CHAPTER II
SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS
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Social customs, traditions, rituals, believes, superstitions, etc., are the part of an individual’s life or any group of individuals; while a larger group of the individuals make a society. The term society derived from the Latin word ‘socius’ which means togetherness (companionship) or friendship. The famous social scientist Morris defined society as- “a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behaviour which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relation differ from them in behaviour.”\(^1\) While, Mac Iver states that “society is a web of social relationship”. G.D.M. Cole comments that society is a complex organized associations and institutions with a community.\(^2\) A society is thus a collection of individuals bound together by relations, institutions and associations. While tribal society is simple, homogeneous, integrated and undifferentiated as compared to the industrial society which is complex, heterogeneous, disintegrated and differentiated.\(^3\) The main features of the tribal society are discussed below.

People live close to the physical environment i.e. land, forest, river, climate, etc., that supports them and determines their economic activity. Division of labour is simple, sex and age differentiation is almost non-existent. Women generally take care of the home front, gather and prepare food and are responsible for the caring of children while

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\(^2\) Ibid. p 104.
\(^3\) Vidyabhusan and Sachadeva, An Introduction to Sociology, 1987, p, 83).
men hunt, combat enemies when necessary and take part in their ceremonies. Almost every household needs as they make clothing, footwear, containers, etc., except a few items obtained from market. Society is also devoid of the institutions of private property, exchange and credit. Thus, the patterns of economic activity in tribal society are simple and undifferentiated in comparison to complexity of non-tribal society. Life in a tribal society is simple and integrated. It is not compartmentalized into economic, religious, educational and recreational categories that cause each personality in modern society to play five or dozen specialised roles. The maintenance of order depends more on folkways and mores rather than upon the power of the tribal leaders. The socialization of the young is mostly carried in the family and the intimate relationship of day-to-day living. Each tribe knows the norms of behaviour and it is the responsibility of the tribal elders to see to it that the young learn the proper ways of behaviour. The tribal society is small in number of population and homogeneous in composition. The tribal people are religious in their outlook and believe in a totem, magic and fetishism. The Hrangkhols have all the characteristics of a tribal society. They primarily depend upon the forest, there is no division of labour and both men and women work in day-to-day activities for their livelihood. Traditionally their religious beliefs are based on totems and animism.

The family is the foundation of the Hrangkhol social unit where an individual is exposed and adapt to the first and immediate social environment. The word 'family' has its origin in the Latin word *famulus*, which means servant. According to Lowi, the family may be considered as an association that corresponds to the institution of

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marriage. Radcliffe Brown includes husband, wife and their children in the family. In a tribal family relationship between members is to be understood in a sociological as much as a psychological sense. Thus, the family includes not only the wife and husband and their minor children but also parents and in-laws. The Hrangkhols present most of the characteristics of the typical tribal family in India.

In a Hrangkhol family, the father is the head and possesses all the authority, linear descent is traced through the father and society follows patriarchal norms. Under the patriarchal form of society, the male head of the family is vested with all the powers in the family. He is the owner and administrator of the family property and rights, to him all persons living in the family are subordinate. The composition of the Hrangkhol family is generally nuclear consisting of parents and their children. Society is strictly monogamous. The clans are exogamous, and no marriage is permitted within the same clan without any exception. It is also found that the joint family does exist though it is not a very common practice. There are a few couples living with father-mother, children, unmarried sister, and brother, which are the components of a joint family. When a son gets married, he initially lives with his parents until he begets children. Generally, after marriage the children leave their parents’ house. On the death of the father the eldest son becomes the head of the family.

7 Vidyabhusan and Sachadeva, An Introduction to Sociology, New Delhi, 1987, p, 262.
8 Ibid, p, 291.
As the head of the family, the father performs all the socio-religious rituals of the family. The wife of the head is required to perform her duties as the guardian with the advice of her kin after the death of her husband until her children grow up. The father is responsible for the overall welfare and security of the family, including food, clothing, education and shelter. All earnings by the individual members of the family go to the account of the father. However, the wife and the grown up children in a family are allowed to keep a certain amount according to their own requirement. The wife is required to help her husband in the discharge of his duties. The women of the Hrangkhol family generally perform the household activities such as cooking of food, rearing of animals, fetching drinking water and collecting firewood, as well as collection of consumable vegetables from the jungle, etc. Conversation and gossiping within family is very rare. A husband never addresses his wife by name, rather he address her by saying ‘uai’ and vice versa or as the mother of x or father of z etc.

The wife of the head of a family also has the responsibility of weaving clothes to meet the requirement of the family members and to offer gifts to the kith and kin during the occasion of festivals and other social needs. The father being the head of the family is responsible for various activities. The grown up children assist their father in the jhum cultivation, plantation, construction of houses and other family activities as well.

9 Interview with Bultoirher Hrangkhol the present Kalim of Dima Hasao District at Lungkhok dated 12 March 20013.
11 Uai is a Hrangkhol word meaning women or man with honour.
12 E.D. Suchiang, My reminiscence of Haflong Town (prior to 1947) in 100 years of Haflong centenary Commemorative Souvenir, 1895 to 1995, Haflong 1995, p, 121.)
Daughters also help their mother in cooking of food, fetching water, collecting firewood, etc.

After the death of the father, the elder son (if he is an adult) is required to take over the responsibility of the family including that of his widowed mother. In case of the son is a minor, the close relatives on the paternal side take the responsibility of the family until the child attains adulthood. The widow, while shouldering responsibility of the family always consults with the relatives of the husband in the maintenance of the family as mentioned earlier. Traditionally the Hrangkhol women are not allowed to be the head of the family; hence, she is bound to take advice from the male members from her husband’s male relatives.

Childbirth in a family is regarded as an auspicious occasion, though the family is regarded as impure until the date of performance of ‘barva’ literally meant purification, and cannot participate in worship and other rituals. The leaves of the Naisulbang are hung on both sides of the front doors upon the birth of a child. After 9 or 11 days (9 days for girls and 11 days for boys) as the umbilical cord of the baby falls off, the purification ceremony called Naiirthiang can be performed. Naiirthiang rituals can be performed only by the Kurma. In return, they are given a feast consisting of meat along with valuable gifts like a pitcher of zu, a handful of rice, clothes and sometime a dao (machete).

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13 Interview with S.B. Palal, of Zion, Suoneilien Hrangkhol, Kalim the Head of the community Court Halam, dated-10-7-11.
14 Naisulbang is a kind of wild orchid.
15 Kurma is a Hrangkhol word means Midwife
The naming ceremony of a baby is quite different from that of the caste Hindu society. The priest has no activity in this ceremony, only the ‘Kurma’ has the right to perform it.\textsuperscript{16} After cutting the hair of the baby, the ‘Kurma’ declares the name of the baby on the road near the house. Traditionally the name should bear the names of the grandfather of both paternal and maternal side if the baby is male and grandmother of both paternal and maternal side if the baby is a female. However, the name of a child bears name of the paternal side or the maternal side, it does not influence the clan that the child belong to that of his father. The Hrangkhols follow a patrilineal form of descent.

The Hrangkhols who converted to Christianity, however no longer follow their traditional birth rites and naming ceremony. They perform the entire custom of purity through a simple prayer perform by the Church elders and the naming ceremony too is performed at the church. The style of bearing the name of grandfather and grandmother is gradually vanishing from the members who have embraced Christianity.

The status of the women is not equal with their male counterpart in the traditional Hrangkhol society. The Hrangkhol women stay aloof from active participation in religious performances as well as social activities. They have no power to exercise in their life; the women have to remain submissive and dependent upon the male. According to the Hrangkhol customary laws and customs, the women have no rights over in the property of their parents or even over the property of their husbands.\textsuperscript{17} The Hrangkhols believe that women are incapable to holding property. Girls are

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with the Present Kabur means additional chief justice of Dima Hasao at his residence, age 60 years, in the Village Lungkhok, Dted-12-7-12.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview with Bul Hrangkhol, age 45 years of Moulpong village, an educated Christian businessman. Dated-27 February 2012.
sometimes allowed to retain a small portion of the jewellery belonging to their mother, but that is all. If a man has only daughters, the property passes to the nearest male relative of the deceased, the daughters receive nothing. On the death of a man without any male issue, the property does not remain with his widow, but passes to the nearest male relative of the deceased. Traditionally, the question of inheritance of immovable property among the Hrangkhols did not arise, as there was no private ownership in land. The Hrangkhols live in reserve forests owned by the Indian government and by tradition the land of the village is handed over to the Kho devan (village council). However, gradually the Hrangkhols have taken recourse to settled life, have cleared forests, and started cultivation on a small scale. After the death of the head, the houses and land are transferred to the eldest son of the family.

In a universalised concept of a family, women have to do a lot of work and bear responsibility in every domain of life. The tasks she has to do exclusively are cooking and serving the rice (rice is the staple food of the Hrangkhol), pounding rice in the mortar and pestle, brewing rice beer, cleaning in and around the house, offering food to the fowls and pigs, etc., and weaving in the handlooms. Other works that are performed by both men and women are collecting firewood, fetching water, collecting roots, plants, leaves, wild fruits and vegetables from the forest, etc. Despite their contribution to the household the Hrangkhol women do not have any voice in the family and women are not allowed to be the head of the family. If there is no male issue, widows have to

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19 Interview with Dersen Hrangkhol of Zion age 30 years, graduate in Social science, dated, 11 November 2011.
follow the wishes of her husband’s nearest male relatives. This customs clearly indicates the poor social status of women.

