CHAPTER - II

LAND AND PEOPLE

The Tangkhuls are one of the major tribes of the Naga society mostly found in Ukhrul and Senapati districts of Manipur, and in Myanmar. Manipur is a small state surrounded by hill ranges from all sides. Manipur lies between 23°83′N and 25°68′N latitude and between 93°3′E and 94°78′E longitude covering an area of 22,327 square kilometres. In the east, it touches the international border of Myanmar, to the south Mizoram, to the west Assam and to the north Nagaland. The state popularly known as the “Jewel of the East” is located strategically in the easternmost corner of India and played an important role of a buffer zone during the British rule in India. Topographically, it is a hilly terrain. Primary jungles are still available in large parts of the hilly region. According to 2011 census, the population of Manipur is 2,721,756. The literacy rate is 79.85%. The climate throughout the year is temperate, quite pleasant.

Two national highways, National Highway 39 (NH 39) and the National Highway 53 (NH 53), connect Manipur with the rest of the country and abroad. National Highway 150 (NH 150) is also being used as the third lifeline. NH 39 link-up with the railhead at Dimapur (Nagaland) and the NH 53 with the railhead at Jiribam (Manipur) and Silchar (Assam). Most of the major roads pass through the capital city Imphal, which acts as the main centre of all economic and institutional activities (Singh 2009). Currently, Manipur has nine administrative districts i.e. Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Chandel, Imphal East, Imphal West, Senapati, Tamenglong, Thoubal and Ukhrul.
Ukhrul District

Ukhrul district is tucked in the northeastern part of the state of Manipur. It lies about 82 kilometres to the Northeast of Imphal, the capital city of Manipur. It covers an area of 4544 sq. km flanked by Myanmar in the east, Nagaland in the north, Chandel and Thoubal districts in the south, and Senapati and Imphal districts in the west. According to 2011 census, the population of Ukhrul district is 183,115.

Ukhrul district is a mountainous region. In the heart of the district, it is broken up into four mountain ranges and they tapered off to two mountain ranges in the north and south respectively. They are Angkoching and Somra in the extreme east; Kamjong-Grihang range in the south east; Mapithel and Shirui Kashong range in the centre; and Tungou and Somdal range in the west.

Mapithel range is the watershed between Thoubal and Tuyungbi rivers. Shirui Kashong range commands a view of the open rolling mountains. Angkoching dominates the extensive terrain on the east. Northeast of the district is the Khayangphung peak at an elevation of 9352 feet, the highest in the district and second only to the highest peak of Manipur, the Teneu 9824 feet in Senapati district. However, the most well known is the majestic Shiroi peak at an elevation of 8474 feet.

Climate: Owing to the elevation which it commands, the climate of Ukhrul District is healthy and salubrious and the heat of most parts of India, during summer, is unknown. Winter is cold, but summer is pleasant. The coldest season in the district is in the month of December to February. The temperature in winter goes down to 0°C. During the hottest part of the year, July and August, the temperature in Ukhrul town is on the average of 15°C to 25° C. The maximum temperature recorded in 1991 at Litan was 33°C. The autumn season, September to November, is the finest
part of the year. The rainfall is abundant from May to September. The average annual rainfall is 5,551.9 millimetres. Winds are generally high during March to May.

**Rivers and Lake:** Cutting through the deep gorges and the scenic valleys are the swift flowing nine rivers viz. Thoubal, Tuyungbi, Maglang, Chamu, Nambalok, Challou, Ihang, Irl and Laniye (Rangazak). There is another small river called Taret river in the south that flows between Ukhrul and Chandel district border. It may be noted that the principal river of the district is Thoubal.

About 70 km east of Ukhrul, not far from the international boundary, there is a beautiful lake called Kachauphung Magi. The lake is situated in a plateau surrounded by a number of knolls known as the Achuwa magi hills. The lake is about nine acres in size and about 9 to 12 feet deep. Due to the presence of floating mass of reeds, it fails to exhibit its full magnificence. There is one notable waterfall namely Khayang Tilulu fall near the Indo-Myanmar border in the east of Ukhrul. The fall consists of three stages of cascading falls. The breath taking cascading waterfall is 227 metres high.

**Forest:** Over 50% of the geographical area of Ukhrul is covered with forest, which range from tropical rain forest to sub-alpine forest. They are mainly of pine, mixed with oak, chestnut, alder walnut, phoecha-hensiana, fir and mixed evergreen forest. It covers an area of more than 1,400 sq. km and is found in different altitudes. Teak is common to the slope overlooking the Kabo valley. Wild tea plant is found in Kamjong Sub-Division of Grihang and Ningchou area. Unfortunately, many areas have become barren of big trees due to deforestation - heavy extraction of timber especially in Chingai Sub-Division, and jhum cultivation in Kasom Khullen, Phungyar and Kamjong Sub-Division.
An area of about 300 sq. km is covered with dense forest especially in the Angkoching, Khayangphung and Khamasom forest bordering Myanmar. This area is mostly inaccessible due to difficult terrain, and has relatively remained untouched and forms a natural habitat for a large number of rare and indigenous flora and fauna. The local villages customarily own forests in Ukhrul District.

