CHAPTER IV
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
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Religion or belief in some supreme power and its process of appeasement is an important part of society. Apart from the economy, polity and science, every society has its own religious activities. Man is not only a social animal, but also a spiritual being. The institution of religion is permanent as well as universal. It is found in every society in past and present.¹ Scholars define religion in different ways. The *Penguin Dictionary of Religions* states that a general term used to designate all concepts concerning the belief in god(s) and goddess(es) as well as other spiritual beings or transcendental ultimate concerns,² while the *Britannica concise Encyclopaedia* defines that religion as the relation of human beings to god or the gods or to whatever they consider sacred or in some cases merely supernatural.³ The famous sociologist Emile Durkheim defines it thus: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden. Beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them."⁴ There are different religions in the world namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc., while the religion of the tribes of the world is known as Animism or Totemism. The religion of the Hrangkhols is called *Sonong* by them. The features of the Hrangkhol religion are similar with animism rather than Hinduism, while the traditional followers of the Hrangkhols claim to be Hindus. The socio-religious activities of the Hrangkhols are strictly adhered to in their day-to-day activities within the bounds of their own

³ *Britannica concise Encyclopaedia*, online, 2006, p. 123.
community. Scholars term animism as a power of religion. However, both ‘animism’ and ‘primal’ do not precisely define the religion of the Hrangkhols, even the characteristics of the Hindu religion are also not seen fully in the traditional religion of the Hrangkhols. Certain Hindu theological ideas such as Samsara, Dharma, Karma, and Moksha are not found in the traditional religion of the Hrangkhols. Hinduism follows the theory of caste or Varna system which is absent in the Hrangkhol society. The philosophy of salvation of soul is not in the Hrangkhol concept of religion and they believe that the soul rests in Mithikhua (like heaven) or abode where there is no presence of their gods and goddesses. Moreover, there are separate Mithikhua for the common people and the Ochai and Deipu. Hindu concept of heaven is quite different from the Mithikhua of the Hrangkhols. One of the important features of Hinduism is the importance of the Brahmin priests, which is not relevant in the Hrangkhols religion. Here any one of their community members can be Ochai (priest) if he receives mandate from god. There are also similarities of Sonong with Hinduism such as belief in one supreme god that is Sung Pathian like Hindus believes in Lord Bishnu, there are examples of animal sacrifices in Hinduism and it also practiced by the Hrangkhols. The Hrangkhols worship several natural phenomena like water, river, storm, sun, moon etc., which are also a part of the Hindu religious beliefs, and the Hindus worshipped the Sun and moon, they believed that the river Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati to be holy rivers, at the same time river Brahmaputra is also regarded as the son of the God Brahma. Ochai (priest) plays a significant role in Hrangkhols traditional religion just as the Brahmin priest Hinduism. However, the main characteristics of the Hinduism i.e. Caste or Varna system, belief in samskara, dharma, karma and moksha, tapa, yajna and

5 M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Orient Black Swan Pvt. Ltd 2013 (2009), p.3
6 Interview with Khumnei Thoi Bangkheng of village Rekho, aged 75 years, follower of traditional religion and in traditional religious custom, dated, 17-12-2012.
idol worship etc. do not form a part of the Hrangkhols *sonong* so the Hrangkhols are not Hindu. Therefore, the Hrangkhols traditional religion may be said to be a type of Animism. E.B. Taylors defines animism as 'the doctrine of the souls and beliefs in the spirits and souls both of man and animals'.\(^7\) According to *A.C.Kapur*, animism is a natural phenomenon, which could not be easily understood.\(^8\) Different aspects of nature such as thunder, rain, wind, stars and other natural phenomena beyond human comprehension were regarded as having natural powers. Thus, the natural phenomena became the objects of worship, and this worship is termed as animism.\(^9\) Because of the fear of different natural phenomena, the Hrangkhols worshipped them. Ignorance about nature increased this fear and to appease the anger of the gods and goddesses, who they believed, were responsible for the phenomena, sacrifices were made. Animals and birds like *Mithun*, (wild cow) goat, pig, and fowl were offered as sacrifices. It was fear of the wrath of the gods, which appears to be the primary cause for their sacrifice. The Hrangkhols being animists believed in a future state of retribution, and a plurality of gods and spirit. They affirm that these gods or spirits have equal power. Animals, fowls and liquor called 'Zu' are offered in sacrifices on all occasions whether sickness, famine or other affliction, they conceive sacrificed offerings as the surest method of averting evil and to fulfil their wishes and hopes. The value of the sacrifice varies according to the status of the gods and goddesses. As the Hrangkhols have no written text, or Holy Scripture, the oral traditions and customs are accepted as holy and authoritative for the faith and practice of the people. These oral customs have been carefully preserved and transmitted intact from one generation to another to this day. Another important aspect

\(^8\) Ibid, page.32.
\(^9\) Ibid, page.32.
in animism is the idea of life after death, which the Hrangkhols believes in. However, according to H. Risely, ‘no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between Hinduism and animism.’ As there are many practices that reveal similarity among Hinduism and animism, to him Hinduism is animism more or less transformed by philosophy or magic tempered by metaphysics. Therefore, the religion of Hrangkhols could be defined as a traditional religion or Sonong in the Hrangkhol language instead of animism or Hinduism.

The traditional religion of the Hrangkhols as mentioned earlier called Sonong. According to their legends this religion was first introduced by the doithoi (sorcerers) named Siangsiangkha and Olongkha who considered themselves as God’s representatives as well as gods. They taught the Hrangkhols all the religious beliefs and practices. Henceforth their religion was called Sonong. There is no religious ‘guru’ or teacher to preach their religion like the other religion of the world here i.e. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and others. One of the unique features of the Hrangkhols’ religion is that they have no permanent image of their deities. The place of worship is called Bojol or Boljol which is an open place near a running water source. There is no separate space for worship but they simply selected a place at anytime, anywhere, according to the needs of the pujas and sacrifices, but it should be in the eastern direction of the house or the village.

The origin of the Hrangkhols religion is quite obscure. As a tribe, they have followed a religion based on nature. They revere the different aspects of nature as their

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11 Interview with Songbunggril of Michikhur village, age 71 years, followers of traditional religion, dated 22 February 2010.
12 Interview with Menbuangthoi Chorai of village Rekho, age 58 years, followers of traditional religion, dated 17-12-12.
god such as -the forest, river, hill, trees, air, sky, dawn, midnight etc., in the form of different gods and goddesses. In the absence of written records, legends and hearsay are the only sources from which one can reconstruct their religious beliefs and practices.