The religious rights of the Hrangkhol women are very limited in every religious activities. ‘Bojol’ the holy place of worship of the Hrangkhol community is closed for the women. They are not allowed to officiate as the priest to perform worship, nor are they allowed to participate in the pujas (worship) celebrated in the Bojol.

The Hrangkhols have a high degree of social cohesion and identity. However, in political life, women have no right to raise their voice. They have to keep distance themselves from active discussions in any matter. The Hrangkhols have a democratic tradition in political life known as Halam where different types of social and family disputes are solved democratically. However, the women have no rights to participate in this system of local government. From the very beginning, the Hrangkhol society has not offered equal status to the women. Popular proverbs compare woman sometimes with children and sometimes as the door to hell.20 Nujuar, which literally means a case against the illicit relation of women (both married, and unmarried) is the only administrative institution where the Hrangkhol women can participate. However, this institution is exclusively for the women.21 In household activities, the women have equal status with their husband. However, the women are not attracted about the modern political exercise extended by the Indian constitution. Till date no woman from

20 Interview with Roishingir Hrangkhol of Michikhur Village, expert in folktales and traditional customs, age 69 years, dated 23-04-11.
21 Nujuar is a social offence regarding a woman having sexual relation with a married man and only the women try the case.
Hrangkhol tribe has been part of the political exercises like Member of Legislative Assembly, Parliament or as the member in the Autonomous District Council of Dima Hasao (N.C.Hills) where one member for the district council is reserved for the Hrangkhol community.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that though there is no bar for women on receiving education, but the literacy rate of the women is less in comparison to that of men. The education scenario in Dima Hasao district is not good as a whole and the people of the Hrangkhols live in the hill areas where communication is generally poor and one cannot easily go out from the village to the town to attend school, colleges or any other institution for education. At present, the education of women is advancing without any sex discrimination. Of the two doctors in the community, one is a woman. The following table shows the education level of the wife of the respondent household that indicate the poor level of womens education among the Hrangkhol tribe.

The table no. 2.1 shows that the household surveyed 250 during field study resulted the poor status of education of the Hrangkhol women. 78.7%, of traditional Hrangkhol women and 67.2% of the Christian Hrangkhol women are illiterate and 13.3% and 24.4% of traditional and Christian women respectively have passed the primary school level. Only the 5% of traditional and 6% of the Christian women have studied up to the High school or Higher Secondary school level.
Table no. 2.1  **Level of women’s education among the Hrangkhol tribe.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education obtained</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th></th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

Compared to the women from traditional Hrangkhol society, the position of women in families that have adopted Christianity is relatively better. Among them, there is no discrimination in religious affairs, as the women have the right to go to the church along with the men. Women are also accorded the same status in Christianity in every sphere of religious life. Along with religion, the Christian woman is quite advanced in education and some of them are occupied in government jobs. If the husband is not available at home for some time or he has expired, Christianity has offered full rights to the wife to be the head of the family. Christian Hrangkhol also accept their traditional judiciary called *Halam* and accordingly the participation of women are still restricted. The rights of the property however still denied to woman though the Christian Church sanction it. Both the traditional and Christian Hrangkhol are not ready to offer the equal
rights in respect of inheritance and judicial function to the woman except Nujuar trial that as mentioned earlier is comprised solely of women.\textsuperscript{22}

Marriage occupies an important position in the Hrangkhol community. The Hrangkhol society followed the rule of monogamy. The selection of bride in early age indicates the prevalence of child marriage among the Hrangkhols. However, child marriage was not observed in the Hrangkhol society though hearsay indicates about the practices of child marriage among the rich section of the Hrangkhols. According to the customary law, marriage within the same clan was prohibited earlier but now it has come into practice as it was observed in several married couples of five villages like Zion, Tangpui, Robipui, Rekho and Khote. The normal age for marriage of the girl and the boy is 18-24 and 25-30 years respectively. Primarily arranged marriage is preferred, but love marriage is also accepted.\textsuperscript{23} If a girl is chosen by a boy or falls in love, his family sends the marriage proposal to the parents of the girl. This is known as ‘Kutchoi’ literally meaning gift of marriage proposal, which includes a bottle of zu and a piece of cotton cloth. In return, the father of the girl sends a similar gift to the family of the boy, if he accepts the same. After it, the guardians of both the bridegroom and bride, along with village seniors meet and complete the negotiations for the marriage ceremony including bride price. Traditionally a sum of three rupees is paid to the bride’s father as a mark of honour. This is known as Hloman. A pot of zu\textsuperscript{24} is offered and consumed during the offerings of bride price. The process of this negotiation with zu is known as Biak zu. Generally arranged marriages are preferred, but a love match also accepted.

\textsuperscript{22} Interview with REV. Lalhrithoi Hrangkhol of village Zion, age 53 years, He is a follower of Christianity, dated- 22-6-13.

\textsuperscript{23} Interview with REV Zingzembul Hrangkhol age 30 years, He is a member of Hrangkhol Literary Society of Dima Hasao, of Lungkhok, Village, dated 11-2-12.

\textsuperscript{24} Zu is a traditional rice beer.
Sometime love affairs conclude through the means of an arrange marriage and others elope and get married. Earlier the system of service marriage was prevalent. In this custom known as Samak a boy had to serve in the bride’s house for seven years. With time, the period of ‘samak’ reduced to five, three, and two years. During the period of samak the boy (bridegroom) should prove his ability as an honest and strong enough fit to be a good husband. Otherwise, he may not be allowed to marry the girl. The couple are not allowed to cohabit during the samak period, until the guardians of the both family accord formal permission called Tingkhou zu. Marriages are not recognised by the society until and unless the traditional customs are fulfilled.

According to the customary law, Samak is compulsory in an arranged marriage. Apart from the samak if the boy’s parents are not able to pay bride price or the huge expenditure for the marriage, the bridegroom has to serve in the house of the prospective father in law for a period of at least one year. Earlier it was three years and he has to work as a labour. Generally, in this period, the bridegroom is treated as a family member and during this period, the boy and girl get time to understand each other. The father-in-law builds a new house for the couple to live in especially, after expiry of samak-chang. This is known as Tarpuinsum. At the end of the Samak-chang, the boy’s family approaches the girl’s parents with a pitcher of zu and other gift like clothes, meat, etc., to fix the date of marriage and discuss about the expenditure of the feast of the marriage ceremony. This process is called as Chong-ir-don and that is the

\[25\] Tinkhu is permission for the couple to cohabit after a meeting of the parents accompanied by zu hence it is called as Tingkhu zu.

\[26\] Interview with N.L. Siak Hrangkhol, age 47 years of village Bualjol, He is a follower of traditional religion, dated-7-7-12.
last discussion before marriage. The following table shows the importance and the changes that occurred in the practice of the Samak.²⁷

Table no 2.2 **Period of Samak practiced by the Hrangkhols.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Traditional Hrangkhol</th>
<th>Christian Hrangkhol</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No 2.2 shows how the Samak was practiced by the Hrangkhols since 1947 till the present times. It shows that 78.9% of the follower of traditional religion and 71% of the Christians practiced the Samak for 7 years, 10.9% of the follower of traditional religion and 9.6% of the Christians practiced for 5 years, almost 11% of the Hrangkhols practiced Samak for three years while only 7% of the Hrangkhols had practiced for two years. This indicates the importance of Samak in the society by showing the highest participation of this custom for the long duration of seven years. Through the table, a significant change has been observed that gradually the period of samak has been decreased and it became more popular among the Christian Hrangkhols.

²⁷ Samak is a Hrangkhol word, according to customary meaning Samak is a period for the manual labour offered to the family of the bride by the bridegroom.
In the traditional marriage ceremony, wearing of the traditional dress and costume is compulsory. Dresses for male are dhoti and white kamij with turban. Women dresses are puonbontak, blouse, and ornaments like Kongkhit, Khavai, Benhriel, Sumhrui, jakser, kuordoi, Toia, Maduli, Velching, etc.

On the very morning of the marriage day, the bridegrooms party approaches the bride’s house performing a traditional dance and offer a piece of new cloth, a piece of red pumpkin which represent gold a handloom shawl, a handful of rice with any amount of rupees (especially coins) and a white hen. This celebration is called Kuvaichu and drinking zu is a custom and very common during all the ceremonies performed at the time of traditional marriage. In this session, a payment is made to the bride’s party by the bridegroom’s party known as Kuvaichuasel. The amount of Kuvaichuasel is not fixed but sometimes it paid symbolically. Hloman (bride price) to paid at the time of Kuvaichu. In early times, it was rupees three to five only, now it has changed in due time. The amount of the Hloman is not so high but the custom is regarded with an honour in Hrankhol society. Table no 2.3 show the importance of the Hloman along with the changing pattern of the rate of the Hloman.

The table 2.3 shows that the Hloman of Rs 30 is paid by only 15 (6%) of the total sample out of 250 and Rs 75 by 189 (75.6%) of total sample until the eighties of the last centuries from 1947. The values of Rs 30 and 75 were so high during the time of Independence of our Country that marked the importance of the Hloman in Hrangkhol Society. After the eighties of the last century, the society and culture of the Hrankgols witnessed rapid changes in different aspects like religion, economy and education and its influence was observed in Hloman that it change from Rs 100 to 300 over a period of
time. While 6.4% of the total sample paid Rs 100, 9.6% paid Rs 200 and very recently, it increased up to Rs 300. The participation of the Christian Hrangkhols proved that despite changes in religion some of the traditional customs were still maintained by them.

