

## CHAPTER IV

### TANGKHUL BELIEF, RITUALS AND PRACTICES IN PRE-CHRISTIAN ERA

#### 4.1 The concept of Supreme Being

The Tangkhul belief, rituals and practices in pre-Christian era is known as *hau*. In 1891 census of India, E. A. Gait wrote on the Nagas, 'There is a vague but very general belief in someone omnipotent being, who is well disposed towards men, and whom therefore there is no necessity for propitiating. Then come a number of evil spirits, who are ill disposed towards human beings and to whose malevolent interference are ascribed all the woes which afflict mankind. To these, therefore, sacrifices must be offered. These malevolent spirits are sylvan deities, spirits of the trees, the rocks and streams, and sometimes also of the tribal ancestors'. Before they ate or drank, they would always offer a little food and drink to their gods so that they might not harm them (Shimray 1985). Horam (1988) asserts that they believed in one omnipotent being, who is well disposed towards men, who rules the universe and who, though benevolent, is seldom approached because he is too lofty for direct contact with human being. He is the male god whose name is held in deepest reverence, and who lives in heaven. He is addressed by different names like *Kazing Ngalei Kasa Akhava* (The Master and Creator of heaven and earth), *Varivara* (source of Peace), *Kazingpa* (the one who dwells in heaven/dweller of heaven), *Kazingwung* (King of heaven), *Ngaleiwung* (King of earth), *Zingmungleng* (the one who rules from heaven), etc. Below him are hosts of minor deities (*kameo*) who are more sharply perceived and given greater attention because they control such concrete phenomena as disease, crops, rain, or human fertility. There are different deities for different places like the deity of house, field,

jungle, river, stone etc. and so, rites are performed accordingly (Ibid.). *Phunghui philava*, *Shimlui kameo* and *Kokto* are well known deities.

#### **4.1.1 *Phunghui philava* (deity of wealth)**

*Phunghui Philava* is associated with the fertility of the paddy field. It is considered to be different from other deities for the simple reason that it has feet unlike other deities. The Tangkhul belief says that if *Phunghui Philava*, a deity with a long flowing hair down the feet, passes through a paddy field, the place will receive good harvest that year. It is perceived as a harbinger of fortune if her footprints are found stepping in into the granary and vice versa. Therefore, rites and rituals are performed for the fertility of paddy (Luikham 1961).

#### **4.1.2 *Shimlui kameo* (deity of house and field)**

Literally it means home field deity. There is innumerable *Shimlui Kameo*. People from different villages have different names for these deities. The Tangkhuls propitiate the deities for different purposes except for the fertility of paddy. (Ibid.)

#### **4.1.3 *Kokto* (deity of the land of dead)**

*Kokto* is the deity of *Kazeiram*, the land of the dead judges the dead. He lives in a grand mansion with guards securing all sides and nobody from the upper world would dare to enter. He is known as the cruelest deity. In order to please him, he is presented with the newest shawl brought by the dead (Shimray 1967).

Generally the Tangkhuls regarded the deities as malevolent, and so, they appeased them in the form of various sacrifices- of pigs, fowl or other living things and to keep them

from bringing havoc upon individuals or the entire village. This required the services of folk practitioner to interact with those deities. After they propitiate the deities yet the the deities do not response to the sacrifices, the villagers would then turn to their benevolent God. Here they would try to defy the demons and utter words of rebuke, “Hey, you deity, although you are treating us in this way, be it known to you, God is above you.” In this way, their ultimate belief and worship is rendered to God who is the Creator of all (Horam 1988).

#### **4.2 Folk practitioner (*Khanong*)**

*Khanong* or folk practitioners are of various kinds. There are men as well as women *khanong*. According to traditional belief, a deity called *shu* accompanies the *khanong*. Among the *khanong* some can drive out evil spirit but could not go to *kazeiram* (the land of dead). At the same time, there are others who can go to *kazeiram* but could not heal sickness, some can even call the departed soul and some possess expert knowledge of herbal medicine. *Shu* guides them whether to sacrifice a dog, pig or cow for sick person. There is another kind of *khanong* who can prophesy. *Khanong* can also tell what kind of untoward things will happen and can detect crime. A *khanong* knows the coming of dead of some great men but not his/her own. He serves as an intermediary between man and deity (Ruivah 1993). Exorcist, Prophet, Shaman and Priest (*sharva/sharwo*) are also categorized under *khanong*.

*Sharva/Sharwo* is exclusively meant for male. *Awunga* (village headman) is the head of all *sharva* of the village and he is called *sharwo*. *Sharva* can be acquired by anyone

who has the requisite qualification, one who is well versed in customary laws, religious practices, and medicinal knowledge and possessing magical power (Ibid.).

#### **4.3 Dreams (*Mang*) and Omens (*Khamachut*)**

The Tangkhul beliefs say that dreams and omens afford an unerring presage of the future. If a buffalo attacks a man, he will lose any lawsuit in which he is involved at that time. Likewise if a buffalo attacks a man in his dream, he will suffer the similar misfortune. They attach to the dream precisely the same significance as to the actual event. The interpretation of unusual dreams is left to the *khanong* (Hodson 1911).

Constant fear of evil spirits led the people to perform divinations, rites and ceremonies; and the predictions of the religious specialists were strictly and faithfully executed either to proceed with the plan or withdraw from it. This involves both individual and communal affairs. They used different methods of divination in order to read omens such as *kapa khayang* (bamboo divination), *hara khayang* (egg divination), *harkho khayang* (cock divination) etc. Household omens are consulted with the head of the house whereas the community divinations are performed either by the village priest or some village elder. The detail process is meticulously observed and prediction of the omens is made accordingly.

In *kapa khayang*, a bamboo is split suddenly, and then if the fracture be regular, without any overlapping strands, the omen is good. This omen is commonly observed before going to war. In *hara khayang*, an opening is made on top of an egg, boiled on heated ashes and the cooking process is observed. If the egg, meant for the family or village boils and its contents spill out, it is considered to be a bad omen. The same indicates

that during that year epidemic and any kind of trouble or controversy might afflict the family or village. If, however, it boils up but does not spill, it is considered to be a good omen. It forecasts that they may have a happy and prosperous life during that year. In case of an egg meant for crops, spilling of its content is considered to be a good sign and they may get a bountiful crop that year. This ceremony is performed outside the village gate. In *harkho khayang*, preferably a white cock is strangled to death and its legs are examined. If the right leg is placed on top of the left slightly crossing, it is a favourable omen. (Ibid.)