According to hearsay, the Hrangkhols used to worship only Surjuma and Laijuma (sun and moon) in the past. After a long time their civilisation changed and the people were not satisfied with their old religious beliefs and wanted to change and this was conveyed to a man named Angkara who vanished after hearing their wishes. Immediately after this occurrence two strangers came to the Hrangkhol settlement. The strangers shouted for help to cross the river that was flowing on the border of the Hrangkhol village. The villagers helped them in crossing the river through a raft made of banana trunks. The strangers introduced themselves as Singsingkha and Olongkha, and the two villagers who came forward to help them were known as Lungpui and Nelpui. In due time, Singsingkha and Olongkha taught the villagers a new path of worship and various kinds of pujas. The two persons had the knowledge of diseases, and asked the patients to offer pujas and sacrifices in the name of different gods and goddesses and said that they would be cured. Before the retreat of the Singsingkha and Olongkha from the Hrangkhol village, they tested the villagers to determine how much they had learnt the art of pujas and sacrifices by the help of 'Khema' pair of leaf of 'songrom' tree.

A man from Dumkar clan passed the course of priesthood and they declared him as the parentage of priest of the Hrangkhol community. After it, Singsingkha and Olongkha vanished from the banks of the river from where the villagers had helped them to cross the river to the village. Moreover, the two people are also known as Vangchung and

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13 Interview with Thirsuoathoi Hrangkhol, of village Dolaichunga, age 62 years a traditional religious follower, dated, 5-7-12.
14 Interview with Hakthangthoi Hrangkhol of village Zion, age 59 years, knowledgeable person in traditional religion, dated 23-2-13.
Vanglengor meteors of the Sky and the religion taught by them is known as ‘Sonong’ and this has continued till today.\textsuperscript{15}

The Hrangkhols believe in the existence of one supreme god whom they called the Chungpathian (high god). Besides, Chung Pathian they recognise, the existence of 17 (seventeen) Gods and Goddesses called ‘Chung Pathian Somhleisari’. The Hrangkhols believe in three prime Gods Lambra is their chief god or creator and it is necessary to offer prayers to him to start any pujas or sacrifice and work. Golarai is the god of death and the third deity is Dudukal who occasionally causes sickness when offended but generally he works for the welfare of mankind.\textsuperscript{16} Dudukal has a wife named Fapite, who is the Goddess of crops. Besides these, many other of gods and goddesses possess good and evil powers. Like some of the primitive religions, there is no god of war. Benaiki is a minor god who keeps guard over all property. There are about twenty two gods and goddesses popular in the community some of whose attributes are discussed in the following sections:

Baliraja is a male god with benevolent character. His followers regard him as the first god who is ready to give whatever is demanded. There is no specific place to worship him but it should be the eastern corner of the house or the village. The priest and the followers imagine him without any image and when they believe that the god Baliraja has arrived, immediately the puja starts. It is believed that this god comes to the bojol (the place of the puja) with a great Simhasan\textsuperscript{17}. To satisfy Baliraja with the pronouncement of the mantra by the Ochai, sacrificing of an animal and a bird is compulsory. For sacrifice, at least one white goat, hen or cock (more than one,) white or

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Darsuiril Hrangkhol of Lungkhok Village, age 78 years, follower of traditional religion, and regarded one of the repository of their traditional customs and religion, dated-17 December 2012.
\textsuperscript{16} Sopitt. C.A. A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribe, Firma-KLM Pvt Ltd, 1893, Page.-12
\textsuperscript{17}Simhasan means the throne of the god.
red is necessary; sometimes pig is also offered for sacrifice. Zu (traditional rice beer) is important for every occasion of puja and festival, as zu is offered to the god.

*Balong raja* is another god imagined as the rainbow with benevolent character. The process of *Balong raja* worship is almost same as that of *Bali raja* but this puja performed individually for the fulfilment of the individual or the family’s desires. The Hrangkhols believed that ‘crab’ is a favourite dish of god *Balong raja* and he searches for it in the form of Rainbow.

The entire community worships *Chempiri*, the god of wealth, together and individually. This god is invoked for the fulfilment of wealth and prosperity and regarded as the son of *Bali raja*. It is necessary to worship *Chempiri* at the time of worship of *Bali raja*. *Meitika* is another form of *Chempiri* and worshipped separately.

*Dudukal* also known as *Chem-Dukal* is a male god with the power of sickness and welfare. It is believed that if the god *Dudukal* or *Chem-dukal* is offended then he may cause illness. The deity is known by different names among the different Hrangkhols clans.

*Sri Bukundrai* or *Jukundrai* also known variously as *Lam Jukarte* or *Lam-Parakate* is the god of land, a male god worshipped by the Hrangkhol with two names. To worship this god, sacrifice of one white goat, a pair of fowls and eggs is needed. They believe that the fertility of the land depends upon the wishes of *Sri Bukundrai* or *Jukundrai*. *Sr Kotor* or *Sr Kolarai* is a powerful god regarded as the god of anger. It is believed that he can give a lot if he is satisfied and he can change one, to a beggar from a rich men if he so desires, so he is worshipped with a great deal of fear and honour.

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18 Interview with Present *Kabur* of Dima Hasao District *Halam* of Lungkhk village, age 63 years, dated, *Kabur* is regarded as one of the expert person of their traditional customs and religion, dated, 7-1-11.
Songma is the goddess of nature, medicine, crops, etc. It is necessary to worship her for a good harvest, using medicinal herbs and before the journey of hunting. The mode of worship is almost similar with the above mentioned gods and goddess except chanting of particular 'mantras' (incantation) and offering 'zu' which is compulsory.

Kalakhi or Naran (Tuirang or Tuipathian- god of rivers) is a very important god for the community. Without the puja of the Kalakhi the marriage, naming of a baby and the rituals of the death are not possible. Sangkuru is another goddess similar to Kalakhi. According to traditional beliefs, the worship of Sangkuru is necessary if Kalakhi is being worshipped and the system of worship is similar to that of Kalakhi.

Teilakhi is a village god, usually worshipped commonly by the community on the banks of the river or any source of water like streams or any other source of running water. It is believed by the community that the god Teilakhi gives wealth and prosperity to the village if regularly worshipped. The Ochai (priest), sacrifices one goat, a pairs of hen or cock, and eggs. Community worship is common in the Hrangkhol society but Teikiphil a powerful god is worshipped individually. The worship of god Teikiphil is an expensive one. It is compulsory to offer a goat, a hen, a pig, eggs and zu to this deity. The place for his puja of god is on the banks of river or at any source of running water. Seberei is regarded as an old god like Lord Brahma of the caste Hindus, and he is the god of creation.