Table 2.3 The amount paid as Hloman since 1947 till the present times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>Traditional Hranhkol</th>
<th>Christian Hrangkol</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

Before the payment of the Hloman a celebration is done with zu known as Manchat zu offered to the aged persons as a token of respect for acting as witness to the negotiation. Beginning from the morning until next morning the process of the marriage ceremony goes on through the consumption of zu with different names for different functions. Sarchan zu is offered as an honour to the men who slaughters the animal like buffalo, goat, pig, etc, for the feast and all the persons sit together and drink zu with
meat. After the consumption of Sarchan zu next session is called Opui zu. In Hrangkhol language opu means respected elder, hence drinking zu with the opu is named as Opui zu. At the time of Opui zu the bridegroom and the bride has to stand near a pot of zu where eight members of the community are seated. This is called ‘Bangchengtuicho’. After the zu has been consumed the couple is required to bow at the feet of the eight persons for their blessings. In this session, singing and dancing are integral part. Offering two pitchers of zu is customary while sometimes the number of the zu pitchers is increased to more than two. The entire day, the process of eating and drinking is continues and in the afternoon, the session with Pu (maternal uncle) and his friends start. In this session, the zu offered is called Pu zu. Next to the Pu zu for the honour of Nujuar (women) a session is arranged which is named as Nujuar zu. In this party the women will sing together and dance, and eat meat and drinks zu. Sometime the women also demand gifts from the relatives of the bridegroom and bride. The Nujuar party is also known as Irkul zu. After the Irkul zu the Nucha zu is offered to the brothers and friends of the bride, present at the time of the marriage ceremony. In this session along with singing and dancing, youthful bother and jokes are allowed. After completion of the Nucha zu the honoured session with the mother of the bride and her friends are done. Laipot zu is exclusively for the bride and bridegroom and their close friends, here they exchanged the pot of zu. There is a blessing ceremony, which is named as Rengsahnachen or blessings the newly married couple and praying for the blessings from the aged person attended the ceremony by offering a pitcher of zu. This ceremony is known as Bidaipek or Borpek and the zu offered is known as Baiirsuk zu. Before the time of offering presents to the bride’s family, another session of drinking a pitcher of zu called Siem zu occurs. The final discussion of the marriage is complete through the
drinking of zu called Mualldai zu and it is the finishing of the zu festival. The marriage ceremony is completed in the bride’s house on that very night itself. Next morning the new couple returns to the house of the bridegroom. On the return journey, the bridegroom and his friends offers money to the girls present at that time.

The honour of the ‘Pu’ (maternal uncle) is very high in every activity of the socio-religious customs. Hence, in every kind of marriage, the paternal uncle of the bride plays an important role at a special celebration called the pufak ceremony. The whole negotiations of the marriage ceremony are done under the leadership of the Pu and a pitcher of zu offered in his honour and drink together known as Pu zu. After the discussion of the parents and confirmation of the marriage, the next discussion takes place with a pitcher of zu called Tinkhulenkham zu (asking permission to use their courtyard to perform the marriage ceremony).  

In general, the Hrangkhol marriage system is quite expensive, so to minimize the expenditure a type of short marriage ceremony sometimes takes place after the consent of the two parties that is known as Hruite. Here the different stages are performed symbolically in a very short manner. The poor people who are not able to afford the cost of Hruipui (legal marriage) are opting for this practice. This marriage causes less expenditure and is within the capacity of the poor people. Here all the customs are celebrate in a very brief and short manner and the expenditure is can minimised as far as possible.

28 Information regarding marriage was collected from the members of the Hrangkhols literary forum. Members were Hrangkol Chang, Hrangkol Zingzembul, Hrangkol Lalpirthang, Hrangkol Bulpena, dated 17-10-13.
After seven days of the marriage, the married couple visits the bride’s house and at the time they enter the house, the mother of the bride or any other elderly woman of the settlement sprinkles holy water upon the couple. On that very day, there is a feast and the married couple may stay for a few days in the bride’s house.

According to the Hrangkhols traditional custom a man, if not already married, is bound to marry the widow of his elder brother even if he is quite younger than the widow is.29 However, the elder brother is not allowed to marry the widow of his younger brother. One can marry his wife’s younger sister but not the elder one. On the death of his wife, the widower is not permitted to remarry before a period of three years, on the other hand a widow is allowed to remarry immediately after the death of her husband if she so wishes.30 In this case, it has been seen that the Hrangkhol society is liberal to widows about remarriage. Remarriage of widows is widely prevalent in the Hrangkhol society. The system of dowry is absent among the Hrangkhol. However, the status of woman is not high in different aspects but like many other tribal communities in the field of marriage, they have a high sense of respect towards the female.

As mentioned earlier, majority of the Hrangkhol population have already converted to Christianity and they have adopted the life style of western culture and no longer practice their traditional marriage customs. The extensive use of zu has been stopped by them and they have adopted the Christian marriage style (Church wedding) to replace the traditional system of marriage. However, some of the Christians try to maintain the Christian culture along with their traditional customs relating to the

29 Soppitt C.A. p, 15.
30 Interview with Bulthoirher Hrangkhol is a present Kalim i.e judicial head of the Hrangkhol community of Dima Hasao district, at Lungkhok village dated 25th August 2012.
marriage ceremony except drinking of zu. In such cases, they fulfil their social customs accordingly in the Church and then they follow their traditional custom.\textsuperscript{31}

The Hrangkhols have their own traditional funeral rites called \textit{Mithi}. Soon after a death, a senior woman who belongs to the same clan sacrifices a matured hen or cock near the feet of the deceased in order to show the path to heaven accordingly to their beliefs. After death, the corpse is removed immediately from inside the house and it is placed in a sleeping position on the floor at the end of the courtyard facing the entrance. The relatives of the deceased wash the corpse but the person should be the same sex as the deceased. After washing, the corpse is dressed in new clothes. Then the corpse is placed upon a bamboo or wood coffin to be carried to the funeral pyre, and it burnt with the head turned to the west. Two senior women called \textquote{Bupu} are selected to offer a meal to the departed soul at the cremation site. The process for purification may be completed on the next day of cremation itself or it may be postponed according to the convenience of the family. On the day of the purification, \textit{Ochai (priest)} performed the \textit{tuillar} i.e. purification rites according to the religious custom and the village head along with the village elders discuss about the debt, inheritance, and property of the deceased. Due to large-scale conversions to Christianity, death rites have also changed. Instead of cremation, the Christians bury the corpse.\textsuperscript{32} The messenger, who bears the news of the death to another village, is required to first approach the person who belongs to the same clan as the deceased and not others. This process is known as \textit{Thanginthei}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Interview with present Kalim and Kabur (Kabur is regarded as assistant Kalim) of Dima Hasao district, at Lungkhok village, dated 03 February 2013.
\end{itemize}
Sarathi (un-natural death) like suicide, murders or accident is regarded as an unholy affair. In such cases, the dead body is never buried in the village but it can be buried at the place of death. There is no purification rite. Only the ‘Sar-inliem’ a puja offered to the god Khori pathian an evil spirit who is believed to have controlled the unnatural death and sacrificing of a white hen on the bank of a river may be performed.33

After one year, the family members are required to offer a feast to the villagers and relatives in the name of the departed soul known as Ruoknghathat. In practice, it depends upon the economic condition of the family. The poor people do not perform this rite as arranging a feast is quite expensive.

The Hrangkhols believe that the soul would not get salvation, if the family members of the deceased do not pay the debts of the deceased. Therefore, the son, grandson, or any of the clan members (in case of issueless people) is liable to repay the debt for the salvation of the soul. This belief is known as Nu le pa lakuitoum. Traditionally they believe that the soul is immortal and it moves from one life to another life like insect to human life for several times in a cycle.

The following table shows their beliefs about the soul. 13.3% of the traditional Hrangkhols and 15.2% Christians believed that the soul is mortal which is a new development in the Hrangkhols’ religious beliefs. While 21% of them believed that the soul is immortal and 63% of the total surveyed (250 samples) still believed in the life cycle of the soul in different life from insect to the human without believing in

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33 Interview with Hakthanthoi Hrangkhol of village Zion, age 62 years, is a follower of Christianity and expert in traditional customs, dated 12 July 2014.
'Karmavada' theory of Hindu philosophy for the soul. However like the Hindu, some of the Hrangkhols believe in transmigration of the soul.

Table no. 2.4 The beliefs about Soul.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Hrangkhols</th>
<th>Christian Hrangkhols</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.