Further, in consulting omens, the natural agents such as dreams, squirrel crossing the path against the journey of a person, deer and tiger barking in front of the way and certain kind of bird called *chaklen* chirping on the left side of the road are considered bad omens. In such cases the person is to return home though he may already have been far advanced in the journey. Otherwise, it is believed that the journey is bound to meet in failure, even to the extent of misfortune on the wayfarers.

#### **4.4 Necromancy (*Kathinaoli chan khangazek*)**

Another feature of the traditional belief system of the Tangkhuls is the practice of necromancy. Here a *khanong* falls into a trance and the spirit goes to the land of the dead called *kazeiram*. The spirit of the oracle *khanong* after contacting the spirit of dead receives reports, which again are told to the emissaries about their future. At times the necromancer brings some articles, as they say, from the land of the dead.

There is a folktale about going to the land of dead. Zamthingla (the girl) and Longyao (the boy) were engaged. Unfortunately, the girl was seriously ill and died. In those days, it was said that it was possible for a man to go to the kingdom of the dead but

only a few who were physically very strong and mentally very alert and intelligent could ever succeed in doing so. Longyao did not lose any time in preparing himself for the journey. He took detailed instructions from a trustworthy medium (*khanong*). Eventually, Longyao was successful to meet his fiancée (Luikham 1983).

#### **4.5 Belief in Talisman (*Lunghaila*)**

The Tangkhuls believe that a small shining black stone called *lunghaila* is a lucky stone. There are lucky stones for individuals, for the village community and also for different occasions- good harvest, games, war, cattle, and so on. Whoever finds the luck stone for good harvest will have a bountiful harvest. If any unmarried girl has this lucky stone, it is believed that she will find a good husband and will have a prosperous future. It is also believed that sometimes the person in possession of the stone may become loose his/her mind. They believe that the lucky stone is capable of going by itself from one place to another and chirping at times, like a bird (Arokianathan 1982).

A community's *lunghaila* is kept at a distant place- a few miles away from the site of the village settlement, and buried by wrapping it with pig's fat sacrificed for the purpose. Only the *awunga* (chief) and his heir can approach the stone and offer prayers and sacrifices. This takes place only once or twice in his lifetime or at times when the village is visited by some misfortune. Only village male elders accompany the *awunga*. *Awunga* asks blessings and power in order to ward the community calamity. It is taboo for the common people to come near the stone. They may do so at the cost of their lives.

#### **4.6 Taboo (*sharra*)**

The Tangkhul word for Taboo is *sharra*<sup>1</sup>, which is also known as *genna* in Angami (Ruivah 1993). The term “*genna*” means forbidden or prohibited. It is therefore applied in its primary sense to the mass of prohibitions, permanent and temporary, periodic and occasional, which are important to the tribal law of these societies<sup>2</sup> (Hodson 1911). The entire village or at times an individual member of the Tangkhuls was often under prohibition for a day or for several days. Sometimes this state of things lasts a day, sometimes several. The *sharra* may be against the entrance of strangers, or the exit of members or of both, or, allowing the entrance of strangers, disallow their going into houses, etc. Peculiar circumstances also induce prohibitions in food and drink. A young person is prohibited to plant seedlings of trees like Banyan and Oak trees because there is a belief that the trees outgrow the young people. The Tangkhul Nagas believe that there are some trees, rocks, animals, birds, plants etc. where evil spirits or ghost live. Destroying such things is prohibited for the fear of reaction or revenge. On all the Tangkhul festivals there is *sharra* either in the beginning or later part of the festival (Marchang 2003). The Tangkhuls strictly observed the following *sharra*.

##### **4.6.1 Household *sharra***

Among the Tangkhuls incest is taboo that is strictly maintained. Incest taboo is known as *shokhala* in Tangkhul. Marriage within the family and clan are strictly prohibited and is considered to be a serious crime (Ruivah 1993). It is also prohibited for a pregnant woman to kill a snake. She is restricted to approach dead to avoid the baby from evil spirits. It is taboo for a stranger to visit the household of a new born child within a week of the child's

birth. It is also taboo for strangers to come into the house of a family where domesticated animals give birth. Likewise the family members are also prohibited to talk to any strangers. This type of taboo is observed for health and long life of the newborn ones (Marchang 2003).

#### **4.6.2 Food *sharra***

No Tangkhul is permitted to eat the flesh of the goat. There was once a kid born with a pure white head and the appearance of this prodigy was the occasion of a warning to the Tangkhuls that if they ever ate the flesh of the goat they would die a mysterious death. Others assert that they would go prematurely gray, and die mad if they go against the belief. Others again say that a horrible death from boils carries off those who touch it, while there are others whose belief that men who keep goats suffer from terrible headache. With regard to dog, only a few individuals, and in rare cases separate sections of the villages are forbidden to eat the flesh of dog. In no village is the *awunga* allowed to touch it, while the prohibition extends in some villages to the whole of the *awunga's* clan. In some villages, unmarried girls are not permitted to eat dog or to eat the flesh of any male animal. A pregnant woman is not allowed to eat crab and bear's flesh or the flesh of any animal that dies a natural death. On the day of delivery the father of the baby is not allowed to take the flesh of the fowl that he kills as a sacrifice. Sacrificial meat is forbidden to women. (Hodson 1911) It is also a taboo for the commoners to eat the festive meat before the *khanong* tastes and blesses the people

### 4.6.3 Sickness *sharra*

Mysterious sicknesses, the sudden appearance of boils, blindness, loss of speech, premature greyness, are regarded as probable consequences of breaches of *sharra*. Since their attachment to the *sharra* rules is morality of a kind, this belief contains the rudiments of the idea that physical suffering and sickness are due to sin—to breaches of what is “tribal law”. While breaches of these ordinances are, as a rule, the ultimate cause of these forms of sickness, their proximate cause may be, and often is, the malignant activity of some powerful offended spirit.

Sacrifices are used as remedial measures for sickness. When an epidemic occurs in any village it is averted by means of a *sharra*. The village gates are closed at which the sacrifices are made, and sacrifices offered at the village gate by the village priest.

As a rule, the patient does not eat any portion of the sacrifices, a fact that seems to distinguish them from sacrifices performed in the course of village *sharra*, which are consumed by the villagers (Ibid.).