To protect their movable and immovable properties the Hrangkhols worship a god called Beneikia with zu while a hen, a pig and eggs are necessary for sacrifice. The Hrangkhols believed that if god Beneika is satisfied then their property will increase gradually. Meitikia is a god of wealth and regarded as a form of Chempiri. Probishree is
a goddess like *Kali, Durga* or mother goddess of Hinduism, worshipped as a source of fertility and power. She is worshipped in the form of any big stone available at a designated place. After finishing of the *puja* the stone (which was used to be represent the image of the goddess) is thrown into the river. Sacrifice of a goat or a pig, eggs, pair of fowl and *zu* is compulsory for the *puja* of goddess *Probishree*.\(^\text{19}\) *Fapite*, goddess of wealth is worshipped at the time of harvesting. Especially three days before harvesting the elder women of the family collect three sheafs of the paddy on the name of *Fapite* and the worship starts.

Another important god is *Haphairaja* who is regarded as the god of air and controls the air or wind and storm to reward or punish the people. According to the Hrangkhols' traditional beliefs, he releases the storm of destruction for punishment if anybody acts against his wishes. *Haphairaja* blows a wind upon the people who feel tired in the *jhum* or during journey as reward if someone appeases him. *Haphairani* is the goddess with same power and activities and is regarded as the consort of the god *Haphairaja*.\(^\text{20}\)

*Hasong* is the god of nature with evil power who is believed to be a spirit lives in the deep forest and causes diseases in children and women. Also, one may lose ones way or hunting may be fruitless if someone enters the jungle without the proper worship of the god *Hasong*. *Bountangval* or the seven spirit sisters live together and they should be offered *puja* at the same time. It is believed that just by pronouncing their name they will arrive and should be offered *puja* immediately; otherwise they will cause disease to

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\(^{19}\) Interview with Lalphirthang Hrangkhol of village Lungkhok, retired school teacher and regarded as the expert in their traditional customs and religion, age 68, dated 12-07-12.

\(^{20}\) Interview with Tongbounglien Hrangkhol, of village Dolaichunga, age 50 years, a follower of traditional religion, dated 7-1-11.
the person who summons them. Therefore, their names are never mentioned without preparing for their puja. Hmangkainu (spirit) a goddess with bad character usually causes diseases to babies to get puja and lives in the Pipal tree and in big caves.

There are many important pujas performed by the Hrangkhols community to appease or propitiate their numerous deities. Bersi is one of the most important and expensive puja performed by the Hrangkhols. It is purely a family puja and the mode of worship may slightly differ from clan to clan. Bersi is the puja of all the gods and goddesses of the community. It is performed for three days and may even extend up to five to seven days. The feast, zu and sacrifices are necessary on all the days according to the mode of worship of the deity and its power. The first day of the Bersi is call Tuituolar-That. In this puja, a pair of fowl is sacrificed and zu offered to the deities. The second day of the Bersi is known as Sirchuma or Renghai and for this puja a white goat is sacrificed and a pitcher of zu is offered to the deity. The third day is reserved for the puja of Kalagotor or Kolarai and requires the sacrifice of a white goat and a pair of fowl. The fourth day is called Khiengholheai and is reserved entirely for the deity Dudukal or Samdual who is worshipped by the sacrifice of a pig. Every four days eggs are needed for sacrifice. After the puja the flesh of the sacrificial animals and birds are cooked and eaten in the feast arranged for the people present at the puja.21

Bahnarisuk or Khoroi is performed worshipped commonly by the villagers every year before the sowing of the seeds of jhum 22 cultivation and it is offered in the name of Baboi Baliraja for the welfare of the community and a good harvest.

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21 Interview with the Ochai of Lungkhok village, age 52 years, dated, 12 January 13, He is the main Ochai (priest) of Dima Hasao district of Assam.
22 Jhum means shifting cultivation.
**Tuiroi or Tuikel-That puja** is performed once in a year by the villagers in the month of June or July for the good production of the crops. In this *puja*, the god Teilakhi is worshipped, as Teilakhi is the god of water the rituals are performed on the bank of a river. Goat, pig, a pair of hens or cock and eggs, are sacrificed and *zu* is offered to the god. After the *puja* a feast is arranged at the spot.

*Buboi* is another common *puja* performed by the villagers for the protection of the crops from disease. Customarily until and unless the performing of the community *puja* of *Buboi* is complete, no one can perform the *puja* of *Buboi* individually. The process of the *puja* is quite similar with that of the other gods.

*Turpe* is a god of benevolent character who needs sacrifices for worship. A pig, a red fowl and three eggs are offered to this deity. A matured fowl is necessary to worship his son *Sempiri* and three eggs for his wife *Songma*. *Turpe* is worshipped to recover lost goods or for recovery from illness.

*Tuitualar* is a purification *puja* performed on the naming ceremony of a new born baby and offerings are made in the name of the god *Kalakhi and Sangkuru*. The head of the child is shaved on that day by the *Kurma*. This *puja* requires a piece of cloth, fire, rice, eggs and a *dao* (machete). The *Tuitualar puja* is also performed at the death of any person on the next morning of the death in the name of *Kalakhi and Sangkuru*. In this case, a cock or hen and a pot of *zu* are necessary. Entrance of the other family members to this house is restricted until the *Tuituolar puja* is performed.

*Thingtuk zu puja* is performed after thirteen days of the death of a person or at any other convenient date subsequently. To performs this *puja* two numbers of fowl,

23 *Kurma* means midwife, who help at the time of delivery of a child.
eggs and zu is required. The Ochai performs the puja and all the persons associated in the cremation of the deceased are invited to participate in this puja. Apart from these prime pujas, there may be various pujas at any time in individual household as the Hrangkhols are superstitious about the causes of disease, natural calamities, changes with weather etc. Hence, when they suffer from illness and if any other natural untoward incident occurs, immediately they pray to some of their traditional gods according to their traditional system of worship. During any illness the Hrangkhols worship different gods associated with the symptom of illness. If a minor falls ill they worship Bukundrai and in cases of adult, the priest examines the pulse of the patients, and advises them to offer puja to a particular deity.

Apart from their community pujas the Hrangkhols also offers puja to appease their family deities for the welfare of the family members, which are known as simbak. There are a good number of Simbak or Kula Devata like Samrodil, Neirahdil, Simbak-nei (male), and Tuisingden, Meisingden (female). These are akin to the totem deities of different clans. Due to scarcity of adequate numbers of priests the head of the family started to perform the necessary puja to the simbak. Here also the sacrifice of fowl and eggs is common. Normally the community and family pujas are done in the eastern corner of the village and eastern corner of individual houses respectively but simbak puja is always performed at the eastern corner of individual houses. In the worship of some Simbak zu is not offered.\textsuperscript{24} Initially, the snake was worshipped by the Hrangkhols. The Kukis regarded snake as their family god or Simbak. The worship of ancestors is another feature of the Hrangkhol traditional religion. Running water also occupies an important role for any kind of Hrangkhhol puja, if running water is not available then

\textsuperscript{24} Interview with Ochai of Lungkhok village dated 17 November 2012.
they build an artificial drain where flow of water is continued until the completion of the puja.