The village is the social unit of the Hrangkhols. Their villages are situated on top of the hills or on the ridges. There is no fixed plan to establish their villages but the house of the village head is situated at the corner of a village. Most of the villages are situated at the interior hilltops of the district. The Hrangkhols follows certain norms for site selection for a new village known as Khohmunzong. To establish a new village a group of knowledgeable and experienced elder persons of the same clan or several clans move in search of a suitable site to build a new village under the leadership of the priest. The preferable sites are the middle portion of a hill, access to maximum plain or level area and proximity to a natural source of water such as river or stream. When a suitable
site been identified, the priest prays to god 'ruoimpuom' (god of land and forest) and holding each end of two halves of a bamboo which are brought closer by two youths. The priest then pronounces his divination for the future prospect of health, wealth, cultivation etc. The two halves of bamboos are brought closer and again separated from each other according to the pronounced chant of the priest. After completion of the rituals of the site selection, they start to build their houses according to their convenience. After construction of the houses are completed the priest ask the villagers to assemble in a specific place of the village and performs titual or tualmei puja to forest god erecting a fire by natural way without using a matchbox (Meirilinlap). All the new comers collect fire from 'titual' the holy fire for their home, which must not be extinguished from the hearth until the celebration of Bahnarinsuk festival. When all the families enter their new houses in the new village then 'Tuitualar that' rites of purification are performed by offering a white or red cock to the deity along with a number of eggs and a name for the village is declared. The Christians do not follow the all the traditional rites and rituals related with the established of a new village but the other regulations are followed strictly.

The Hrangkhols have their rules and regulations for the migration of an individual or family from one village to another village. It is not possible to build a house or migrate from one village to another village, without the fulfilment of the Hrangkhol customs and prior permission from the competent authority. The person or the family must apply to the village council with a pitcher of zu, otherwise, the negotiations cannot be initiated if the villagers are the followers of the traditional religion. In a Christian village, regulations are same except for the practicing of religious rites and rituals. After getting allotment of the plot of land from the village
council the applicant must build the dwelling house (*chophek hem*) within one year or the given stipulated time. It has been observed that both traditional religious followers and the Christians generally migrated to the village of the same religion.

The new comer should submit the no objection (*Khomakdan*) from his or her earlier village. If the applicant fails to build his house within the stipulated time determined by the village head then the allotted plot will be forfeited.

According to the Hrangkhol traditional customs for seeking of land for *jhum* cultivation an individual from outside the village (*ram zongdan*) should apply to the village council (*Kho Devan*) offering a pitcher of *zu* seeking *jhum*, and then the negotiation may take place on an appointed date. He or she may be allowed the same on the following condition: 

- Traditionally one should pray for the *jhum* land with a pitcher of *zu* to the village council. The followers of Christianity have forsaken the use of *zu* in every customs or in rules followed by the traditional society so here too, they just pray for the same to the respective village council through a written application.
- The land allotted is purely on a temporary lease and not given free more than two years.
- He or She must pay the village dues as usual fixed by the village council. He or she must follow the village rules and customs.

The Hrangkhol village does not have any definite shape, and a number of houses are clustered together according to the nature of the terrain. Earlier timbers were available in forest and used freely when necessary. Now the scenario is changed and necessary timbers for construction are purchased from the market. Now the asbestos

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34 Interview with the Bulthoirhir Hrangkhrol, present Kalim of Dimahasao Distct, date. 12 may 2013.
35 Interview with Dershen Hrangkhrol dated 23 April 2010 at Zion.
sheet or the aluminium sheet are often used for the roof of the house instead of straw. However, the use of the straw continues in the village area. Except the town area, in the other settlements it is very rare to see the R.C.C. buildings, but their traditional houses or the Assam type houses are seen with bricks and aluminium sheet. Most of the Hrangkhol families do not have pit latrines. People having pile houses keep their domestic animals under the platform. In the village area, the household articles are made of bamboo, wood, can and plastics. The uses of their traditional household equipment’s are common in the town area also.

A unique feature of the tribal life in North-east India is dormitory system but this is not practiced in the Hrangkhol society though the other Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes have the dormitory system. This system plays an important role in the tribal way of life. Significantly, the Hrangkhols do not have this type of dormitory and that make the Hrangkhols different from their co tribes like Hmar, Biate, Halam, etc.

In every Christian village have a lower primary school and a Church. The Middle English and High Schools are also found in the big villages. The sources of water are always outside the villages but not in the centre of the villages. As in the traditional religion, there is no permanent place for worship, so that there is no permanent place for worship in the traditional Hrangkhol villages.

The language of the Hrangkhols is known as Hrangkhol. It bears similarities with the languages spoken by various sub clan of the Old Kuki group of tribes like the
Hmar, Khelma, Halam, Biate, etc.  
As all these tribes are believed to have the same origin, so their food habits, traditional dresses, some of the folk song, etc., bear similarities and this is seen in their language too. Since the remote past, they have no inscription and written literature. Now they have adopted the Roman script to write their literature. As a process of acculturation, the Hrangkhols learned the Haflong Hindi (mixture of Bengali, English and Hindi) and broken Bengali for communication, which has been in practice since the time of Indian Independence. Now some of them can speak English, and they prefer to admit their children in English medium schools and it has become the mode of communication for the elite sections. The influence of the Assamese language is also seen in and around the Haflong town. It has been noticed that a few of the Hrangkhols living adjacent to Haflong town can speak Assamese fluently or a broken form of Assamese.

Table no.2.5 shows the languages known by the Hrangkhols. It shows that the most of them can speak Haflong Hindi while 94 (37.6%) of the total sample and 69 (27.6%) of the total sample can speak Haflong Hindi and Bengali. People who spoken only Bengali 39 (15.6%) of the total sample. English, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese were spoken by 27 (11%) of the total sample. The table revealed that except Hrangkhol language majority of them could speak Haflong Hindi along with Bengali as Cachar district is very near to Haflong Subdivision and the businessmen of this district are belong to the Bengali community. The influence of the English language was also seen among 10% of the total sample, which is quite significant as the total population of the Hrangkhols are less than six thousand in this district. The acculturations of the

Hrangkhols with dominant groups like Bengali Hindi or Assamese speakers are clearly reflected in the sphere of language.

Table no. 2.5  
**Languages known by the Hrangkhols**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language known</th>
<th>Traditional Count</th>
<th>Traditional Percentage</th>
<th>Christian Count</th>
<th>Christian Percentage</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
<th>Total Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haflong Hindi</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Hindi</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi and Bengali</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali, Hindi and English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and English</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey.

The Hrangkhols have their own names of month and they count the month in 30 days while there are 12 months in a year. The names of the months in Hrangkhol language are –**Tualbual** (January), **Vatchang** (February), **Michai** (March), **Irtun** (April), **Thadoi** (May), **Thaphur** (June), **Hmurpur** (July), **Thazing** (August), **Tharam** (September), **Hmartang** (October), **Rutlai** (November), **Birip** (December). All these twelve names of the year bears similarities with the other Kuki group of tribes like Biate, Kuki etc., who have the same origin in remote past. The Hrangkhol divide the whole year into six seasons according to the weather condition and start it from spring season. The seasons of the year are accordingly:-**Phalbi** (spring), **Sal** (dry season), **Fur**
(summer), Zar (time of harvesting), Favang (autumn), Bolzoi (end of harvesting). Similarly the name of seven days of the week are known as- Pathianni (Sunday), Sinphutani (Monday), Sinnokni (Tuesday), Nilaini (Wednesday), Nilaichum (Thursday), Irtanni (Friday), Irtungni (Saturday).³⁷

According to the 2011 Census of India, the Dima Hasao District has a total Hrangkhol population of 4317 of which 2934 are males and 1383 are females. Of them 280 are in infants (0-6 years) while 1858 are above 18 years of age and eligible to vote. The Census report furnishes the following details of the Hrangkhols:³⁸

Numbers of service holders 107 only one people have standard up to the first grade, and nine up to the second grade. Moreover, there are only thirty five Lower Primary teachers in the entire district and only three High School teachers. The district boasts only doctors of which one is a woman. There is one engineer, one bank employee and one man is employed in NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development). The rest work at clerical and lower grade jobs. According to the Census of 2011 the Hrangkhols have 1079 matriculates, 120 graduates and 20 post graduates.³⁹

Traditionally the Hrangkhol are divided into 12 clans. Earlier, marriage within the clan was prohibited but at present this practice is accepted by the society. In Dima Hasao district only seven clans were found which are- Pena, Phirpu, Chorai, Phuoitong, Cholkha, Bangkheng, and Dumkar. All of these clans claim the same origin and have

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³⁷ Interview with, Mrs Zirsangpui, Mrs Palal, T.S. Hrangkhol, Lalphirthang Hrangkhol, Rev. Lalneithang Hrangkhol, and Mrs Saloni Hrangkhol, all are the members of Hrangkhol literary society of Dima Hasao district, dated 12 Feb, 2012.

³⁸ Census Report of India 2011 collected from Dima Hasao District Council of Assam.

³⁹ Information collected from Khupril Hrangkhol of Zion, age 40, presently working postal department Government of India.

51
similar culture and some of them have sub clans. On the other hand, the Hrangkhols living in other places of India like Tripura and Mizoram have another five clans such as Kazari, Bong, Dap, Mualsuam and Langkai. The Sub clans of the Hrangkhols available in the Dima Hasao district are shown in the following table.\(^{40}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table no: 2.6</th>
<th><strong>Clan and Sub Clan of the Hrangkhols.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub Clan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pena</td>
<td>Sakhidolai, Zuasel, Saihlikhin, Saizahol, Telengsing, Denlikhin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phirpu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholkha</td>
<td>Achalkha, Zetekha, Suangsaikha, Simvakha, Lalchungkha, Kor Cholkha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumkar</td>
<td>Thirhlumn, Kelai, Mena, Phadul, Tang dumkar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkeng</td>
<td>Bapui, Tualtok, Vara, Tuivarlenglvak, Motsun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phuitong</td>
<td>Samphiar, Thingphhun, Chalvom, Aisente.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

The concept of caste does not exist in the Hrangkhol society. However, class distinctions are seen in the community. The **Kalim, Kabur, Chapia**, the Village head and the rich people received high respect in the society. The **Ochai** and the **Deipu** receive special respect above them all. They even believe that there is a separate abode (heaven) for the **Ochai** and **Deipu**. The position of the **Ochai and Deipu** in the society is very high and the Hrangkhols believe that the **Ochai and Deipu** possess some benevolent and malevolent power received from their high god **Sungpathian** and have possess the power to help or harm people.