### 4.6.4 Gendered *sharra*

Taboos that exist for men and women in the Tangkhul society also point to a process of gendering. Following are some of these taboos:

- A woman should not yell in public. (*Shanaona kayang khareili kahang sharra*).
- A woman should not climb over roofs, trees etc. (*Shanaona tantung kasharra*).
- A woman should not walk across a man while sleeping or sitting. (*Shanaona mayarnaoli makanta sharra*).
- Ill luck will fall upon a man if he walks below a woman’s clothes line. (*Shanaowui*

*kashan phuikahai chonpar azingli marashok sharra).*

- It is forbidden for men to eat meat hunted by women. In other words a woman should not go hunting. (*Shanaona khaman/kathat sa mayarnaona shaisharra).*
- It is a taboo for women to sit cross-legged. (*Shanaona phei yakreida pamsharra).*
- Women are not allowed to eat sacrificial meat. (*Shanaona sharphahor sa shaisharra).*
- Women should not sit on the tools (like knife, *dao*, hoe, etc.) or sharpening stone. (*Khaikhara lungli shanao pamsharra).*
- A woman should not visit her parent's house immediately after getting married without her husband. There should be at least a month's gap from the time of marriage. (*Ngalanaona fathui hailaga kachang akha makaranglakha avavashi shimli ungka sharra. Khaung tharan agaharali ngasoda ungphalungra).*
- A woman should not destroy her husband's spear or any weapon, which is used for warfare. (*Shanaona malung vathaowada agaharrawui kazei raisari satek sakazam sharra).*
- It is not allowed to wash woman's wrap-around (*mekhala*) in the pond. (*Shanaowui khamakhao kashan rakhongli ngasasang sharra).*
- Tangkhul view women as polluting, at particular times. The concept of pollution/fear is established for women during her childbirth, menstruation etc. Further, a man should not have close intimacy with his wife during the period of war or before going to war. (*Tangkhulwuili shanaona nao kaphara kala awon rada leilakha makhaowada khuiya. Langmeida, rai atamli la rai vauki kaji tharan parei gahar ngaso sharra).* (cited in Kashung 2012)

On all rituals, ceremony and festivals there are *sharra*, which will be discussed separately under each section.

## **4.7 Rites of passage**

The life cycle of the Tangkhuls from birth to death is surrounded by a number of rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies, performed at different stages of their lives.

### **4.7.1 Birth ceremony**

On the day of delivery a branch of a tree is placed just at the entrance of the house to signify that *sharra* is observing. Immediately after delivery the baby is given bath with warm water. This treatment is supposed to render the child a strong body and prevent it from suffering from any back pain and pain on the loins in the afterlife. After two or three days the mother of the child is also made to sweat profusely by being wrapped in hot water blankets, this is repeated two or three times, and on the third day the woman is allowed to go about as usual. It is believed that the mother is relieved of her pain on the sixth day in case of a boy and in case of girl on the fifth day. After delivery the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp bamboo splinter called *chai* and then it is wrapped with a clean piece of cloth and buried near the house. It is believed that while burying the umbilicus, the wrapping cloth must be neat and clean and also the place to be buried must be a dry clean place; otherwise the baby may suffer from any skin disease. At the same time, the cord must be kept upward, otherwise the woman may not conceive anymore and the child may also have a short lifespan.

On the second day *naokatun*- literally it means 'laying the baby' ceremony is performed. On that day a cock/hen is killed and cooked only with water. It is believed that if salt and chillies are added in the food, it is detrimental to the health of the baby and the mother. The cooked meat is known as *naotunsa*, 'baby laying meat'; and it must be eaten

by all the members of the family on that day itself, lest misfortunes visit may befall at any time of the child's life. On that day a piece of split wood called *pheisai*, from any available post of the house, is buried near the village water-point so as to ensure an abundant and fruitful future of the newborn baby. *Pheisai* signifies addition of a new member to the family. Besides, a kind of insect called *kajat* is collected from the jungle and roasted and then chewed with some cooked rice and a few drops are given to the newborn baby. This is followed by a hot bath given to the baby. This ceremony is known as *naokhamalan*. It means 'exposing the baby to heat'.

On the seventh day, the maternal uncle or grandfather of the baby brings a big fat cock/hen, preferably a cock, called *naoyan* which means 'baby seeing' or to see the baby. The chicken/hen is then killed and cooked. The meat is distributed among the neighbors, friends and relatives. This meat is called *naoyansa*, which means 'baby seeing meat'. The uncle then blesses the baby for health and happiness.

#### **4.7.2 Naming ceremony**

The name is given either at the end or during birth taboo (*sharra*) (Hodson 1911). Omens are taken by means of fowl's feet or the split cane to determine the name. It is the belief of the Tangkhul that if the child is not given its proper name evil spirits may kill the child, as it was easy to kill a nameless person. It may be noted here that in the case of twin birth, to ensure the longevity of the babies one of the twin must be given a sky name like *Zingshinla*- meaning coming from the sky or 'replacing from the sky; in case of a girl, or *Kazinga*- meaning 'son of the sky; in case of a boy. It is believed that if no such name is given the sky god may kill the child at an early age (Ruivah 1993).

### **4.7.3 Ear piercing ceremony**

Ear piercing ceremony is performed when the child is one or two months old. A cock/hen, pig, cow or buffalo is slaughtered with some portions offered to *kameo* (deity). After performing all the required ritual by the family priest, the family may invite relatives, friends and neighbors to the feast. Ear-piercing ceremony is held for two days. Ears are pierced on both the lower lobes of the baby by a sharp bamboo needle. For girls five pieces of yarns are tied and six yarns are used for boys as five is considered as the number for female and six for male. Piercing of the ear top is done in a simple ceremony, only when the child is seven or eight years old. On that day family might not kill any domestic animal. There are altogether six holes, three in each ear of a child.

Ear piercing is done so that ornaments could be worn to beautify themselves. Secondly, it is done to identify themselves that they belong to Tangkhul. Thirdly, it is believed that ear piercing would ensure longevity of the individual and would further enhance their wisdom, health and happiness.

### **4.7.4 Marriage ceremony**

A Tangkhul marriage may be the outcome of youthful courtship-followed by the approval of their parents or arranged by the parents. Indeed, in the matter of matrimonial affairs ample freedom is given to the girl or boy to choose his or her life's partner without much interference. It should, however, be noted that the proposal made by a son or by the parent should be acceptable by both the parents and their children.

When the two families are satisfied, the engagement of the girl to the boy is arranged. Here the woman who acts as a go-between, *ngalahangsangmiva* plays the most

important role. On knowing the mutual acceptance of the families the *ngalahangsangmiva* fixes the date with the girl's parents for engagement by taking omens and informs the date to the boy's parents. Accordingly the girl's parents arrange necessary food and drinks (rice beer) for the appointed day.