The worship of Surjuma and Laijuma, was an integral part of tradition of their religious tradition. In the Hrangkhol dialect Surjuma means the Sun and Laijuma means the Moon. According to the oral traditions, the Hrangkhols used to worship only Surjuma and Laijuma in the past. They still believe that before the coming of Singsingkha and Olongkha the founder of their sonong (religion), they worshipped only these two deities, i.e. Surjuma and Laijuma. After the development of the Sonong importance of Surjuma and Laijuma decreased and the worship of new Gods and Goddesses became prominent. However, worship of Surjuma and Laijuma is still practiced on many occasions like Parhrui Lak, Tuolsuokjoro, Choifabai, etc.

Tarpaphak is related with the festival of Roulsaflak. Before the start of the festivities the Kho Ochai (village priest) along with other village elders first bathe and then solemnize the festivals by performing the Tarpaphak where a fowl is sacrificed and a pitcher of zu is offered to Pathian. After the sacrifice, the meat of the sacrificed fowl is cooked with rice. This is known as Nempok, and after then the villagers eats Nempok with zu and the priest inaugurates the festival and declares its purpose to the crowd. The Ochai and other elders remain on a fast until noon. The followers of the ancestor worship do practice in keeping with the religion of animism where fear and superstitious beliefs led to consequential propitiation of spirits. They belief that the spirits of ancestors aided mortals in attaining blessings from Pathian (supreme god), led

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25 Interview with Suialnigir Hrangkhol (67 years) and Songlalthoi Hrangkhol (72 years) dated 22-12-2010.
the Hrangkhols to observe the ancestor worship rituals in their day-to-day lives. The Hrangkhols believe that spirits of the ancestors abound within the premises of the house and also participate in their activities. According to the Thangkim Haolai, there is a marked similarity in the animistic religious practices among the Kuki-Chin group even in the ritual of ancestors worship. In early period all the Kuki-Chin group of tribes practiced ancestor worshipped.

Significantly, the sense of purity is very strong among the Hrangkhols. The birth of a baby is regarded impure for any kind of sacred work. Therefore, the puja for purification of the family is done after nine days for a girl, and eleven days for a boy child. The purification rite after a death is done immediately after one day by performing the Sangkur puja.

The period of menstruation is regarded as impure for religious activities though the woman is allowed to perform other household activities. If the wife of the head of a family is in her menstruation period then the whole family is banned from performing any family pujas during this period. The male partner is also not allowed to participate in any community pujas and other sacred rituals. During the time of the community pujas the priest and his associate are required to abstain from sexual activities.

In the Hrangkhols religion, the place of Ochai is very high and he plays a very important role. Only the Ochai can perform all kinds of pujas. He has knowledge of medicine and also performs the role of a traditional doctor. He is the preacher of the religious ideology, customs, traditions, culture, rites and rituals. He is thus the backbone of the Hrangkhols religion. The role of Deipui (prophet) is also very important in the

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27 Ibid p, 55
Hrangkhols society. Like the Ochai, Deipu is also regarded as the representative of god with power over good and evil. According to their religious beliefs, Ochai and the Deipu are pre-destined from birth to perform these rites. According to their legend both the Ochai and Deipu got the call from god and then they went to the jungle for meditation or some of the activity not known to the general people to acquire the requisite knowledge to be the Ochai and Deipu, from god. Deipu is the more advanced and powerful in this regard than the Ochai. Now a days the person who want to be the Deipu or Ochai are very rare. To be the Ochai or Deipu a person is required to have the knowledge of their customs, taboos, religious rites and finally should also get the call from the Divine to be the Ochai and Deipu.28 The Hrangkhols have strong belief in the deeds of the Ochai. The Ochai is called in times of danger, disease or any other calamity. The people hold the belief that the Ochai can save the life of a man who is on the verge of death. The potent influence of the mantras (chants) and religious deeds lies mainly in propitiating the angry supernatural powers by specific prayer and sacrifices and the Ochai plays an important part. However, at present the numbers of the Ochai is very less compared to the demand for their society. Even if a person is well versed in all the religious knowledge of the Hrangkhols to be the Ochai but fails to get the divine summons he cannot be the Ochai. At the present situation, the paucity of the Ochai, has become a big problem in the performance of the religious rites and pujas. There are only two Ochai (priest) in the entire Dima Hasao District. The Hrangkhols believed that many of them have converted into Christianity mainly due to the shortage of the Ochai.

The Deipu is regarded as the representative of the god with some special powers. According to their beliefs and folk tales in the remote past the Hrangkhols used

28 Deipu means the Prophet.
to communicate with the gods through a prophet called the Deipu. The Deipu acts as an intermediary between man and god. However it takes a lot of trouble to be the Deipu, one should lead an auspicious life from his childhood and abstain from certain food habits and activities. When a person enters into adulthood, the person should go to the jungle to learn the knowledge of god and knowledge of magic. However, it is not known from whom they learn the art of magic or received knowledge.\textsuperscript{29}

Water is also worshipped as a god known as ‘Tuhrel’ and the use of water is very important. Without water no puja is possible and all the pujas should be performed near running water as stated earlier. If not available they should be performed near the artificial ‘nala’ (small drain) where the water is running. Taking bath is compulsory before the performance of any kinds of rituals and religious activity.

Sacrifices and zu play a significant role in the Hrangkhols religious and social activities. From the very beginning of the Hrangkhols religion, the use of ‘zu’ is popular and it seems to be the holy drink that can used at any time and it is necessary to offer to god. Sacrifice is another important feature of the Hrangkhol religion. In every religious activity, sacrifice is necessary, even eggs are sacrificed. To celebrate any festival puja and sacrifices are compulsory in the Hrangkhol society. Besides the feast, offering zu and drinking zu paves the way for performance of social and religious rites. The animals like pig and goat are sacrificed in different kind of pujas and animals like buffalo and mithun (wild cow) are sacrificed in social festivals and feast. Fowl (hen/cock) and eggs are needed in every pujas. There is no instance of human sacrifice in the Hrangkhols religious history.