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\(^{40}\) Interview with Rev, Neinialthang Hrangkhol, Dated, 22 April 2013, at Lower Haflong, time 1.00 pm.
The morality of the Hrangkhol society is very high. Inviolability regarding social norms is the primary ethics of the society. Respect for elders, parents, and women are common ethics of the Hrangkhol society. Adultery in family life is strictly prohibited. Those who are accused of adultery are punished under the traditional judiciary system. Dishonour to women is a punishable offence, even entering into the room of a woman without permission, is considered to be an offence.\textsuperscript{41}

As evident from our earlier discussion, it is seen that $zu$ occupies an important place in the Hrangkhol society. $Zu$ is distilled from rice, and when new, is very intoxicating, gradually becoming less and less potent the longer it is preserved. At present tea is equally popular. Milk is not common, though some have now started to drink milk as a nutritious drink. Rice is the staple food, and vegetables like, tomato, potato, sesame, arum, radish, pumpkin, gourd, papaya, etc. are commonly used curried. Meat is one of the common dishes of the Hrangkhol people. The meat of pig, goat, buffalo, hen, duck, deer, and mithun (a kind wild cow) is popular. Cows are not eaten and even rearing of cow is not popular. Fish is another popular item of the Hrangkhol community. The use of dal is very rare. Garlic, ginger, chilli, turmeric etc. are used normally as spices. Hunting and Fishing in a year is a traditional custom.

The attire of the Hrangkhol society is very simple. Narrow dhoti and Lukom (turban) and white Kami are a common dress for the man. In addition to that, man wears a body tide coat made from endi. The women wear a white short shirt and a lower garment called "Puanbom", a black cotton cloth bearing long horizontal red lines, extending

\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Zirasangpui of Mualpong, age 32, She is Graduate and expert in their Folktales and customs, dated 25\textsuperscript{th} June 2012.
from the waist to just above the knee that are quite similar with the dresses of the Biate.\textsuperscript{42} They also use an upper garment consisting of cloth worn from the breast to the waist. Traditionally, the use of a blouse or the inner garment was not practiced by the Hrangkhols.\textsuperscript{43} They tie their hair in a knot at the back of the head. Occasionally, long brass hairpins are used to fasten the knot.

Traditionally both men and women wear earrings and bracelets. Beads are worn around the neck as ornaments. The women use bangles in great profusion. Necklaces of silver coins are very popular amongst the Hrangkhol women. The Hrankhols use their traditional dresses and ornaments at the time of the ceremonies and festivals. Games and sports are a part of the festivals of the Hrangkhols. The common games are \textit{Irhnol} (bamboo tug of war), \textit{Irbuan} (wrestling and lifting pestle), \textit{Lunghlon} (stone throwing), \textit{Intan} (racing), \textit{Vaaktuiin} (drinking like a crow), \textit{Thaltuiin} (back drinking), \textit{Lumphirbuan} (broom wrestling), spoon hanging), \textit{Khuaikai} (bee hanging), \textit{Kutirbuan} (arm wrestling) etc.\textsuperscript{44}

The main festivals celebrated by the Hrangkhols are discussed below:-

\textit{Rualsafak} occupies a special place in the hearts of the Hrangkhol people, which was celebrated traditionally after the harvesting was over. In the year 1998, the Autonomous Council of North Cachar Hills (presently DimaHasao) declared, 1

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{43} Interview with Puinte Hrangkhol of Village Mualpong, She is expert in their Folktales and the author of the book \textit{Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi} meaning Folktales and Lores, dated 22 Nov, 2012.
\textsuperscript{44} Interview with Lalphirthang Hrangkhol and Hakthangthoi Hrangkhol at Lower Haflong, Followers of traditional religion and expert in traditional customs, dated 22 Nov, 2012.
\end{flushleft}
February as the day for Rualsafak. From that day, this festival has been celebrated on 1st February every year.

In the festival, the most important role is played by the youth called the vengasuo. They are the heart and soul of the festival. They undertake the entire planning and all the proceedings of the festival. An efficient and reliable man called ‘Pahoi’ is select as the leader of the core team. The process of celebrating of the Rualsafak in the present day differs from the days of past. Earlier a certain village was entrusted with the task of hosting the Rualsafak. It was a huge responsibility but the host village ensured every possible help and co-operation, and entertained the guest from different villages from near and far. The Vengasuo engaged themselves at certain jhums for accumulating funds in aid of Rualsafak. Purchasing the animals (buffalo) for the feast was also the responsibility of the vengasuo. Work schedules for the festival, were planned and fixed at an appropriate time by the Vengasuo.

The venue for the festival is called Tungkung or Roikung. This place is regarded as a sacred place. Roikung is part of the Tungkung, specially prepared for the feast. During the time of the festival ballads and dances are never-ending scenes at the Roikung. The cheerfulness of the venue delights the peasants providing pleasure from their hard work. A couple of girls and boys called “Hlompabophkat and Hlomnubophkat” are entrusted to maintain courteous behaviour and proper discipline at the Roikung.

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46 The lahd and People of N.C.Hills. T.S.Hrangkhol. (a booklet of 20 pages.)
47 Mrs Zirsangpui Hrangkhol & Mr. Sonneibul Hrangkhol, Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2010, page, 20.
On the scheduled day, before the entry of the reserved animal for sacrifice into the host village, a series of rites are performing. A traditional puja called “Lamtak Satindaisung” is performed in order to seek protection from Lamtak Pathian (god of protection). Again another puja is solemnised to please the ‘Tarpa’ the goddess of protection. When the animal is brought to the sacrificial area, the Vengasua, are not allowed to be present that place to see the ritual. The members of the Vengasua are sent to a distance, where the sounds of the animals are not being audible. To commence the sacrifice of the animal, a special rice beer called ‘Sarchan zu’ is served. The Vengasua prepare various types of delicacies for the people. In this time, a group of Youngsters called ‘Seraphit’ snatch a large amount of meat from the chopping area for their consumption at their own separate venue. However, this kind of activities is accepted by the society as formalities. The main feature of the Rualsafak is enjoying the ceaseless flow of traditional rice beer called zu. The person in charge of the zu sectioned is called ‘Bangchengchof’. He is responsible for serving the zu to all the people. The eating, drinking and merry-making goes on, for a whole day and night and the festival come to end in the next day. The Rualsafak finally comes to an end but only with the anticipation of making another exciting event of life. This celebration marks a new beginning for everything and the Hrangkhols are eagerly wait for it.

The Farongot (parongot) festival is meant for the young boys and girls for merry making and rejoicing and seeking friendship with each other. It is celebrated in the month of April (Thadoi in Hrangkhol). This celebration is exclusively meant for the youths, where the Pahoi (leader) has a major role to play on it. The youth get great pleasure in collecting and presenting all kinds of flowers specially the wild orchids. In

56
Hrangkhol language, these are called -dannghang, rualtei, chemjem, nemengetc.\(^{48}\) It is mostly a spring festival for the youth. A group of village youths gather and collect various kinds of flowers from the jungle and carry it on a large basket called *Tolai* (made of bamboo) to the village with the cheerful enthusiasm to the *Tungkung*\(^{49}\). On that very night, all the flowers are presented to every household for the prosperity of the family and society. There is no arrangement of feast for this festival. *Zu* is served on the occasion and the youth enjoy the whole night at the *Tungkung* with singing and dancing.

*Neimthek* is a very expensive festival celebrated individually. *'Neimthek'* is meant exclusively for the rich and wealthy person to exhibit their power and richness. On this occasion, a grand feast is prepared for all. Unlike other ceremonies, the *Neithek* begins with a different arrangement, where a huge cauldron of cooked rice is served on each and every plate but the served rice is not for eating, but discarded on the floor. After it, the people gathered in the festival eat the subsequent cooked rice from the cauldron. However, this unusual tradition of the Hrangkhols is seldom practiced at present, because the people are no longer blessed abundantly like before.

*Chemchoina* is celebrated just before the selection of the *jhum* land in the first part of March. The word *Chem* means *dao* and *choina* means handling, so this festival is celebrated by praying to save the people from unwanted accident and injury during the time of the *Jhum* and good production of crops, protection from natural calamity, etc. A ritual is relating of young boys of five to eight years of age is performed through the help of *Ochai*. After the *puja* is completed by the *Ochai*, the villagers make a fire by


\(^{49}\) *Tungkung* is Hrangkhol word meaning a selected house where the youth girls are gathered.
rubbing or fiction by spited in two bamboo strings on the village ground. There would be competition and those who would make fire first would be awarded. As the bamboo catches fire, they make a big fire for their hearth as it is regarded as a sacred fire. Then every household resumes cooking with this fire. It is to remember that in the past fire was very valuable and that is why people's hearth was never extinguished until the next holy fire was produced. In this occasion, the villagers enjoy the whole day with singing, dancing and drinking zu. There is no special feast in this festival.\(^5^0\)

The *Lenpui* is a ceremony, which paves the way for a teenage girl to enter a new phase into adulthood. A teenage girl willing to associate with others gets an invitation to join the group. The parents of the girl are required to co-operate and prepare a pitcher of zu. At the appointed day, a group of youth enter the girl's courtyard singing and dancing. The group is entertained only with zu. The continuous singing and dancing enables the teenage girl to shed her shyness and from then onwards the girl becomes a part of the group. Thus, the *Lenpui* ceremony declares the maturity of a girl with pomp and show. Unlike the Caste Hindu society and some of the plain tribes like Boro and Karbi the Hrangkhols do not practice any kinds of ritual at the time of getting puberty of the girl. The Hrangkhol community are very fond of singing, dancing and music. Every festival is characterised by music and dancing. They have also their own traditional musical instruments that accompany any festivity.