The engagement ceremony takes place at the girl's home. Both the families discuss the marriage in details. It is on this occasion that the bride's parents must know what movable and immovable properties should be given to the couple after their marriage. On this day the date for the marriage ceremony is also fixed to suit the convenience of both the families. Further, they discuss about the bride price (*manho*)<sup>3</sup>, and the presents to be brought by the bride (*shimlam*) to the groom's family at the time of their marriage.

After settling of the engagement the groom's parents present a hoe to the bride's family as a confirmation of the engagement. Giving of a hoe signifies a lot in pre-Christian era: 1. Hoe is made of iron, which is a hard metal. It is hard to break and it lasts long. As such, it signifies that, the relationship of the two families will be as hard and strong as the iron, 2. Let the affection and love of the couple be as strong as the metal, 3. Hoe is one of the most important tools for the Tangkhuls, as such; let the union of the couple be fruitful and useful during their lifetime.

The bride presents shawl to the groom as a mark of mutual respect, love and affection between the bride and the groom. On the occasion of this function the bride's parents slaughter at least one pig. Some portion of the slaughtered meat is sent to the groom's family and the rest of the meat is distributed amongst all the families of the groom's clan as a declaration of engagement. The period between engagement and

marriage may last for two or three years or some time even more, so that proper arrangement for celebration of the wedding can be made. During this time the bride may learn many household chores under her mother's supervision.

The bride's family is expected to kill six pigs. Out of the six pigs the biggest one is left for the bride's party-accompanying they bride. The remaining five are sent to the groom's family prior to the procession. The bridal procession may start from the bride's house at midnight or at dawn and they must reach the groom's house before sunrise. To start the procession one of the responsible men of the bride's family lights up the pine torch from the hearth of the bride's house. In any case, this burning torch should not extinguish till they reach the groom's house. This burning torch symbolizes the life of the bride and as such, the torchbearer takes proper care. The torch, bearer is again followed by the clan priest who holds a spear in his hand. Behind him, persons carrying the slaughtered pigs follow. They are followed by the bride who carries bamboo-made basket called *tansop* (which contains the sacrificial meat, ginger, one *khor* and *zam*<sup>4</sup> gourd container and cooked rice). The bride is then followed by a trail of women participants, carrying their respective drink gourds. Lastly men-folk follow the group.

When the party arrives at the frontcourt of the groom's house, one of his sisters comes out to meet the bride, takes the ceremonial basket, *tansop*, and carries it upto the door of the groom's house. The torchbearer keeps his burning torch right in front of the door. Before the bride enters the house, a big *dao* called *khairai* is laid at the door. If the groom's family is not a well-to-do one, they may keep a hoe known as *tin*, instead of *khairai*. The metal hoe or big *dao* is called *marichon* meaning 'metal to be stepped in'. The bride will then take the *tansop* and steps into the *marichon* and enters the house. It may be

noted that the reason for stepping on the metal tool is to ward off any evil spirit and ill luck that may follow the bride in her new home and new life, that her new life will be fruitful, useful, and she will live as long as the metal tool. Now as soon as the bride enters into the groom's house, an elderly woman helps her to put down the *tansop*. The groom's priest then takes out the sacrificial meat and ginger from the *tansop*, and cut it into pieces and offers it to *kameo*. He blesses the couple by saying, *oh naniwui nao karkaora yakha phararanu kala ramwung kachida somlaga okathui vapeiranu*. It may be translated as 'oh let your children be as many as the eggs of the spider and let them settle over all the land of the earth'.

One common feature of the ceremonies is the attendance of the bachelors of the bride's clan who wrestle with the bachelors of the groom's clan, so as to determine the prosperity of the couple. In the tussle if the groom's party wins it is believed that the life of the couple would be a prosperous one and vice versa. At the time of the wedding the groom's entire married sisters and his father's married sisters '*yorla*' must bring a shawl for the groom. In return they receive portions of the meat of the slaughtered animals according to their status. The right hind leg is given to the eldest *yorla*, the left hind leg to the second, the right foreleg to the third, and the left foreleg to the fourth. If the family has got more than four *yorla* then they may receive their portions from the smaller animals-killed on that occasion. In case they kill only one animal the remaining *yorla* may receive meat from other portions. However if there are less than four or no *yorla* the remaining portion may be given to the nearest male relative's *yorla*. (Ibid.)



Plate 4.1 *Yorla* with their portion of meat (*yorla sa*)

#### 4.7.5 Death ceremony

*Kameo*, the deity is believed to be responsible for causing the death of individuals. Besides, they strongly hold the view that those who are virtuous, righteous and truthful live much longer than those who deviate from the traditionally prescribed ways of life. An individual imbued with such ideals live for a full span of a centenarian and expired naturally in the ripe old age only. Such persons are beyond the reach of evil spirits, evil eye, evil tooth or the like.

The Tangkhuls bury their dead. They possess family vault. But not all the dead are buried inside the village or in the usual burying place. For example children of tender age who die before they are weaned are often not buried in the ordinary grave but close to the house. Those that die outside the village should be buried outside the village, though there is either a ceremonial burial in the usual place or the burial of some part of the remains or belongings of the deceased. In any case where the person dies away from home and where there is a difficulty in getting back-crossing a river, for instance- the body is buried near the place where the death occurred but the head is brought to the village. On the death of a warrior his nearest relation takes a spear and wounds the corpse by a blow with it on the head so that in *kazeiram* he may be known and received with distinction. On burying the skull they cover it with a black cloth, and in place of the trunk left behind a piece of wood. Usually the wooden pillow of the deceased, is attached to the skull, and covered also with a piece of cloth, to represent the whole person. Those who die in a war or any violence, or death due to a snakebite, or drowning, or may be a fall from a tree, or is killed by a tiger in the jungle, or women who die in childbirth and pregnancy, are buried apart from the generality of the village (Hodson 1911). Their bodies are not buried in the usual place, because it is believed that if it is to be buried within the village the same misfortune might visit them once again. Thus to avoid it, they are buried outside.

