the essential services)” and Bepa offered the Zu ‘Sunggao’ (maternal uncles) of the individual as an invitation. Thus, in response to such invitation from Tucha the Sunggao would contributed chicken, dry fish, dry meat etc for the ritual. At the close of the third day, the Tucha and Bepa will come and offer a jar of Zu called Belbing. They will invite the Priest who declares the consecration period of the three days as closed with a dedication which is known as ‘Thenso’. Then the Priest declares the individual as purified. In the third stage- an important feature is the erection of sekon (a se tree of about six
feet with a branch of about two feet kept intact) in front of the house. Thus, this symbolizing the completion of the preparatory rituals and his/her readiness to perform *Sa Ai* or *Chang Ai*.

3. *The Communal or Village Rites:*

   (a). *Aikam Ritual;* Aikam is a kind of village ceremony performed by the village *Thempu,* when any rumors or news comes of any fatal epidemic like, cholera, typhoid, etc. that has taken its toll in neighboring villages. The idea behind performing this ceremony is in fact, to block or resist the spread of this fatal epidemic in the village. The *Aikam* ritual is both mandatory as well as propitiatory.

   (b). *Khopi Changlha Kou;* The ceremony of *Khopi Changlha Kou* is normally held in the month of may, when the sowing of seeds of paddy in the jhum fields are over. The animal to be sacrificed in this ritual must be a full grown pig, and the ceremonial rites are to be held at the residence of the *Haosapu* (Chief). The day of *Changlha Kou* is observed by the entire village as taboo, called *Khopi Zechang.* No one is allowed to
enter or leave the village. Everyone of the village must be gathered at the residence of the Chief, drinking and singing takes place throughout the day.

(c). “Salha Kou; The ceremony of Salha Kou ritual is performed once in a year. The animal to be sacrificed must be a blameless cock of any color, to be donated by the chief of the village. The ceremonial rites are officiated by the village priest. Eventually, the main sacrificial service of Salha Kou ritual is performed in the evening after sunset. The priest, with a cock in his hand sits under the scared post called ‘Doikhom’, which is erected in front of the Chief’s house. Then, he throttles the cock which is to be sacrificed, and calls upon the soul-spirit of all the known animals. The Thempu likewise saying “All you beasts of the world and flying game taste this Ju, it is much better than any Ju you all will ever have, so came here for it when you are thirsty.” By this it is meant that they will be enticed to come to that village and the hunter will kill them all.”
(d). Khopi Doilha; This is sending-off or setting free of the unseen evil-spirits, who are supposed to be in the village. It is a kind of village purification service performed once in a year by them in every Thadou-Kuki village. It is believed that illness of all kinds is caused by the evil-spirits called ‘Thilhas’. Ceremonies are to be performed to appease them and to request them to leave the village. The ceremony is to be officiated by the village Priest called ‘KhoThempu’ on behalf of the entire village.

(e). Khopi Changkut; On the arrival of this auspicious day the village Priest along with the village elders goes to the outskirt of the village called ‘Khomoul’ and performs a village purification service called Khopi Thenso Na. On the very spot where the ritual of purification is to be held, the priest then throttles a cock. After the arrival of the Thempu at the residence of the Haosa Pu, who first commences the sucking of the ready-made rice-beer that is in the jar, through a pipe called Don (it is made out of bamboo). The priest declared that, whosoever observed ritual-abstention thereafter was free to eat, drink and freely mix with other people of the village.
(f). “Khongchoi Ceremony: This 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’. Khomol is small hillock near the entrance of the village from the main road. It is very important in the village life of the Thadou-Kukis, in view of the political, social, economic, religious, significance being attached to it. It is also a place for performing all sorts of rites, like ‘Kithoi’ (appeasement of the evil spirit), and a place for welcoming the guests or a point up to which guest or persons leaving the village on tours area seen off”. After they have assembled, the Priest starts his invocation for appeasement of the; Khomol, called ‘Khomol Lhai’. After propitiations, he sprays a mouthful of ‘Zu’ on the Khomol. This is followed by formation of a circle by the ‘Lom’ members. A pre-selected Youngman for the dance starts brandishing his sword, after which the pre-
selected girls join him in the dance. This is followed by the lom members who form the circle dancing and singing.