The Hrangkhol like other tribes are very fond of dance and music. Dance and music are socially and culturally significant in their life cycle. Dance and music are

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closely related with the expression of joy for a good harvest, on the success of hunting expedition, honouring and receiving the chief guest or best hunter, awards to ward off grief on the death of an important person or chief, to drain out relief or sorrow, expression of joy in festivals, to speed up work progress in the field, etc.\textsuperscript{51}

Hrangkhols performed dance and songs by the co-ordination of the people. Coordination is the indication of unity of the community. The pattern of unity inherited from generation to generations in Hreangkhol society. Everyone wants to join the cultural activities without any denial appearance. Their culture distinguishes them from others. The musical instruments of the Hrangkhols are quite distinct in kinds. The most popular instruments are describe as below.

\textit{The Khouaung} is a long wooden drum, the \textit{Dar} is a bell, while the \textit{Zamluong} a big bell, and the \textit{Darribu} a pair of small bell, they also have Zamluong a big mouth pipe organ, \textit{Belem} is a small flute made from bamboo and \textit{Chompereng} a kind of violin, locally made of wood and bamboo. The \textit{Loiput} is a bugle made from buffalo horn while the \textit{Serenda} a kind of violin made from wood. The \textit{Theipit} is a kind of small flute made from bamboo. Due to the impact of western society and Christianity, they have been started to play guitar and other western musical instruments. All these instruments used by the Hrangkhols are made by them except gongs and bells, while the gongs and bells are purchased from the market imported from the Tripura and Mizoram.\textsuperscript{52}

Singing song is the most spontaneous expressions of joy and pleasure. The Hrangkhols have their own folk songs that may be divided as the Lullaby song,

\textsuperscript{51} Chaturbhuj Sahu, \textit{Tribes of North East India}, Sarup & Sons, 2002, New Delhi, p. 119.  
\textsuperscript{52} Interview with T.S. Hrangkhol, of Moulpong village, He is an assistant School Inspector of Dima Hasao district, dated 25\textsuperscript{th} September 2012.
Romantic song and game song. They have so many game song sung by them during the
time of playing various game. Some of these songs are (i) Achoran sang choran sang.
(ii) Meipaso, meipose. (iii) Sirlungka sirkambaka. (iv) Kapansakarahuonte. (v)
Inchongareng patuolhmai a. (vi) Thangvaianhong lien an tih. (vii) An run e, an run e.
(viii) Kheng oh khupkhup. (ix) Um uminzolekenchi bam bam, etc. These songs are
especially sung and performed with a companion of group of persons in moving
position.

There are more than 33 numbers of folk song in Hrangkhol tribes which are still
sang. But due to the lack of written record none can sing all the songs. These folk
songs are very popular among all the Hrangkhols and performed during marriage
ceremony, religious performance and in different festivals. Relating to different
occasions their folk songs may divide as marriage song, religious song and festival
songs. All the songs are sung by a group of persons in a particular place with the help of
musical instrument like drum, flute, etc. Clapping is one of the musical arrangements of
the Hrangkhol tribe. During the time of these singing, they clapped moving around the
place with a great excitement and pleasure. 53

The Hrangkhols has their own dances known as Lampalaklam, (festive dance),
Soksolam (in soksolam dance they focused the community fishing experiences as the
fish is symbol of prosperity to the Hrangkhol). Thalirheilam, Ufeilam, Vailam (Vailum
dance to welcome honourable person into the village,) Balabunlam, Irkolintet, Insudet
lam, Khuollam is a dance performed by a group of dancers who dance in colourful

53 Interview with Lalphir thang Hrangkhol of Lungkhok Village, a follower of traditional religion and
retired teacher of L P school, dated- 22-07-12.
profiles to the tune of gongs and drums. Originally, it was a dance performed by honoured invites while entering into the arena where community feast was held. *Dar lam* (funeral dance), and *Inintir lam*, etc. are performed in the time of the celebration of the funeral feast. All these dances are performed on special occasions along with the drums and other musical instruments during the time of festivals and religious ceremonies. The male dancers wear dresses like ‘Dhoti and Kamij’ Lukom (turban) *Changlatak* and the female participants wear *Puanbomtak, Ponamnei, Kongkhit, Thepbop*, etc. They use ornaments called *Jackcher, Chumhrei, Lirthei* etc. All the dances have different meaning and dance it in different occasion.

Literature reflects the culture of a civilization or community. It may be a written sources or an oral tradition. Upto1972, there was no written literature of the Hrangkhol community. Their entire literature consisted of oral traditions handed down from one generation to the next. The Hrangkhols as mentioned earlier had no script their own and their traditions have been preserved orally in the form of ballads, legend, myth, and also in the form of religious ‘*Mantras*’(chants) and activities. They do not have a sacred script to preserve their religious tradition. Thus it was continued in the form of oral literature. However, the oral tradition is quite rich in the form of folk tales and folk songs. About fifty folk tales were collected from the field study but as the folk tales are preserved orally they vary from one locality to the next. The folk songs, may be divide into lullaby songs, traditional games songs, devotional songs, and love songs. After independence, solely the Christian missionaries spread education in this area. They introduced the Roman script to write Hrangkhol literature and a booklet of Christian

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54 interview with *Mrs. Zirsangpui Hrangkhol*, age 32 years and *Dershan Hrangkhol* age 35 years, dated 12 March 2012 at Moulpong and Zion village.
religious hymn book has been published in the Hrangkhol language named *Hrangkhol Kristian Hla Bu* in 1972. The second written literature was the enlarged edition of the earlier publication with three hundred and fifty songs published in 1982. The *Zokna rhai hoi* containing sixty songs was published in 1990 through the effort of Mr. Vanthoi of Zion village. The most important Hrangkhol literary work is the Hrangkhol Bible. The entire New Testament with Psalm and proverbs was first published in 1997 through the ardent efforts of Rev. Lalneithang of Zion, published by the Bible Society of India. The Hrangkhol *Thurchi Laktoi* was the first traditional literature written and published by T.S. Hrangkhol from Halflong in 2000. It contains some of their folktales, folk song and a very brief description of their origin, society, customs, etc. After it, a book of folk tales entitled *Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi* has published by Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, Guwahaty, in the year 2010.

The British government started modern education in India and it was in some selected places of the country. As ethnic groups like the Hrangkhols always settled in the interior area of the land or in, the hilly area and traditionally they were not interested to get the education. The work of Christian mission in the field of education had the most significant impact on the hill tribes of Assam. The arrival of pioneering missionaries may be regarded as a blessings for the tribal people.\textsuperscript{55} It was one of the reasons why the tribals converted into Christianity. The most important reason for the great impact in the hills was that during the colonial period (1826-1947) British government gave the Christian missions a virtual monopoly in the sphere of education

there. Since the Missions, Station was set up in 1905 in North Cachar Hills through
the effort of Rev. Gerlan Williams several mission schools were opened in many places
where the art of writing and reading was taught. At the beginning, the Hrangkhols were
not interested but through the effort of the Christian missionaries formal education
gradually appeared. Now the literacy rate of the Hrangkhol is started to increased. As
per the Census of India 2011, the literacy rate is 72%. However, it is important to
mention that education up to lower primary school is also regarded as the literate, while
dropout during L.P. School is high among the Hrangkhol. The first matriculate of
Hrangkhol community in Dima Hasao District is Lalfimthoi, Lalphirthang, who passed
in the year 1964 while Mrs Ngulchohli was the first female matriculate but the exact
date of her passing the examination is not known. Gradual development of education is
going on, and in the year 1999 a first division in Matriculation was secured by
Lalphirhoi and first letter marks was secured by Rengthonei Hrangkhol in the year
2000. Till 2011 in the Dima Hasao district the Hrangkhol have, postgraduate twenty
numbers, Engineer two, graduate one hundred and twenty and matriculate one thousand
twenty. So one can easily imagine the steady and slow development of education
amongst the Hrangkhol of Dima Hasoa District of Assam:

The traditional Administrative system of Hrangkhol tribe has been strictly
maintained since the remote past. The customary rules and practices of the Hrangkhols
are associated with the social life and activities strictly followed by all members of the
society. The customary rules and practices play an important role in social control.