In the case of ordinary or natural death the grave is dug by the men of the deceased's *tang* (locality or *khel*) and the kin of the bereaved family. But in case of an important person like the village chief or influential clan's head or village leader, immediate kin dig the grave as a sign of respect to the departed soul. But in case of unnatural death, mentioned above, only old men may dig the grave. This is done to avoid

the evil designs of the malevolent spirits causing the death; old men cannot be badly affected as they are nearer to natural death. In the case of a woman who dies in childbirth no women who have reached menopause are allowed to participate in the ceremony. It is considered as unfortunate and if they participate, similar ill luck might visit them too. Burial usually takes place on the following day of the death person. This is done to enable all the near and dear ones of the dead to participate in the funeral ceremony as some of the near relatives reside at distant places. The message of death is immediately passed on to the relatives to attend the funeral as a part of kinship obligation (Ruivah 1993).

The dead are buried outside their houses to the depth of the length of the corpse, where there are no families' graves near the house; other graves can be opened if there has been no burial during the past year. But before doing so a sort of ceremony has to be done with the bones of the departed. On opening this family grave the bones are collected, cleaned with water, and then wrapped in a large cloth, and put on one side of the grave. The bottom of the grave is made circular to hold the corpse and the things buried with it.

In the graves are placed various articles for the use and comfort of the deceased in the world hereafter. The Tangkhuls bury some shawls, the hems of which are torn for his own use and a new un-torn cloth as a present for the deity of *kazeiram*. Tobacco and a pipe are laid near at hand. In the grave of a woman are placed food and drink, her tail of false hair, her cooking pots, her digging stick and the brow-band which in life she used to carry loads from the fields. The grave of a man whose parents have predeceased him it is customary to place food and drink as gifts for his relatives. If a man dies of tiger bite, they put a bugle in his grave to scare away the tigers on the road to *kazeiram*. They also bury a thorn, or sharpened stake, rough and ready but useful weapons. Sometimes they provide a

well-sharpened spear and kill a dog to keep him company on his long journey. Over the body they play the bugle before burial.

On the day of burial the rich kill a buffalo; others manage a cow, or a pig or poultry. They are killed before the grave is dug, and are left whole until the grave is finished. It is then cut up, the relatives take half, and the gravediggers the other half of the intestines. The head is taken always by the nearest male relative; all the legs go to *yorla* according to their status as done in a marriage ceremony. The heart, liver, kidneys spleen, lungs, etc., are then handed to the village *khanong*. He first of all divides these portions up, six portions for a male and five for a female, and takes them to the next-door neighbour's house and cooks it. He then brings them to the house of the deceased and places them on top of the rice and vegetables, which the relatives have brought in during the morning, and placed near the head of the corpse. For, when a person dies, the neighbors, relatives and friends (particularly all the married sisters or daughters of the deceased) bring cooked food to the deceased's family. And as a final wind-up for the night, the relatives' portion of meat is cooked and eaten, along with the rice and vegetables left over from the morning's feast. The next duty of the *khanong* is to offer up this food to the '*kameo*' by reciting this refrain: '*thisan yamsanli, shaiphung shakphungda thulu*', which may be translated as, 'we are tired of seeing the dead and fleeing of the soul often, eat and drink this food and go away'. Calling upon the dead to eat this offering, he takes the special portions on a plate of his own, and throws it away in the compound, where the death's spirit and the *kameo* are supposed to have appropriated it before touching the ground. The dogs, however, have a meal afterwards. Rice beer is also offered, and a small portion thrown away. After this ceremony, the rest of the meat and rice is divided amongst all and eaten before the burial. It

is interesting to note, that no matter what is killed in the village, or at whatever time, feast or otherwise, it is always offered to the *kameo* before eating. The next task for the *khanong* is to take the length and breadth of the bier (a wooden frame on which a corpse is placed before burial or on which it is carried to the grave), and if found too large for the grave, he alone is supposed to cut off any portion necessary. The bier is simply a plank of wood, which lies outside ready. The dead body, covered with white cloth is then taken out from the house led by a torchbearer, a close relative of the deceased. As soon as they reach the grave, the torch is twirled round beseeching the ancestors of the dead to come and meet him on his way to *kazeiram*. 'O awo ayi! *Ishava/Ishava/amei/achon rarali, unngaroklu*' (our ancestors he/she is coming come and meet him/her) is the prayer made by him. Then according to custom, the priest slightly raises the head of the bier the relations carry it out, and put it on the plank of wood, and on top of same whatever cloths are to be taken to *kazeiram*. The top cloth is never torn, as it is meant for *kokto* (the deity of *kazeiram*) when they meet him. The bier is lifted by the palms of the hands and taken to the side of the grave. It is believed that if it is lifted otherwise, the relatives will fall ill. All the relatives now gather round and make great lamentation, and tramp around the grave two or three times. Then tightly fastening the body to the plank, it is placed, with all the gifts for the journey mentioned above, in the grave. The wife is allowed to enter and remain till the last moment. Then a stone wall is built around and over the body to prevent earth from touching it. After filling up with earth the priest is again called to place a pole above the mound, while others place six prongs of wood around a small hole made in the mound, wherein is placed a pine torch. On lighting this they all leave the grave and enter the house (cited in Hodson 1911).

At the time of death, the family puts out the fire of the hearth and clears all ashes. After the funeral members of the family come to see if there are any footprints on the ashes and decipher if there any more deaths are expected. If there are none it is a favorable sign fortunately. Extinguishing of the fire from the family hearth signifies that the ill luck of the family is extinguished; secondly, it denotes that once the deceased was in the family and thirdly, it is their wish that a propitious fate and good fortune be a part of the family like the new fire, which is brought from another house nearby.

The next morning and evening the pine torch on the grave is again lighted. This is continued for three days. It is believed that during those days the deceased would have an interview with *kokto* and the presents would be handed over to the ancestors (Ibid.). It is also believed that if nothing is kept with the deceased on the burial day in the grave, the spirit of the deceased and the ancestors would complain. If the presentations are good, the ancestor's spirits would express their satisfaction on the family. The family also keeps some share of food for about a month in case of an adult and ten days if the deceased are children. They also keep their doors open till they observe the last festival of the departed souls called *thisham*. This festival is observed every year in the last part of December.

#### **4.8 Agriculture ritual**

All the Tangkhul village festivals (*phanit*) are celebrated at the behest of the *awunga* who has an important role to play in the festival. He announces the dates and seasons of the festivals by observing the lunar calendar. He performs the rites, sacrifices,

offers prayers and inaugurates the festivals. However this ritualistic duty is not necessarily confined to the *awunga* alone. Sometimes it is performed by *sharva*.

#### **4.8.1 *Laira phanit***

*Laira Phanit* is the New Year Festival of the Tangkhuls. It is also known as the festival of sowing seeds, or festival to begin cultivation of the year. It is the most prominent festival celebrated in the full moon of February-March of the year. It lasts for about ten to fifteen days.