**Flora and Fauna:** Ukhrul is best introduced through its famous Shirui lily flower - the abode of which is Shirui Kashong, located about 15 km toward the east of the district capital, Ukhrul. Shirui Kashong range stretching from north to south ranging from 4900′ to 8474′ above the sea level is indeed one of the most strikingly beautiful ranges in Manipur. *Lilium Macklinae Sealy* is the botanical name of Shirui lily named after the maiden name of the wife of its discoverer Kingdom F. Ward. They are seasonal flowering plants. The blooming season of Shirui lily is in between May 15 and June 5. The height of the plant is between 1 to 3 feet, and 1 to 7 flowers per plant. Native to Ukhrul, the specie belongs to the Lillian family distributed in the damped alpine areas of Shirui peak. The flower is light pinkish in colour. It is a rare and endemic species grown only on the Shirui peak.

Not less than 150 herbaceous flowering plants including rare orchids of various hues and crimson red rhododendrons locally known as *Kokleiwon* bloom with the advent of spring time on the grassy slopes of Shirui Kashong. The rare white rhododendrons thrive at high altitudes of Phangrei. Towards the end of winter season, the hillsides at Shirui and Phangrei are a riot of colours of rhododendrons and Bauhinias blooming in succession. Some of the most spectacular wild roses, wild azaleas of several kinds and orchids are grown in the region. There are hundreds of varieties of trees, flowering plants, orchids of enumerable hues and kinds, epiphytic ferns, varied species of plants and shrubs.
Apart from the rich diversity of the flora, Ukhrul District is also rich in fauna. Situated on the border with Myanmar on the east, the forest of Ukhrul District is the home of various animals and birds namely, Tiger, Leopard, Deer, Wild Bison, Pangolin, Porcupines, Gibbon, the stump tailed Macaque, and the pig tailed Macaque among others. The great Indian Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill, Indian pied or lesser-pied Hornbill and the brown backed Hornbills found in Ukhrul give testimony to the riches as well as the diversity in avifauna of Ukhrul District. There were also white wing wood duck, toucan, dove hoopoe, cuckoo etc. Migratory wild ducks are also found during winter season.

**Tourist Destination Spots:** Some of the tourist destination spots are Khayang Peak, Khangkhui Cave, Shirui Peak, Kachauphung Lake, Angkoching, Hungpung Mangva Cave, Dilily Water Fall near Khayang Phunghtha, Azoa Jenephiu Magi Lake near Kachauphung, Saline Springs, Longpi Pottery at Longpi, Phangrei, Nillai Tea Estate etc.

**A Note on the People**

The name “Naga” was given by the Burmese (Myanmar), which means people with pierced earlobes because piercing of the earlobe is a widespread practice amongst the Naga people including the Tangkhuls (Muivah 1996). The name ‘Tangkhul’ was given by non-Tangkhuls, probably given by the Meiteis. The Tangkhuls are one of the major tribes of Manipur.

**Origin and Settlement:** The Tangkhuls point out to the association of their ancestors with the seashore. Most of the ornaments of the Tangkhuls such as *Kongsang, Huishon* etc. are made of cowries and conch shell, a prominent feature of the people who live on the shore. According to their oral tradition, the Tangkhuls
trace their origin from Mongolia. The Tangkhuls like other Naga tribes migrated from China to Myanmar until they finally reached the present habitat traversing through innumerable snow covered landscapes, mountains and wild forests confronting wild beasts and wild tribes. The exodus of the Tangkhuls from China to Myanmar and finally to India is indeed a heroic story of human courage and endurance (Ibid.). Some of them also settled in Myanmar and did not venture further. However, their movement over Myanmar and into India spread over a period of time. They entered the present habitat in waves following one another and in some cases in close succession.

**Physical Appearance:** According to anthropological classification, the Nagas belong to a “Mongoloid stock” (Shimray 2004). They are generally medium to above medium stature, monocephalic head, every prosopic broad flat round face, broad high chick-bone, flat platyrhine to leptorrhine nose, brownish, yellow-skin, and narrow Mongoloid oblique eyes. They are strong and sturdy. The Naga tribes of Manipur have all the affinities with the Naga tribes of other states and have some affinities with the tribes of South East Asian countries (Sen 1993).