56 Frederick S. Downs, Christianity in North East India: Historical perspectives, New Delhi, 1983, page
273.
58 Source field survey.
These are being continued from one generation to the next generation through observance in a systematic way with proper respect. The Hrangkhols have their own social rules and practices that serve the very purpose of the modern judiciary. The Hrangkhols have no rajas (kings) and the Halám headed by the Galim or Kalim governs the whole community. In early period, the office of the Kalim was like a village head, which was practiced by the different sub clans of the Old-Kuki group of tribes like Kuki, Halam, Biate etc., even sometime the Kalim or Galim acted as the priest. In due time this administrative system carried by the Hrangkhols and Halam (a tribe of Old-Kuki group of tribes) living in Tripura as a distinct features of their own. Gradually the office of the Kalim became the source of solidarity and they accept it as their supreme administrative machinery covering certain area or one district etc. for instance in Dima Hasao district there is only one Halam irrespective of religion for the Hrangkhols. Now the Kalim of Hrangkhols is not merely a priest or the village head but he is the Chief justice of their society. They have separate village head and other officials under the office of the Kalim. They have democratic traditions with a group of village officials, the Kalim Chief justice, the Kabur or Assistant justice and their subordinates Chapia-Kalim and Chapia-Kabur, to control their administration. These officers were not hereditary and an aspirant for the headman ship has to start at the bottom of the official hierarchy. The Halam is the Supreme House of the judiciary system of the Hrangkhols. It is comparable to the Supreme Court of any judiciary system of modern

61 S.Borkakoti, Tribes of Assam, New Delhi, 1984, p, 67.
civilization. No one can challenge the decision of the Halam. Halam is the supreme authority of both the administration and judiciary.\textsuperscript{62}

There are two lower courts under the jurisdiction of the Halam starting from the Village court and Pafong court. The first is the Village council (Kho Devan) where trial justice is dispensed. The Village Council is headed by the village chief (gaonburha). The role of the head of the village i.e. Gaonbura is very important in any tribal village and the Hrangkhols follow this custom. The village head has the sole authority of administration and judge of any village disputes setup by the Hrangkhols. There are customary laws to select the village head through the following customs:\textsuperscript{63}

The person who was the founder or the leader to establishing a new village is often regarded as a qualification to be the Gaonburha.\textsuperscript{64} If it is, an old setup then the village head may be hereditary. The son of a village head may be the new village head for a newly established village as a token of honour. In some villages, the householders may not belong to the same clan, and then the village head may be selected by rotation for specific period from different clans. A person from outside of village or a new comer to the village is not allowed to be the village head.

Selection of the village head may also arise when a village headman resigns from his post, or the post remains vacant due to death or any other cause. The service of village head is not fixed and he could remain in his post until his death if the villagers are satisfied with him or his term may be for a specific period only.

\textsuperscript{62} Soppitt.C.A. page 7.
\textsuperscript{63} Interview with present Kalim of Dima Hasao district, dated 11 July 2013, of Lungkhok village.
\textsuperscript{64} Interview with Present Kabur of Dima Hasao district of Lungkhok village dated 7\textsuperscript{th} April 2013.
The table no. 2.7 shows the honour of the Hrangkhols towards the democratic process on selection of their Gaonbura (village head) as 168 (67.2%) of the respondents supported on the option to election or selection democratically. Some time Gaonbura has been selected from the same family as hereditary rights as 79 (31.6%) respondents has been supported for this option. If any problem would arises to select the Gaonbura then the government may appoint but it is very rare as only 1.2% of the respondent opted for it. At present, there are no any gaonbura out of twenty-four villages who was appointed by the government.

Table No. 2.7  **The Systems of appointment of Gaonbura of Hrangkhol villages.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of the selection of G.B.</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected/Selected</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed by the govt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected/Selected, Traditionally from the same family</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey

Gaonbura is assisted by prominent village elders (*Tar ulian*) and the next elder most (*Sazom*) consist of eight active members of the village. From these one is selected called Sazom Ulian to assist the village chief and function as a secretary. The Sazom Ulian is the chief spokesperson and advisor in every respect of the village administration. Another portfolio of this administrative set up is the Tangva Ulian.
selected from among the village youth to look after the welfare of the youth and village development. To give the information of the village council to the villagers a couple of youths called Tangva Bop are selected. In the village council, the petitioner has to register his grievances to the village chief. The chief of the village may permit him/her to call for trial in the village courts depending upon the circumstances. In the court if a particular complaint is found guilty then person/party or the accused is liable to pay fine/compensation as decided by the court according to the gravity of the offence. If a case cannot be resolved in the village court, then it may be referred to the Halam.

Some cases like theft, injury, divorce, adultery etc. required to be tried in the Satha Court. In this situation, the person or party has to present a medium sized pig called Sakeminli or a pair of matured cock or hen and a pitcher of zu (rice beer) as a token of court fee. The all people associated with solving the problem and as the mark of swearing and witness, which is called satha eat this pig or cock and so this court is known as Satha.

Pafong Court held within the clan. The case like 'Zuarruk' the case for those couple who married by breaking the traditional customs, 'Nujuar' case on illicit sexual relation, 'Irchonlua' death case in the house of relatives etc., are solved within the Pafong court. The pafong ulien (eldest men) or nuzuar ulien (eldest women) officiates as the chief of the court. If the two branches of lower court, i.e. village and Satha court are unable to solve a disputes then the cases is referred to the Halam (the supreme court of the community) for the final justice. All are bound to honour and accept the decision of the Halam court.
Halam is the supreme court of the Hrangkhols headed by Kalim or Galim. The Kalim is the constitutional head and keystone of law and order. A Kalim is selected by a general meeting of the community representatives. A wise person who is familiar with their customs and traditional rules, and whose personality is pure and blameless may be selected as a Kalim but the person should be an adult male. There is no other requirement or general qualification to be the Kalim.

To assist the Kalim, there are two offices, one is the Kabur and the other is Chapia, both selected by the Halam. The qualification for the Kabur and Chapia are the same as these for the Kalim. There is also one secretary and one treasurer to help the Kalim, and they are selected by the house. The chief of the villages are permanent members of the Halam Assembly.

The term of the Kalim, Kabur and Chapia is not fixed and unless they break a social law, they can sit in the chair until death. The term of secretary and treasurer is normally fixed for five years or may be removed by impeachment at any moment for violation of the Halam's rules and regulations.

In case of the violation of any rules and regulations of Hrangkhol society or blame imposed by the permanent members of the Halam, the Kalim, Kabur and Chapia may be removed at any time by the decision of the general meeting of the Halam.

The Kalim is the de facto Head of the community and the government. He is the representative of the Hrangkhol community to the judiciary system of the Dima Hasao district council. As a rule, the Halam is required to meet once in a year. Generally, when any cases or disputes arise relating to the divorce, criminal, violation of rules, etc.,
it is directly placed the Halam or referred by the two lower divisions such as Village court, and Pafong court within a specified period. The Halam court passes judgement on all unsolved cases in the presence of the petitioner. When the trial takes place in the tungkung (Halam office,) the appointed Halam Palai (messenger) sent to Parual Tungkung (accused house) to inform about the order of the Halam. After receiving the order from the Halam the accused party has to pay the ‘Halam Fak’ (consisting of a fixed amount of money) fixed by the court along with a traditionally woven shawl to the Halam court as court fee. After completion of this tradition, the trial will begins with a long argument and it ends with a final court judgement.

There are many kinds of customary rules and regulations under the Halam constitution which have been discussed below.

Luangman refers to the punishment in a murder case. If a person found guilty with murder then the murderer may be punished with a heavy fine. The Halam has no fixed and limited rule and regulation in this regard, Judgement may award based on humanitarian grounds.

Maktha is the judgement in divorce case. In case of normal and reasonable divorce the punishment or fine to be paid by the husband is rupees 200/- only. Now it has been changed but not fixed. In the last ten years, there is no record of divorce in the Hrangkhol community of Dima Hasao District. The causes for divorce may be the infertility of a woman; if somebody is accused of adultery then her husband can appeal for divorce and a man who is impotent and unable to satisfy his wife or separated for more than one year then his wife can appeal for the same. Purirka is an option to the
divorcee couple who can remarry; by paying fine to the village Court (traditionally a pitcher of zu, pig or hen for meat and amount of money fixed in time).

*Pabi* is the judgement for the unauthorised marriage of a married person. It is for the person who has an illicit relation with another’s wife. In this case if the woman is ready to stay with the new husband, she may to do so but the new husband has to pay rupees three hundred. This custom has been followed since the time of independence, when the value of Rupees three hundred was quite high. Today with the change standard of rupee value the *Pabi* fine is changed but not fixed.

*Zuarruk* is punishment and fine for those who married without fulfilling the traditional rules and customs. Here the amount of fine is Rs.200/- along with Rs.20/-as a fine of *Pufak*. *Pufak* is bride price to be paid to maternal uncle by the bridegroom. *Pufak* is the payment made to the bride’s eldest maternal uncle from the bridegrooms’ side at the time of the marriage ceremony. The amount of the *Pufak* is Rs. 20/- only.

*Deltha* is the punishment for those who maintain extra marital sexual relation. The Persons having such relations might be punished with a heavy fine. There is no fixed amount for the punishment but it depends upon the gravity of the cases.

The *Inruroi* means punishment in case of robbery. The punishment may vary according to the nature of the incident and grounds of the case. There is no limited and fixed fine in this case.

*Bazarmitha* is the case for the boy and girl who had already agreed to marry each other through the *Biak zu* ceremony (the first marriage engagement). If before perform of the *Tinkhou-lenkham*, (final engagement) the girl committed sexual relation
or eloped with another man then the accused person has to pay a fine one fourth of the
*pabi pui* to the *Halam* court on the trial day.