\textsuperscript{29} Mrs Zirsangpui and Mr. Sonneibul Hrangkhol, \textit{Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi}, (The Folk Tales) Assam Institute Of Research for Tribals And Scheduled Castes. Guwahati, 2010. page 76.
Duality in character of the gods is another unique feature of the Hrangkhol religion. Majority of deities have dual power, character, qualities and name which are quite rare in other religions. As there is no practice of image worship in the Hrangkhol religion, so according to the needs of the clan the name and power of a deity may change along with the mode of worship. When a child is born, a certain rite called the 'naineiirthianga' meaning the purification of birth is celebrated. The name of the baby is given according to the ancestor's name. The ears of the babies are pierced. When the baby grows up another ritual is performed known as 'naitualsua or laibun'. Generally after piercing the ears a thread is tied around the waist of the child and holy words are chanted by the Ochai to prevent the possession of the child by evil spirits.30

The Hrangkhol believes that after death, the irtha (soul or spirit) escapes from the human body and it hovers above the vicinity of the deceased person's village for months. After some months, the soul then goes to 'Mithikhua'(village of dead) where they (souls) live a similar kind of life as on earth. According to their religious belief, the soul has to fight and overcome the spirit of any person whom he might have injured when he was alive. The person killed by animals, especially by the tiger has no place in Mithikhua. They do jhum cultivation, hunting, etc. during the period spent in Mithikhua. For this reason when a man dies, weapons, implements, pottery, cloth and other necessary articles for a man is hurried along with the corpse. When a dead man enter into this area i.e. Mithikhua, it is believed that all the enemies he had killed on earth would attend to him as slaves, and the animals killed by him with his friends during his life in this world would live again as his farm stock. Mithikhua is the abode for the

30. Interview with Lalphirthang Hrangkhol (68 years) & Lalneithang Hrangkhol (52 years), of Village Lungkhok & Zion, dated 29-12-12.
common people, while *Sorpial* is the abode for the *Ochai* and the *Deipu*\(^{31}\). Thus a class status exists among soul even after death.

However like Hindus, the Hrangkhols also have faith in rebirth called ‘*irzirnok*’. It is believed that the soul of a dead return again after a number of years into the body of a new born child, so a little cut mark is made on dead the body before cremation in order to identify him or her in the next birth.\(^{32}\) They also believed that the transformation of souls into other life like insect, goat, dog, etc., may occur. Apart from the worship of gods and goddesses, there are other religious activities related with the Hrangkhols from birth to death.

Table no. 4.1 *The following table shows the beliefs relating Soul after death.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sonong (Traditional)</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immortal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves from one to other being</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

\(^{31}\) *Sorpial* means the separate abode for the soul of *Ochai*, *Deipu* and great men after death.

\(^{32}\) Interview with Joithanglian of Zion, age 63 years knowledgeable person in traditional religion and customs, on 26\(^{th}\) may 2010.
The table no. 4.1 shows that, out of 250 households studied 10 of traditional and 38 of the Christian Hrangkhols or a total of 15% believed that the soul is mortal which is a new concept unlike their traditional beliefs and customs. While 53 (21%) of both Christian and traditional Hrangkhols believe the soul to be immortal and the rest 159 (63%) of them still believed that the soul moves from one life to other i.e. in the transformation of the soul (metempsychosis) like their Hindu neighbours.

Their superstitious beliefs are similar to that of the other traditional religion of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group of tribes. They believe in the power of the thunder bolt and the lightning of the cloud as they are said to give the information of a missing son and mother in ancient times. Deipu was another superstitious power they believed in which is almost similar with that of a witch. However, at present the Hrangkhols do not have any faith in witchcraft. If anyone in a family is suffering from any disease the head of the family approaches the Ochai but never approaches a doctor first.

The beliefs and practices of the Hrangkhol traditional religion are now seen to be disappearing rapidly. The followers of the Hrangkhol traditional religion are now becoming a minority as many Hrangkhols have converted to Christianity and have abandoned their traditional rituals and customs relating to day-to-day life. This trend started in the colonial period (1826-1947) itself. Despite the strong opposition of the followers of the traditional religion, Christianity gradually made inroads into the Hrangkhol society. There were many impediments in the performance of traditional rituals. Moreover, the belief of the Hrangkhols in superstitions and divinity helped in the growth of Christianity. The following table shows the religious faith of the Hrangkhols. Out of 250 household surveyed 70% of the Hrangkhols have already
converted into Christianity and only 30% of them are still following their traditional religious faith or Sonong.

Table no. 4.2 Religious Profile of the Hrangkhols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Religion Affiliation</th>
<th>Percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Sonong (traditional-religion)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, some of the ethnic group of the North East region of India came into contact with Christian missionaries. It was a time of enlightenment through western education and Christianity but it created a cultural crisis. Before the advent of the Christian missionary in this area, the religion and culture of the Hrangkhols and others hill tribes were quite untouched by outside influences. The Gospel of the Christian Church spread among the Hrangkhols of Dima Hasao District from the third decade of the twentieth century.\(^{33}\) A Biate evangelist preached Christianity among them for the first time. In those days they had a firm faith in their own religion and culture. Therefore, they opposed the Gospel and persecuted the converts to Christianity, thinking that this new faith would harm their traditional religion and culture.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Interview with Sumsonlal Hrangkhol at Zion dated 15 October 2011.
After prolonged dedication, a Biate Christian of Vaitang area was successful in propagating Christianity in the Hrangkhols areas. On the eve of 1935, Mr Lalkhosunga worked as an Evangelist at Chuptuk.\textsuperscript{35} Due to his contribution and hard work in 1941 he was appointed as a paid Evangelist-teacher by the Ngaiban Tlang Presbytery where he served until his death in 1951.\textsuperscript{36} As a result, a Hrangkhol namely Suanchungthang of Chupluk village first converted to Christianity in North Cachar Hills District in the year 1935. That was the beginning of the Christianity among Hrangkhols and since then Christianity began to spread over the whole Hrangkhol settlement in the region. The spread of Christianity among the Hrangkhols in Dima Haso district was not uniform throughout the region. Following is a discussion of the spread of Christianity in the different geographical locations namely Dihamlai area, Halflong town area, Dittokcherra area and Harangajao area.\textsuperscript{37}

Dihamlai area is covered with thick forest and Mr. Suangthang, the first Christian from the Hrangkhol community was from Chupluk village of this area. After conversion, Shuangthang was appointed as an itinerant Church preacher in 1936. He preached Christianity with the help of a Biate evangelist throughout the Hrangkhol villages. There was a sudden change in the Chuptuk village when an ardent believer of the traditional religion Mr. Vantuzem converted to Christianity. The reason behind his conversion is that Mr. Vantuz was reportedly, suddenly overcome by a spirit of ecstasy in a certain house where a community singing was being held and he started to dance in an amazing manner. After this, Mr. Vantuz totally gave up opium smoking and drinking wine earlier being totally addicted to both. As a result many others converted to the new

\textsuperscript{35} Biate Kristian Centenary Souvenir 1997, Haflong, 1997, page-16,
\textsuperscript{36} Information collected from Mr. N.C. Thanga of Fiangpui by Sumchonlal Hrangkhol of Zion.
\textsuperscript{37} Souvenir of Cachar Hills Tribes Synod Golden Jubilee, Synod House (1929-1979), Haflong, p, 36.
faith and Vantuze became the first Church elder on 26th January 1957. In 1942 a Church was formed at Chapluk with 30 (thirty) members. This was the first church of the Hrangkhols in this district. Between 1942 to 1954, it was not a full-fledged independent Church but was under the care of the Vaitang Church. In 1954 when the Church of Chapluk village became a full-fledged Church, it was named as Koiindang Indian. From Chapluk, the message of the new religion was carried to the neighbouring villages.