Tangkhul men shave the hair on either side of the head and let it grow in short stubble down the centre of the skull like a cock’s comb, a curious custom which enables them to be distinguished at a glance from other hillmen (Allen 2002). The unmarried girls used to cut their hair straight in front across the forehead level with the eyebrows to the temple but on reaching marriageable age, they grow the front hair long (Ruivah 1993). The hair behind was allowed to grow and flow loose over the shoulders.

The language spoken by the Tangkhuls today is known by their ethnic name *Tangkhul Tui* (Tangkhul language). *Tangkhul Tui* is a lingua franca of the
Tangkhuls. The Tangkhul language belongs to the Naga sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. The Tangkhuls have more than 200 dialects. In other words, each village has its own dialect. The intelligibility among the village dialects varies according to the distance between them. Farther the village, the lesser is the intelligibility. Textbooks, Biblical literature, journals and other literature are printed in *Tangkhul Tui*. Almost all the Tangkhuls can speak Manipuri, the lingua franca of the State.

**Village Administration:** Tangkhul village is a politically organised association. It resembled to the ancient Greek city-states, each village is independent from the other. Chieftains generally rule villages. The Tangkhul chiefs are either hereditary or elected for a definite period. Most of them are hereditary. The village chief is called *Awunga* in Tangkhul language, a title equivalent to English word ‘King’. The village chief is prominent at all social and religious gatherings and festivals of the village. As a token of respect to the chief and his position in the village, customary practices like *Longkat* (free labour) and presentation of animal heads are practice among the Tangkhuls. Though the power to govern is vested in him, he governs with the help of his councillors.

The members of village council are either elected or appointed. It is customary to give representation to all the clans residing in the village. A big clan may have two or more representatives, whereas a smaller clan may have one. The head of the clan is usually the eldest male member of the clan who is supposed to hold the position. However, on certain circumstances like when the head is too old or unable to be a functional representative, in a clan meeting, the clan members tactfully induce the old man to nominate a younger and more capable person to represent the clan on his behalf in the Village Council. The administrative functions
of the Council include the maintenance of the village water supply and footpaths; construction of new paths and bridges across streams and rivers, etc. The Village Council also settles any other disputes in the village (Horam 1977).

**Internal Social Structure:** The entire Naga society as a whole is patriarchal determining descent through male lineage. The father being the supreme authority descent is reckoned on the basis of male lineage (Luikham 2009). Hodson (1911) observed, “The Naga society is patrilineal and male ascendancy is completed with them. The essential feature of the Naga family is that its members are descended from the eldest male resident in the house, the mother being under the rule of exogamy, brought in from another clan that is an entirely different group of families.” Their property usually consists of both movable and immovable possessions. Succession and inheritance are transmitted in the male line by following the rule of primogeniture. The best share of property is always given to the eldest son and the second best to the second and so on. The social system of the Tangkhul is built up around the clan system. From the Tangkhul point of view Shangnao (clan) is an “association of the people of both sexes, membership of which is determined by unilineal descent” (Ruivah 1993).

**Head Hunting:** The Tangkhuls practice head hunting and decorated their houses with human skulls, which had a great significance, for the number of skulls reflected the degree of the owner’s merit or honour. In Ukhrul, one can still find human skulls (numbering around 40), exhibited by the headman of Ukhrul in his house. Village disputes arose out of breach of sexual sanctions, assault and injury, theft, failure to keep the agreement and offences of similar nature, encroachment on land etc. generally led to war and head hunting. They strongly believed that only the
righteous would be victorious. To prove their bravery, courage and honesty, heads were collected and made known to all people. Zehol (2009) wrote,

“Leadership was often attained when a person was able to show his courage and prowess by counting the heads he had taken. Some people, including the colonialist writers, considered the Naga head hunters as ‘uncivilized’ or extremely ‘barbarous’. Head hunting was not a senseless killing of the enemy but a tradition connected with the tribal principles of heroism, justice, honour, pride, recognitions etc., and the victim’s head was a trophy of honour and chivalry.”

Human heads taken were placed for five days on a heap of stones. Thereafter, the heads were taken to a nearby stream or river, cleaned thoroughly and the skulls were kept in the village headman’s house. The more heads, the more honorable the village was. Though head hunting was a practice, there were very strict rules about killing anyone they wanted. Killing of innocent people was forbidden (Ruivah 1993). Head hunting was outlawed by the British administrators before the coming of Christianity, but continued to practice till the beginning of conversion into Christianity among the Tangkhuls. Thus, it was partly a result of the new administrative measures taken by the British, and partly due to the realisation of its detrimental aspects by the people. Finally, under the influence of the new faith, Christianity, head hunting was given up (Solo 1986).