*Hloman* paid by the groom in a social marriage according to their customs to the
bride family. *Hloman* payment fixed for Rs. 100/- along with Rs.10/- as *Pufak*. If it
is not celebrate according to their customs then this payment is not accepted.

If there is 12(twelve) sons or daughters from the same parents and alive with
good health, the father has to pay half of the ‘*hloman*’ to his father in laws family as
token of honour as the parents of a woman with-rich fertility and health. This tradition is
known as *Roungmabe*.65

*Irhnuman* or *Pumichang* (breast-feeding fees) is a custom of punishment for that
person, who is not ready to accept the mother and child, born after illicit sexual relation.
If the accused boy or his family refuses to accept mother and child, then he should pay a
heavy fine called *Irhnuman Chawi* and the child will get the clan from the father side. If
the boy is not ready to pay *Irhnuman Chawi* and girls family called *Pumi chang* (fine
imposed by the *Halam*) will pay it then child will get the clan of his mother and he will
brought up by the girls family.

*Zainai* is for that woman who had illicit physical relation with more than one
man and getting pregnant before marriage then her case will be tried in the Village
Court. The Court will try to find out the father of the baby and if no one confesses then
the last man who had relations with the girl will be considered as the father of the baby
and the judgement is known as *Inhnunginta kelkotkhar*. The accused man may deny and

65 Interview with present *Kalim* and *Kabur* of Dima Hasao district of Assam, dated 23 March 2011, of
Lungkhok village.
refuse to accept the baby, in such situation the baby will be brought up by the girl’s family and recognised as a member of their own clan.

Though the functioning of the *Halam* appears to be very simple the Hrangkhols always honour its judgement, and are afraid to face the *Halam court*, as it is regarded as the highest authority of the community. Some punishments are fixed and some time imposes others according to the needs and crimes. The judgements of the *Kalim* is final, however the decisions are normally taken unanimously. From the feminist point of view, it is worth to mentioning that the *Halam* constitution is not democratic as there is no place for women who have no scope for active participation in judiciary and administrative system. At present, the Hrangkhol people followed two religions namely the traditional religion and Christianity. The latter’s is divided into several denominations like Evangelical Free Church of India (EFCI), Presbyterian Church, etc. In spite of religious differences, the entire Hrangkhol community is integrated through the respect and honour accorded to the *Halam*. Still they have faith in the *Halam* as their supreme judiciary irrespective of religion. The present *Kalim* is the follower of traditional religion while about 70% of them are the followers of Christianity.

According to the traditional records, available in oral sources the following are the names of some of the *Kalims* of Hrangkhol still date Neitonkha Cholkha, Kholsimsik Lalsimsok pena, Densuanngir Bangkheng, Buangtingthang Pena, Neivansong Bangkheng, Darchunthang Phirpu, Lalningsuan Pena, Saipasiam Cholkha, Ngirchuangtong Bangkheng, Suidarthang Phirpu, Bulthoirher Phuitong (Hrangkhol). The last member is the acting *Kalim* of the *Halam* of DimaHasao.
A very small group of Hrangkhols are aware about the modern political system of our country in general and about the politics of state legislative or the politics of the District Autonomous council. There is a Hrangkhol member in the District Council from but most of the Hrangkhols are not aware about the power and function of the members of the Autonomous Council. The polity of the Hrangkhols are mainly confined to their traditional administration so they appear to be indifferent to the modern political systems.

Table no. 2.8 shows the visits of political leader to the Hrangkhols villages. It indicates the lack of concern of the political leaders for the Hrangkhol areas, while the majority of them visit Hrangkhol villages only during the time of election. From the table one can easily realise political parties' lack of concern for the development of their area and awareness of the Hrangkhols towards the modern political system. Here 83% of the respondent denied the visit of any political party leader to their villages and only 4.8% of the respondent said that their political leader visits their villages weekly, monthly or quarterly. They were observed to be the Village Head or political leader of their villages during field study. Majority of the Hrangkhols (8.4%) says that their leader visit only the time of lections.

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Table no: 2.8 Political leaders visits to a Hrangkhol village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional village</th>
<th>Christian village</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not visit at all</td>
<td>60 80.0</td>
<td>148 84.6</td>
<td>208 83.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6 3.4</td>
<td>6 2.4</td>
<td>3 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>3 4.0</td>
<td>6 3.4</td>
<td>3 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>1 1.3</td>
<td>2 1.1</td>
<td>3 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>6 8.0</td>
<td>3 1.7</td>
<td>9 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only at the time of election</td>
<td>5 6.7</td>
<td>16 9.1</td>
<td>21 8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75 100.0</td>
<td>175 100.0</td>
<td>250 100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

The major reason for this phenomenon is that maximums of the settlements are located in the interior area of the District and the political parties do not have any activities in those areas. The visits of their political leaders are marked at the time of the election once or twice within the five-years of tenure. Once elections are over, the contacts of the political leaders and the Hrangkhol electorates become weakened. It is reported that, at the time of voting the majority of the Hrangkhol voters exercise their franchise. This is generally attributed to the activities of the Christian Missionaries that has helped to bring awareness regarding education, superstition, and science and technology.

*Khomak-irsam* (swearing) is a unique tradition to find out the culprit who has committed any activities against the community. (i) *Tuilut Meisem* (immersion and fire): To find out the culprit, the entire suspected people are directed to assemble on the bank
of a river selected by the Ochai. After performing the ritual named Tuilut Meisem the priest cuts the throat of a white hen on the brow of each disputant, allowing the blood to run down the face. According to the colour of the blood, red or blackish the judgement is given. To ascertain that the judgement is just the suspected person is asked to enter into the deep part of the river water. They believe that the water of the river will become full hot like fire and the water will burn the real culprit who thus cannot stay in the water for a long time. (ii) Kamkeihase (Biting tiger’s tooth) Here the accused person have to swear on the name of Pathian that if he is guilty then he will be killed a tiger. They have belief that ultimately a tiger will kill the person who is guilty. These kinds of the tests are also practised by the other Old-Kuki groups of tribe like Kuki, Hmar, etc. with certain differences.

The feeling of differentiation has also gradually developed among the Hrangkhol people and they have been suffering from an identity crisis in modern times. The Hrangkhol are included in the Old Kuki group of tribes in spite of their separate religion, customs, language, and tradition. Solidarity has now become the main problem among the Hrangkhol people due to their small numbers scattered in different settlements. The Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council has recognized the power of Halam in the judiciary system. Halam is the Hrangkhol traditional administrative system where all the disputes and cases are solved. At present, there are so many organizations like Hrangkhol Christian Club, Hrangkhol Women Forum, Hranghkkhol Forum for Literature, and the Hrangkhhol National Council connecting all the Hrangkhol people living in North East India. All these are non-government self-funding organizations that work for the revival of their tradition and customs along with the propagation of education in the community.
Bowell first used the term acculturation to signify the change from a purely traditional to a modern way of life. It is a 'transfer of cultural or social elements from one society to another.' Through this process of social change, certain changes voluntarily or involuntarily occur in a society but mostly the cores of the culture remain intact. The changes in most cases are superfluous. The process however has both positive and negative aspects. Socio-political, environmental and planned development factors play a decisive role in bringing about changes. The society of the Hrangkhols is under the process of acculturation and assimilation. Since the time of independence changes in the political institutions, educational institutions and the mode of communication resulted in changes of the root level of the Hrangkhol traditional customs and rituals. The significant assimilation of Hrangkhols traditional customs was started immediately after their conversion to Christianity. The changes occurred in their traditional religious beliefs through the efforts of the Christian Missionaries; changes also came in their food habits and dress. For instance, the Christian Hrangkhol strictly avoid their traditional drink 'zu' which has an important role in the economy, and in the attitude of an individual. The avoidance of the zu stabilised the household economy and it improved the enthusiasm to work. Gradually the Christian Hrangkhol started either the money thus saved to educate their children or to purchase day-to-day modern needs. Both education and modern tools (like medicine, road communication, Television, Radio, Internet, computer, Phone, Banking etc.) helped in the process of change. Earlier breeding and eating cow was taboo for the Hrangkhol people. Moreover, they do not domesticate the cow but beef is now edible though not common. Changes in the traditions in

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68 Ibid.
every ritual from birth to death are seen. Christians now follow a Westernized lifestyle neglecting their own traditional lifestyle. They celebrate all the ritual through the Church, deny the importance of the *Ochai* and sacrifices. The mode of dresses gradually changed among the Hrangkhols of the Dima Hasao District of Assam. The men both of traditional followers and Christians have generally adopted the western style of dress while the young women now prefer to wear the western style of dresses like trousers and T-shirts instead of their beautiful hand woven traditional attire. The attitude of the Christian Hrangkhols has witnessed many changes and the sanitary habits was observed more among the Christians than the traditional Hrangkhols. According to custom, the Hrangkhol women have no right to property but after embracing Christianity those who have sufficient property (movable or immovable), allow daughters a share.

Competition is an essential process in every social system by which the individual and institutions adapt to new conditions. Competition functions as a process of selection, promotes organization, and thereby functions as an agent of social change. Since the early part of the eighties of the twentieth century the competition among the tribes of the Dima Hasao district was nil. Gradual development in education and placement in government jobs of the Hmar, Biate, and Kukis have goaded the Hrangkhols to take an interest in the field of education. Now the Hrangkhols are displaying an increased interest in education and are marching forward to attain it. They have started to get the government jobs just like their allied tribes and sought to improve their economic conditions, as discussed in the next chapter.