Tangpui was the next village to establish a Church with 15 (fifteen) members under the leadership of Lalripai who had converted in 1949 and the Church was inaugurated by Reverend Morgan a Welsh Missionary in March 1952. In 1959 it became a full-fledged Church. In 1953, Neihrilthang of Buangkuang village converted to Christianity and in 1954, a church was formed at Buangkung with about sixteen members along with a few members of his village and he became the Church elder in 1963. After the establishment of the Church at Buangkung Mr. Khaikhogen started to preach Christianity at Paija village and because of his service, another Church was established at Paija in 1968. Meanwhile in 1966 a Church was established at Loskor under the leadership of Suangkhuplal of Buangkung village. Christianity spread further to the village of Kalimabong and Tuikim. It was said that in 1957, an epidemic broke out at Kalimabong and Tuikim and some people lost their lives. Due to fear, many villagers embraced Christianity. A process of gradual conversion into Christianity is still going on. In Dihamlai area, the villages like Chapluk, Tangpui, Buakongkung, Paija and Loskor are Christian villages while the rest are populated with Christians as well as
non-believers. At present about seventy percent of the population in this area are Christians.38

In 1958, Khimlianzn of Robite or Asiakrobi accepted Christianity in Halflong area which was the district headquarters since the time of independence (1947). After the conversion to Christianity in great numbers in 1958, a church was formed at Robite village.39 After the establishment of the church in Robite Village, preaching was started in the village of Robipui where a Church was formed in 1980 with a few members.40 In December 1969, Mualpong village was established and some of the people started to preach Christianity and in 1983, they formed a full-fledged church. In 1983, the Christian people established a new village named Zion and it became a hub of Presbyterian Christianity of Halflong area with the Pastor’s quarter at Tang Pastorate and Tangram Presbytery. In lower Halflong, there is a village named Lungkhok where the majority of the villagers still follow their traditional religion. Roikhumzing was the first to embrace Christianity in this village. In south Bagetor, a Christian station was formed at Khaihinuai in March 1996.41 In the area of Halflong, about sixty percent of the total Hrangkhol population are Christians, and we find three denominations namely Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Free Church of India and Roman Catholic Ernest42. The Presbyterian Church is the leading denomination.

Dittockcherra lies to the south West of Dima Hasao and it is on the boundary of North and South Cachar. Ralapa introduced Christianity in the Hrangkhol area at Michikhur village. After winning some converts the evangelist Gopzen served there in

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40 Information from Vanbulzem of Mualpong on 25th may 2011.
41 Interview with Lalmisong of Dittakchera, on 24th May 2011.
1952. From 1953 onwards Christianity grew rapidly after a great revival broke out in this area. It was reported that on April 3rd, 1953 at around 6.00 pm, a revival fire of Christianity burned around the campaign place and its reviving spirit overwhelmed the people. Simlalsiak and Simlalnei the two traditional religious followers came under the direct influence of the reviving spirit and started to dance in an amazing manner. As a result, they were converted on the following day. Hence forth Simlalsiak totally abstained from eating *kani* (opium) and drinking *zu* (rice beer) as at that time the use of *zu* was very common. After this news spread many Christians rushed to visit the new souls, exhorted them and some received a new spirit. Through this revival impact, many souls were won for Christ. The incident helped the expansion of Christianity throughout the Dittockcherra area. In course of time a church was formed at Michikhur with sixteen members in 1953. From Michikhur Christianity spread to its surrounding area. The Christians who migrated to the New Michikhur village formed a church in 1974. By 1970 a Roman Catholic Church was also setup at Purana Zoars but some of the members left the Catholic Church and joined the Presbyterian Church in 1974. In this area at present eighty percent of the Hrangkhol population are Christians.

The next Hrangkhol area to convert Christianity is Harangajao, located on the southern part of the Dima Hasao district. In 1953 a church was formed at Dolaichunga because of the so-called revival which has been mentioned earlier. Mr. Thanchunthoi worked as an Evangelist teacher at Dolaichunga area until 1979. However, some of the people came back to their traditional religion. Recently a few of the Hrangkhol people converted into Christianity. The process of the conversion is thus still going on. Some

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43 Interview with Pastor Chumchonlal Hrangkhol at Zion on 23 October 2012.
45 Information collected from Sumchonlal Hrangkhol of Zion dated 22 December 2012.
of them joined the Evangelical Free Church of India, others joined the Independent Church of India and the rest joined the Presbyterian Church of India.

For the Hrangkhols of the Dima Hasao District two options were open. First, the Sanskritization and the second is Christianization as the Christian missionaries had already stepped in this land along with the British rule. The Hindus or the plain people looked down upon all hill ethnic groups as primitive people and they never made any effort to mix with the hill people. Sanskritization would place them under the authority of the dominant Hindu society of the plains but the hills of the Dima Hasao District was quite untouched by the so called Hindu or the plains people except a few who were not sufficient to dominant the larger group of hill tribes. Hence, the theory of Sanskritization cannot be applied to explain the socio-religious changes of the Hrangkhol community. On the other hand, Christianity was more open and attractive to all the hill people due to the adaptability of the foreign missionaries to the local situation. Naturally, the Hrangkhols were attracted to Christianity. The Missionaries also facilitated the new identity; a written language and literature, and means of acquiring skills through education. The missionaries brought an ideology that helped the people to acculturate themselves in the process of modernization. Acculturation is a change, which takes place in a group when it comes into contacts with other groups. The process of modernisation is most commonly approached in terms of economic development. It involves a change from the traditional techniques of production toward the application of scientific Knowledge; in the area of agriculture it is transformation from subsistence agriculture toward commercial production using improved seeds,

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chemical fertilizers, pesticides, tractors, etc. in the area of industries. The process of alien rule of the British brought about an upheaval in the traditional culture of the hill tribes of the Dima Haoas district. The process of cultural change had already begun before the missionaries came. The Hrangkhols had certain religious beliefs such as the concept of the highest God or Sung Pathien. They also believed in the existence of benevolent and malevolent deities. Moreover, the concept of tribal solidarity was prevalent among them. Christianity created an everlasting impact on their beliefs and culture, by introducing a very new view of civilization. F.S. Downs observes that the missionary attitude towards tribal culture can be studied by looking into components of culture, which involve, material, social, aesthetic, religion and linguistic components. All these are closely related in any culture. Therefore, an examination of these same features is required to find out the cultural change and modifications that have taken place among the Hrangkhols of Dima Haoas District.