“One on the most archaic level of culture, living as a human being in it is a religious act.” 47 “They have a traditional method of controlling supernatural powers or to subordinate them through certain actions of occultism or esoteric practices, rites, ritual and ceremonies or celebrations in accompaniment with offerings’, prayers or sacrifices so as to appease, placate or propitiate in order to enjoy a trouble-free life, having no anxiety or tension. This, in course of time, gradually takes the shape of an institutionalized system of beliefs, rituals or manifestations. With the passage of time, these are handed down from generation to generation and are entrenched into the thickly woven fabric or culture.” 48 “Without being an exception to this pre-modern worldview, their attitude to life as a whole may be seen as fully religious in nature. With this at the backdrop, Indoi symbolism as encompassing such diverse activities as social, culture, economic and political aspects of the Thadou-Kuki. It has been rightly noted that the institution of Indoi can be
considered the distinctive mark of their society.”

It stands for their very being and serves as the visible identification mark of their existence as a people. That being so the Indoi institution also determined one’s position in the social structure. For instance, anyone intending to induct an Indoi has to acquire the prior permission of the father or eldest brother of the family (U-Pa) in case the father is deceased, which was rarely refused. This ensured that the person concerned became a part and parcel of the community with an assigned place in the social structure. The institution was a constant reminder of this fact. The social norms thus impugned and were transformed into religious obligations and vice versa. It duly instituted in conformity with social demands by given topmost priority, and can even be considered as more efficacious from the point of view of the homo religious’ perception. One important part of the institution of Indoi was the recitation of the genealogical tree of the performer in full, beginning from the mythical progenitor Chongthu or Dapa down to the present inductee. They were most terrified to be cut off from their line of
ancestors and being labeled as bastard. There was no other occasion more sacred and dignified than to proclaim one’s legitimate standing in society by reciting ancestral names during the institution of Indoi. In a way it was a proclamation of one’s ethical purity and a commitment to be so in the days to come before Chungmangpathen (Supreme God) was concretized in the Indoi symbol.

The festivities mentioned above would be greatly strengthened when we considered the paraphernalia of the yearly embellishment of the symbol on the great Hun days. The occasion was one of a new beginning in terms of the Jhuming agricultural cycle. The religious significance may never have been extirpated but surely, it was a great social occasion of feasting and merry making. Wine was especially prepared for this occasion to last three days. The piglet set apart the previous year and reared throughout the year would be slaughtered for the feast. The elderly ones of the village would visit each household in-group tasting wine, till the last household was reached. There would be a good deal of competitions as to who
procured the best wine and provided the best feast. In this way, the whole atmosphere throughout the three days duration was an ambience of gaiety filled with dancing and singing. Their religion provided a system of morality that established right from wrong, good and appropriate from bad or inappropriate behavior. Just as with Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc, children growing up in the religious tradition were similarly acquainted with the precepts of religion. Like all world religions, rituals are important to their religions. Rituals are cultural or religious ceremonies that celebrate or commemorate specific events that have deep religious significance. Rituals serve to reinforce important religious beliefs through meaningful activities that bring comfort or joy and thus strengthen the unity of the followers of the religious tradition. Rituals are often associated with important human events: birth, marriage, death, planting, harvest and hunting.
Notes and References


5. William Shaw, op. cit., p. 76.

6. T.S. Gangte; op. cit., p. 142.


25. D.Sonkhojang Haokip, *op. cit.*, P. 114


35. Baite, Onkhothang, Moreh, Chandel District, Manipur, interviewed on the 2nd November 2011


37. Pu. Tongkholun Haokip of Chahsat, Manipur, October 28, 2012, state that in olden days when metal implements are hard to obtain, spear and knife made from Gopi were used for hunting as well as for defense.


44. *Ibid.*, p. 48
47. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest, op.cit.* p. 35