On the first day of the festival, the priest of the village plants a tuber in his garden. A feather of a bird called *vapaokui* is planted along with it. On the surrounding seeds are sown and a branch of a blooming plum flower is kept on it, to signify that the crops of the year will be as fine, beautiful, attractive and fruitful as the bird and the flowers. The priest and his wife then go to the field with a cock and perform ceremonial rite, offer prayers for the protection of the crops and bumper harvest of the year. The blood of the cock is sprinkled on a clean handful of paddy seeds and spinkled on a prepared ground as a symbolic sowing. The priest then takes out the sacrificial parts of the meat and made sacrificed there. He takes home the remaining and distributes to other village priests to eat. Until and unless the priest eats the festive meat and blesses the people, it is a taboo for the villagers to eat. Animals generally pig, cow and buffalo are also slaughtered for festivals on this day. Thus the sowing season is inaugurated, and this is followed by the common people. If anybody violates the rule and sows ahead of the priest, the harvest is usually very poor and the whole village might face famine. Therefore, heavy punishment is meted on anybody who encroaches the law. The festival continues after the ceremonial sowing of

seed. The village gate is closed for the first two days against the entering of outsiders and exit of the villagers.

On the third day they welcome the guests from different villages. This is known as *kha- khara*, which means ‘coming of the guest’. This day is also the day of the village fair. Buying and selling was done in the most festive way through barter system. The rope to be used for tug-of-war during the festival is procured from the jungle by some young boys. The festive occasion is graced by all items of Tangkhul games and sports. Singing and dancing competition of boys and girls, tug-of-war, wrestling, long jump, high jump, javelin throw are held. The most important festive event of *laira phanit* is the Tangkhul *la khangnui* (virgin dance) where all unmarried girls after attaining puberty have to participate wearing their short skirt, armbands, bangles, necklace and head-dresses. The public judges the contest. The next day all the outsiders leave the village. On the fifth day *tavar*, which means a ‘valediction’, day is observed. On this day those families who could not complete sowing may sow the seeds. This day actually ends the festival but some rituals related to this festival continue.

After the sowing is done, the village priest goes to the field and does some work. In the evening he brings ginger from the field. On that day all the clan-heads go to their respective fields with one cock each. They kill it and offer some pieces to the deity and some of the meat is eaten in the paddy field itself. They however, bring one full leg of the cock at home and serve on the giant bed called ‘*sumkok*’, on which some banana leaves are spread. Here they share it with the male members of the family.

The next day the ginger brought from the field by the village priest is peeled, cut into pieces and kept on the ground. The priest takes some rice powder, mix with water and keeps it on the big *dao* and pour it on the pieces of ginger while saying '*oh yangkashebing rakhalailu rakhalailu*-‘oh please come all the enemies’. It is believed that through utterance of such challenging words the enemies might be frightened. This is done to prevent them from being overtaken by unforeseen dangers. It is also believed that the evil spirit could not attack them as long as they have the ginger with them.

After performing all the above rituals, *yarra phanit* is held. It is the ‘youth festival’ of the Tangkhuls, which is not connected with any religious beliefs or cultivation of the village.

#### **4.8.2Mangkhapphanit**

After completion of transplantation, *mangkhap* festival is observed. This falls at the end of June or beginning of July. During this festival every family kills their domestic animals like buffalo, cow, pig and cock/hen according to their ability. As a sign of happiness and joy every family lights up pine-wood in front of their house. This symbolically shows that from the dark gloomy hard work of busy days they have now pass over to a brighter period of happiness and a brighter future. They pray for a bumper crop and all round prosperity of the society to the deity. In the beginning of the festival, a village taboo-*sharra* is observed. On the day of the *sharra* all the clan’s priests go to the paddy field with one cock each. They kill the cock and offer sacrificial meat to the deity. In the evening as usual, they bring one full leg of the cock, and eat in *sumkok*. This is to ensure good growth of the crops. After performing this, on the fourth day each family collects a leaf known as *langri* (a kind

of small grass, used for ritual), a split piece of wood called *pheisai*, a kind of wood called *khamphuithing* (a kind of tree, bearing a citric fruit) and a fruit called *chingomthei*. Next day each family kills a cock/chicken and pulls out the feather. The priest then goes to the paddy field and performs the sacrifice. He breaks the other end of *khamphuithing*, and put *pheisai*, *langri*, and feather in it. They are fastened by *chingomthei*. The clan's priest performs the ritual in all the fields of the clan members. In the evening he performs other necessary ritual at home. He invokes prayers to propitiate the spirit. Offerings are made to the supreme power for a successful crop. After performing all these rites, the next day, they invite relatives and friends and share with them the best available meals and drinks. Young boys and girls visit their married sisters and shower them with gifts. Married daughters also visit their parents and share their joy and happiness. On the last daya special omen called *harra khayang* is observed. If the omen indicates something unfavorable they may perform certain sacrifices to please the deity.

#### **4.8.3 *Kashongkahaophanit***

To protect the standing crops from the danger of insects and pests *kashongkahao* festival is observed in the Month of *makha* (July). The day is fixed by the village priest in consultation with the village council. It usually falls on the last quarter of the month. On the first day no one is allowed to leave the village. The village priest performs ritual outside the village gate by sacrificing a cock/hen to the deity to protect the crops from any danger. Subsequently, a young man-considered to be one of the best man- physically, mentally and morally, is chosen to cut down the selected tree by a single strike. If he could fell the tree, it is considered to be a good omen. In the evening every family offers prayer and a grand feast is generally organized.

#### **4.8.4 *Khaita/Mawonzaiphanit***

After the completion of weeding a ceremony, called *khaita* or *mawonzai* is observed. On this occasion the village priest performs a ceremony invoking a prayer to the god of wealth to protect the crops from the hail, storm, insects, pests and from any other danger and thereby ensuring a successful and bountiful harvest throughout the year. On this day a village taboo, called *sharra*, is observed and thus, no one is allowed to enter the village and no one is allowed to go out of the village.