The traditional culture is generally based on religion and superstitious beliefs. Christianity denied the traditional religious beliefs. Prior to the advent of Christianity, the Hrangkhols had firm faith in their traditional religious practices. It was essential to perform the religious ceremonies like Khuroinei (village puja), purification puja, worship of ancestors etc. The entrance of Christianity had impacted the traditional faith of the Hrangkhols.

While the traditional Hrangkhol religious beliefs has no divisions, preachers or holy scriptures, Christianity has different divisions and a religious book such as the Bible emphasising on one faith, one holy church, etc.

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48 Ibid, p. 47.
49 Frederick S. Downs, Essay on Christianity in North East India, New Delhi, 1994, p.186.
In pre-Christian days, the Hrangkhols strictly preserved their cultural heritage. However, Christianity opposed some of their cultural activities and these were gradually abandoned, for instance traditional naming system, which follows the name of their grandfather or grandmother in order to maintain lineage. Today those who have converted to Christianity are not ready to follow the traditional naming system but follow the western styles of name like John, Abraham, Sheila, Isabel etc.\(^5\) Thus the Hrangkhols have lost their traditional nomenclature and identity. The loss of traditional faith has resulted in the loss of culture. Music, dancing, and singing are the common features of the Hrangkhol culture. However, the preachers of Christianity did not encourage these activities and their gradual disappearance has resulted in the loss of their cultural heritage. After embracing Christianity, people started to disregard their traditional musical instruments like *rosem* (mouth organ), *seranda* (a kind of traditional violin) etc. in favour of western musical instruments. All the legends, myth, and ballads, folk-tales, fables bear the history of the origin and evolution of their community. The Hrangkhols also inherited different kinds of folk songs and dances from preceding generations but now they are not interested in their traditional culture and favour western culture. As a result, the present generation have lost their traditional history and culture. On the other hand, the Hrangkhols have their indigenous handloom and beautiful traditional dresses. Now they have discarded their indigenous dresses and adopted western dresses. Handicrafts like basket making, pottery and other traditional arts and crafts are in the process of disappearance. All of these activities were also environment friendly and economic, but now they have started to disappear due to the modern technological influence, i.e. the use of chairs, tables, pitcher, cups, different

\(^5\) Interview with T.S. Hrangkhol of village Muolpong, date, 22 October 2010.
household utensils etc., made of stainless steel and plastics and modern education especially English education through which the Hrangkhols started to imitate the western lifestyle considering as necessary for English education.

The Hranghols have their traditional marriage system and custom like *Samak* (marriage by service) *Hloman* (bride price) and other rites and taboos. With these practices, people have a sense of community, faith and discipline. As Christianity spread, some of them have discarded the old customs in favour of westernization. Intercommunity marriage is now practiced in the Hrangkhol society which has resulted in changes in the ethnic culture of the Hrangkhol.

The traditional religion of the Hrangkhols is animism and they believe in a numbers of gods and deities. At the same time, they believe in spirits and sacrificial worship. The worship of snake was practiced in early period known as *simbak*. Christianity denied all these religious beliefs and recognised only one god. Belief in *Pathian* (god) in traditional religion continued with a new connotation as the god of Christianity and belief in a variety of gods gradually disappeared. Now they believe in one god and a new concept of sin, hell and heaven of eternal life through faith in Christ. After embracing Christianity they avoided the traditional rituals and sacrifices which were quite time consuming and expensive.

The Church now occupies the position of the *Bojol*, which was closed to the women. Now both of men and women can go to the Church for prayers. The sacrificial materials known as *Pathian-ruairbu* and *Soibangi* i.e. the practice of keeping the sign of *Pathian* and ancestors for worship have been taken out from their houses and
burned down. In Christian villages there is no sign of any sacrifice is seen. Instead of it the Bible, hymn books, etc., are available now. Christianity offers freedom from the bondage of rituals, sacrifices and zu. Christianity brought changes to the Hranhkhol religion in the sphere of superstitious beliefs. Earlier they believed that all the misfortune, illness, calamities, etc. occurred due to the anger of the malevolent spirits. To propitiate these spirits the sacrifices of animals and birds were compulsory. As they now keep faith in Christ, these rituals have been abandoned and the Christian Hrangkhols became free from the fear of evil spirits. Christianity thus liberated them from spiritual and social demons. All the beliefs in multifarious spirits and appeasement through the bloody sacrifices have been replaced by the new religion.

Christianity rejected the traditional religious rituals and sacrifices, while in the pre-Christian period the practice of sacrifices and the worshipping through the Ochai (priest) was a social custom. As the Ochai was the only media to perform the pujas and sacrifices, he occupied the highest position in the society. Again, the women and all the men could not act as priest. That is why, the priest and prophet practised soothsaying, divination, sorcery, etc., that aroused fear in the people. Christianity has transformed this divine role of the Ochai and Deipu into a new order. The worship and the sacrifices of the people through the Ochai have been replaced by the common prayers in the Church. Now the Christians believe that no priest is necessary to pray and that Jesus Christ is the only priest, prophet, and the mediator between god and human beings for salvation.

51 Interview with Dershen Hrangkhol of Zion age 35, date 19 Feb. 2010.
53 Interview with Soneibul Hrangkhol, age 42 years, of Loskor village on 9th may, 2010.
The concept of salvation is a new concept for the Christian Hrangkhols. In pre-Christian days, they believed in two final abodes for the departed soul *mithikhua* or place for the ordinary people and *sorpial* or place for the Ochai and Deipu. Sorpial was regarded as the heaven or god's abode. The new religion taught that every departed soul of human being has the right to go to heaven. Christianity also rejected the faith in 'irzirnok' and *irtha*\(^{54}\) and Christianity has contributed a new ideology in the concept of God.

Prior to the spread of Christianity the Hrangkhols used to perform ‘naineiirthianga’ or purification ceremony after the birth of a child. As the baby grew, other rites were performed known as ‘naitualsua or nailaibm’ (naming ceremony). With Christianity, these rituals are no longer practiced and the Pastor or the Church Elder conducts the celebration service with a few words of prayer and Christian names are now given to the child in place of traditional names.

Changes have also taken place in the performance of the death rites. Except some basic nature of the death rites, the Christians eliminated some traditional rituals like – adorning the dead body with ornaments, offering food and meats for the departed soul etc. The fear, of the departed soul no longer exist. Some new customs have also appeared in the Hrangkhol society such as, when a person dies, the Church bell has to ring and the people immediately gather and sing Christian songs instead of the traditional mournful songs. The customs regarding the disposal of the dead has also changed with the advent of Christianity. Traditionally the dead were cremated but it has been replaced by burial. Now all the burials take place in a common ground following Christian rites. They engrave a cross and bury the dead after carrying the departed in a

\(^{54}\) *Irzirnok* means rebirth and *irtha* means spirit.
procession. Every village has a graveyard where the dead bodies are interred. The pastors or church elders now deliver a funeral message that provides comfort to the deceased person’s family.\textsuperscript{55}

In the marriage ceremony too some changes have been brought about by Christianity. Child marriage is strictly prohibited and endogamy and monogamy are practiced. Marriage ceremonies were always associated with drinking \textit{zu} but now it has been replaced by tea etc. The bride and bridegroom have now adopted western style of dressing instead of their traditional dresses. The marriage rites are also solemnised in the western style of Christianity. Traditionally the marriage of the widow of elder brother was compulsory which is now not compulsory for the Christians and every ceremony is organised within the purview of the Church.

Women are not entitled to enjoy equal religious rights and social status with the men under the traditional system of religion. Traditionally \textit{boljol}, the place of sacrifice or the \textit{pujas} was prohibited for the women. A great change and transformation took place with the advent of Christianity as women have been liberated to some extent from the low status in the religious and social sphere. Women are now working in different portfolios of Church and participate in prayers of the Church along with men. However the women do not enjoy the property rights as this is still denied by Christianity.

While the use of \textit{zu} is the custom in every traditional religious function, the Christian followers strictly prohibited the use of \textit{zu}. Since the time of the British, the use of opium, which was introduced by the British expeditionary force, became a serious

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Hrangkhol of Robipui village date 27 Feb. 2013.
obstacle for the development of the Hrangkhol community.\textsuperscript{56} In the years of the early twentieth century, the Hrangkhol people spent much times and money in Halflong Bazar for getting opium. \textsuperscript{57} These intoxicants degraded their morality and created chaos in their entire family. With the introduction of Christianity and western education, the Hrangkhols gradually began to abstain from intoxicants. They came to realise that the use of intoxicants not only spoiled social morality but also affected their economic life.\textsuperscript{58}

Christianity has undermined the practices of the traditional socio-religious feast and festivals like \textit{Rualsafak}, \textit{Zutanng}, etc., which are associated with drinking \textit{zu}, singing and dancing. Now all these festivals are replaced by the celebration of Christmas, Good Friday, and New Year Day, etc. Excessive use of \textit{zu} and sacrifices may have had a baneful effect upon the society but observance of social festivals like \textit{rousasafak}, \textit{parongot}, etc., helped to preserve their ancient culture and tradition. There were countless taboos like the closing of the entrance of village during the time of the ‘\textit{Khuarnoi} or \textit{Khuabol}’ (village \textit{puja}) for the outsiders and the villagers would stay at their respective houses, etc., customs followed by the early traditional Hrangkhol society. Eating beef was taboo but now some of the Christian Hrangkhols have started to eat this forbidden food. The Christians do not follow taboos for the pregnant women like eating twin banana, participation in carrying corpse etc. Christianity automatically changed the life style, mode of living, philosophy of life etc., which is now reflected in the dresses, ornaments and hairstyle of the Hrangkhols.

\textsuperscript{57} Interview with Dr. H. Hramgkhol at Maibang, dated 2 Feb, 2013.
\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Pastor Sumchohlal Hrangkhol of Zion dt, 22 Oct, 2012.
The sovereign institution called Halam united the whole Hrangkhol villages under one umbrella but it could never bring social unity among them. However, Christianity created socio-religious contacts and awareness due to which they united in a common ethnic group through different organizations.

The most remarkable contribution of Christianity is the development of education and literature. Roman script was used for the first time to write the Hrangkhol literature and language. Education and written literature were duly emphasised by the Christian missionaries. The traditional religion of the Hrangkhol is slowly but steadily undergoing changes. The role of Deipu has gradually vanished from the society. Earlier only the Ochai could perform any kind of pujas and sacrifices. But now due to the scarcity of sufficient Ochai, Kalim and Kabur or the village head if they are the follower of the traditional religion have started to perform some of the pujas like purification, etc. The marriage with other communities was not accepted in the past but our survey has brought to light five reported cases of inter caste marriage one with an Assamese, three with Nepalese and one with a Dimasa. The marriage within same clan was not permitted earlier but now it is not uncommon though not welcomed. They have started to enjoy the caste Hindu festivals like Durga puja, Saraswati puja, Biswakarma puja, etc., though earlier they never participated in these religious festivals.

According to the M.N. Srinivas "Sanskritization is the process by which a “low” Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, “twice-born” caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that
traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community." Our study has not revealed any kind of upper mobility in the traditional religious beliefs of the Hrangkhols of Dima Hasao District. It has been mentioned earlier that the Hrangkhols are the dwellers of hilly areas and Dima Hasao district is also a mountainous area and the people living here are mostly tribes. A few numbers of caste Hindus living here are still maintaining alienation from the tribes. There is no influence of the Hindu system of nomenclature and imitating the name of gods and goddesses like Hari, Ram, Sita, Laxmi, etc., are not seen among the Hrangkhols. The Hindus often trace traditional ancestry from Hindu gods and goddesses but the Hrangkhols do not follow this practice. The contact of the Hrangkhols with the British is a significant one. Along with the British, the Christian missionaries started their relentless efforts towards the enlightenment of the tribal community living in this area; while the plains people and the so-called caste Hindus kept aloof from the tribes. As a result, the Hrangkhols were attracted towards the various social and development activities of the Christian missionaries. In this regard, the view of the great Indian Sociologist M.N. Srinivas is worth mentioning here "the Christian Missionaries played a notable part in humanitarian activity, especially in providing education and medical aid to sections of Indian society most in need of them-Harijans, women, orphans, lepers and tribal folk." Accordingly, after the conversion of the other group of Old-Kuki tribes, the Hrangkhols also slowly started to convert to Christianity with the hope of a new way and a better life. This has gradually proved to be true and the Hrangkhols claim to get equal status in every sphere of life along with the "foreigners" i.e. British who were superior to the Indians especially in the sense of modernization. Christianity was a more attractive

60 Ibid p 52
option because the Christian missionaries gave them a new identity, and a written language and literature through education. The missionaries also brought an ideology that helped the Hrangkhols to acculturate themselves in the process of modernization. The Hinduization of the region was limited to the plain areas; the Hindu culture never reached the hill regions. Until the introduction of the British rule in the nineteenth century after the treaty of Yandaboo, the hills were isolated and were preserved from the onslaught of Sanskritization.  