#### **4.8.5 *Dharshatphanit***

When the crop is ripe, before the actual harvest starts, *dharshat* festival is observed. One day ahead of the festival they drain away the water from the field. In the evening they bring branches of plants called *mahar* and *mariwon* and keep them with a sickle and a piece of cloth just at the entrance of the house to mark that they are observing a taboo. That night no one is allowed to enter the house except the family members. In the next morning the family priest collects the sickle and the cloth and goes to the field. He cuts the ripe ears of grain from the field and wraps them in the cloth, which he collects from the entrance of the house. Mention may be made here that after collecting the sickle and the cloth the priest should not talk to anyone he meets him on the way till he returns home. It is believed that if he talks to anyone, the good fortune of the family will go away from them. He brings some grains from the field and dries them on the mat-rack that is kept over the hearth of the family. Family members also bring fishes from the field. They partake dinner after performing the necessary ritual. If any outsider happens to join this dinner, he or she must also join on the day of harvesting. Otherwise they consider that the one who joined in that

particular dinner will take the good fortune of the family away. This festival is observed to ensure a good harvest and to protect the crops from unforeseen dangers. Every family should do the same before the actual reaping is done. The village observes a grand feast during which every family exchange or distributes rice beer among their friends, relatives and neighbors.

#### **4.8.6Makahatphanit**

When the grain is ripe, members of the clan or *tang (khel)* discuss as to whose field should be harvested first. An examination of the paddy fields enables them to decide and chalk out a program that harvesting is to be on. Some domestic animals are killed to perform the necessary ritual. The priest collects some stalks of grains from the field and makes a sheaf tied with *phanangkor* (fibre plant) and *lam-kazao* (creeping plant) on which the mud is applied. A sickle is wrapped with a kind of leave called *phulum*, sprinkled with ashes and placed on the sheaf. This ceremonial sheaf can be collected only when the whole work is completed. They brew rice beer out of this sheave and give it to the priest, as a token of love and gratitude for all the troubles he took for the welfare of the family.

When the grain is ready to be stored in the granary, the priest who performs all the rituals from plantation up to the reaping stage, takes some of the grains from the place where the paddy is gathered (*zanpum*) in the field for his own use. After him the housewife may take her load and the other villagers may start collecting their load according to their capacity to carry to the owner's granary. At the time of putting the grain in the granary, the housewife invokes the goddess of wealth to fill the granary to the brim.

After storing the entire paddy in the granary, one of the young men, who is considered to be the best man physically, mentally and morally, is selected to blow the trumpet, so as to mark the end of the harvest. It is believed that if a morally, physically and mentally corrupted man blows the trumpet, ill luck might befall.

#### **4.8.7 *Chumphu phanit***

*Chumphu* is a festival in which the womenfolk play the important part. The festival spreads over four days. It is the festival that marks the beginning of taking out newly harvested rice from the granary. At the time of taking out the paddy from the granary women offer prayer to the deity, so that she may furnish them with enough food the whole year through. While taking out the paddy, if she happens to meet a man, ill luck comes to the house and there will be shortage of grain before the next harvest comes. Thus everyone tries their best not to meet any member of the opposite sex on that particular day. While taking out the paddy from the granary, the woman should not take out more than what the family requires for one day, for it is believed that if they cannot consume the quantum of rice that very evening or the next morning before sunrise, ill luck would befall on them.

The *chumphu* festival is closed along with the ceremony called *zavar*, which means double eating. On the *zavar* day also the woman or housewife should take the paddy from the storehouse and dry it in the sun and pound it properly. While drying the paddy proper care must be taken, so that the birds/chickens eat not a single grain. Otherwise, it is considered to be a bad omen.

The rites, which are held after the crops are gathered in, consist of two parts, the *wonyaithing* ceremony and the *kathi kasham* ceremony which are thus described by Pettigrew:

#### **4.8.8 Wonyaithingceremony**

After the harvest, a day is fixed to keep all the implements used during harvest collectively at one place. On this evening the rich kill a cow, the rest pigs and dogs, and for those whose children have died, eggs are boiled. After cooking the same the *sharwo* is called in as usual and small portions are offered to *kameo*. Next morning the *sharva* from each section of the village gather together in a compound and receive from the relatives of the dead sacrificial portions of the meat killed the night before, and rice beer. On finding out the number of persons who died during the past year in each section, the plates and cups of each deceased are brought to them thoroughly cleaned and put in a row before them. In these plates, etc., are placed the meat and beer. On one side the *sharva* tear off small portions, and arrange three small heaps of same. When all is divided these portions and the rice beer are offered again to *kameo* up and down the rows of plates. After this performance whatever is left they eat, and the plates, etc., are taken back to their respective houses. This being done all friends who come forward to help in erecting the *wonyaithing* are counted, and to them a liberal supply of meat and beer is made. They then bring the wood and rope necessary to erect this structure. It is a lightly made structure, built outside the door of each deceased's house, and is shaped like a shield with a sort of small platform in front. The following day various articles, like corn, roots, pumpkins, etc. are placed on the platform. The shield framework is covered with sheaves of rice corn, and are arranged properly that the birds cannot peck. At the side of this structure is also place a large clump

of the orchid 'Cumbidium giganteum'. All these articles are said to be for the departed spirit as a sign of the fruits of the earth received during the past year. After four or five days friends from other houses and other villages who have not had any deaths during the past year present rice and beer to the mourners, and portions of the same are first placed in the deceased's plate, etc., at evening. If this is not done by the friends it is feared it will be their share to receive death in their midst the following year.(cited in Hodson 1911)

#### **4.8.9 *Thisham/Kathi kasham phanit***

This takes place about the end of January every year. The first thing each family does is to procure their buffaloes, cows, pigs, and dogs. After they have procured these from near and far, the headmen of the village give orders for the rice beer (*zam khor*), weak and strong, to be prepared for fermentation, and they also, after a palaver, decide what day the feast shall commence. It is a ten-day feast. This is a feast given in honor of the departed souls of that year as the final ceremony for the deceased.

Day One- The rope for binding up the animals before killing is procured from the jungle, also the poles for hanging cloths up.

Day Two- These ropes are prepared so as to withstand any strain by the animals when being kicked. The males perform this work of the first and second day. The women, in the meantime, gather and stack wood in each house.

Day Three- This is the day for killing buffaloes and cows. After the cutting-up process in the whole village is over, the division and distribution take place in the same way as performed on the death of the person, and of course the *sharwo* is called in to offer to *kameo*.

Day Four-Both males and females join together in getting in a plentiful supply of wood.As there are many entertainments during this feast, like singing and dancing all night through, there is need for plenty of fires as it is the coldest part of the year. The representative of the dead finds his first occupation on this day by collecting *khamuina*, a kind of broad plantain leaf used for the unleavened bread made the next day. It may be noted here that during the feast, the deceased family asks someone to represent or to act on behalf of the deceased.

Day Five- Unleavened bread is made into small cakes, and pigs and dogs killed, cut up into small pieces, cooked and offered to *kameo* and then distributed with a small cake of bread wrapped in the *khamuina* leaves amongst the mourners in each section of the village. On this day also cloths of all kinds and qualities are attached to long poles and erected outside each house of the dead. The more cloths displayed the greater one is thought of.

Day Six- This is occupied in preparing the rice beer which has been fermenting for some days in large casks.Any leftover work is completed on this day.

Day Seven- This is the day when the real excitement commences. Friends and relations from villages around come in during the afternoon, and at sunset. Before their arrival the females only give an offering to *kameo* in the shape of a sandwich of unleavened bread, sesame seeds concoction, and slices of pork. After it is offered to *kameo* by *sharvait* is placed on the platform of the *wonyaithing*. With this is also placed four pots of *khore* and *zam*. After the arrival of villagers each family of the dead calls someone who is a little similar to the deceased as its representative. This ceremony is known as *thila-kapo*. The representative in the meantime has been decked with bright headgear, necklaces, armlets, and anklets. On the arrival at the house the representative performs a dance outside, and

then on entering is introduced to the seat of the dead. From this point until the end of the feast the representative is treated as a friend or relative who is to embark on a long journey, with no prospect of seeing him/her again, and looked upon by the family and treated accordingly. The representative is presented with all the food cooked, and the head of the house for the time being dispenses hospitality. Those who come for the occasion also receive meat and rice beer from the owner as special gifts. Before the day is over, the cloths hung upon poles in each compound, are taken down and brought into the house to be given to the representative later on. *Thila-kapo* ceremony is observed as a special tribute in honour of the departed soul. This ceremony is thus, observed with sentiment and love by the survivors. On this evening in particular there are high jinks performed in each house.

Day Eight-This is mostly taken up with commercial pursuits, in the buying and selling of cloths, etc., the villagers bring. The representatives of the dead also give the villagers a specimen of their dancing powers in the large space called *leingapha* situated in the midst of the village. They are, of course, dressed up for the occasion. The *sharva*, during this performance cut up a portion of the skins of the pigs killed on the fifth day and offers it to *kameo*. The remaining skin of all the animals killed is eventually cooked and eaten with the other portions. After this exhibition by the representatives they are taken and fed by the female relations, going from house to house, receiving the cloths brought in the previous night, so that by the time he has finished visiting there is a goodly pile. Sometimes the representative would select only one and sell out the remaining pieces.

Day Nine- This is a great day of the feast. The first thing in the morning one of the family searches for plantain leaves to cover the pine torch handles, etc., these torches are made extra large, and laid aside for use at sunset. A further dish of pork and rice is next prepared

and placed on large plates, with salt and fish, and is brought to the compound. Next, there is a great gathering of all friends and relatives with each representative. Relatives, friends and the members of the deceased's family would carry meat, ginger, rice beer and cloths to the representative of the deceased and placed on a mat in a row. These are all placed on mats in a row. Empty plates and pots are placed in a row near, and are then filled up. Everybody is dressed up for the occasion, especially the representatives. When all is ready some old priest of the village gives a loud call, "*Oh, hieina tatang tarangsa*" (Oh, let this be the last), and at this everybody suddenly takes hold of the plates and pots, etc., and holding them up above their heads, then they take everything to the house where *thila-kapo* is being performed. There they enjoy their meal. They now take the place of receiving guests, friends, and relations who wish to say farewell, as they are now on the point of leaving for good. The first to receive a parting gift is the head of the deceased's household, who receives a cloth from the representative. Then come the widows of the village who receive a parting gift of meat and beer from him or her. After the widows come the female relations who entertained them the day before, and they also receive a present of meat and beer- a sort of mutual give and take before the final parting. At sunset a procession is taken headed by the torchbearers. They wear headgears made out of the leaves gathered early in the morning wound round their heads and shoulders to keep off sparks from the flaming torches. Behind them are seen a crowd of elders marching dressed in their war garb. Lastly the representatives of the dead, follow with relatives crowding around them and with much lamenting and grief the procession proceeds slowly on its way towards *zaiphar*, a spot at the north end of the village overshadowed by a large tree. To this spot the torch-bearers wend their way. The idea is that the spirits need to be led in the gathering twilight to show

them the way to their final place of abode, *kazeiram*, and the warriors are also needed as guards to keep them from all harm on their way there. The spirit is supposed to enter into, or rather turned into these lighted torches as soon as they are thrown down at *zaiphar*. By the time these torches reach this place, the representatives have reached the limit of the village boundary, and on the supposition that the spirit had left to proceed on its way as a torch to *kazeiram*, these representatives are at once denuded of all their finery. The headgear is broken up on the spot as their work is over. All the villagers return to their homes, the torchbearers having already returned by another route. Before entering their houses, the *wonyaithing* structure and the poles are pulled out and thrown away. At the front door, just inside the house, a pine torch is lighted and placed on a stone so that no evil spirit could enter into the house. This is also done for the purpose of not allowing the spirits of the living to go off with the spirits of the dead just got rid of.

The spirits after entering the torches are declared to wend their way during the evening towards the hills on the north, and finally disappear to find themselves crossing the river in *kazeiram*. On that side of the river they are believed to commence and carry on an existence similar to that enjoyed, or, otherwise, when alive on earth. The wealthy enjoy their wealth again, and the poor eke out the precarious existence suffered on earth.

Day Ten- On this day the village observes a taboo and no one is allowed to do any work. It is the day of complete rest. It is believed that on this day the embodied spirits in *kazeiram* cut all their hair off on the tenth day, and have a sort of “wash and brush up” to remove all connection with mother earth. On this day, therefore, no one is supposed to even bathe or touch water (Ibid: 153-157).

Until the missionaries came to Ukhrul, the Tangkhul were animists, each village having its own set of beliefs and worshipping a number of benevolent and malevolent spirits. A belief in a supreme being who had a role in the making of the world and then withdrawing from it was a common theme in the Tangkhul cosmology. Gradually, the traditional beliefs system has been replaced with the teaching of the Bible and the vernacular concept of Supreme Being is now identified with the Christian concept of God.

### **Notes**

1. The term *sharra* is taken from the book '*Hau (Tangkhul) Customary Law (Hau Shiyan Chikan)*', written by Ankang Stephen.
2. Naga tribes of Manipur.
3. Bride price varied according to the financial status of the family. Bride price consists of cattle and a hoe.
4. *Zam* and *Khor* are two different varieties of rice beer. *Zam* is the strong and *Khor* is the weak one.