**Food Habit:** Every meal of a Tangkhul inevitably contains pork or beef along with a type of chilly chutney called Kasāthei. They eat food twice a day, once before they go to the field in the morning at around 8.00, and the other when they return from the field in the evening at around 6.00. The Tangkhuls drink rice beer made out of a special variety of sticky rice known as Makrei. A strong concoction of the rice beer is called Zam, while a mild one is called Khor. Every house knows the preparation
of these varieties of rice beer and they prepare them for their own use. Rice beer is an essential item in all rituals and ceremonies. Smoking from a pot is very common among the Tangkhuls. Some elderly men continue to use their traditional type of smoke pot called *Kaporham*. With the advent and growth of Christianity in the Tangkhul hills, many have given up the culture of drinking rice beer and rice wine.

**Trade and Commerce:** In the past, goods were exchanged among the villages in the form of barter system. With the introduction of monetary system, the practice of barter lost its importance. Today, many Tangkhuls are engaged in trade and commerce within and outside the village or town. This aspect of economy is a new introduction that gradually picked up its pace with the improvement of transport and communication. There are three big market places in Ukhrul, viz. Wino Bazar, Viewland Bazar and Phungreitang markets. The agricultural and handloom products are ferried and sold in these markets. The imported goods like medicine, stationery items, food grains, tobacco etc. are transported from the said markets and Imphal to the other villages.

**Dress:** The dress of Tangkhul men consists of a simple cloth worn round the waist and tied in a knot in front leaving the ends hanging down. These ends are fringed with straw pendants. The wrap around (*mekhala*) is made of stout cotton woven in red and blue stripes two inches wide and horizontal. Over the body, they wear in cold weather a long cloth in red and blue stripes, and in the case of chiefs, custom permits the addition of handsome border. Another pattern is in white stripes with terra cotta stripes and a black and white checker pattern, the plain variety being worn by the common people and the variety with the fringed border twelve to eighteen inches deep with white orange, green and red stripes being restricted to chiefs. On special occasions, men wear a much more elaborate costume than the
described above. It consists of a handsome kilt embroidered with ornaments like sequins and the headdress with decorations of toucan feathers and tresses of hair.

Tangkhul women wear small caps of blue cloth when working in the fields. Their petticoats reach from the waist to the knee and are made of cotton cloth manufactured in the weaving villages with red and white or black and white stripes two inches in width. Occasionally, those who have some pretense to wealth or position wear petticoats of red with small stripes of white and black (Hodson 1911).

Though there are common cloths for men and women, there are also some cloths exclusively meant either for men or for women. Some traditional clothes of men are Malao (loin cloth), Laokha, Mayarnaowui thangkang kachon, Haora, Phorei kachon, Luirim etc. The traditional clothes of women include Seichang kashan, Thangkang kashan, Shanaowui thangkang kachon, Khuilang kashan, Kongra kashan, Shanphaila, Zingtai kashan, Luingama kashan, Phangyai kashan, Kahang kashan, Chongkhom, Khuilang kachon etc. Today, the Tangkhuls wear both traditional and western dresses. Western dresses include jeans, skirts, tops, gown, jackets, coat etc. Today, traditional attires are worn mostly during church services, festivals and on other occasions and events.

**Ornaments:** Both men and women wear ornaments among the Tangkhuls. Men have their ears pierced at an early age and gradually distend the holes in the lobes until they are large enough to receive rolls of cotton of considerable size or bamboo ornaments. Brass cylindrical ornaments are often inserted. The ascending cartilage of the ear is frequently bored with numerous holes, into which small skeins of black or blue cotton are introduced. They wear necklace of beads, which are often very costly, and, as a mark of distinction, a collar of red and yellow cane-work with geometrical ornamentation in cowries and three hair tails hanging down the back.
The Tangkhuls wear heavy brass armlets on the forearm and sometimes coiled wire rings. These rings serve a useful purpose as well as being ornamental, as they employ them to deliver a downward crushing blow. They also wear cane or brass rings coiled below the knee, which are said to give support when climbing hills with loads. The Tangkhuls also wear headgear, an article, which is not merely decorative but also serves a very useful purpose as a war helmet.

One important ornament worn by the womenfolk is necklace of the polished hexagonal cornelian beads. They have the ears pierced, and wear similar but smaller ear ornaments. They wear metal armlets, which are coiled up on the upper arm and are made of a white metal. Some of men’s ornaments include - Mayong Pashi (headgear), Vakui, Mayongcha (necklace), Pheimakhei (anklet), Kangra, and Nakhui (earring) among others. Ornaments worn by women are Huishon (headgear), Haar (armlet), Kazao (bangle), Nakhui (earring), Kongsang (necklace), Khommasim, Tansop (basket), and Pheimakhei (anklet) among others. Today, almost all men have stopped wearing earring, largely because of the impact of Christianity.

**Weapons and Implements:** Some of the commonly used weapons by the Tangkhuls are Kazei (spear), Changvei (armour), Mala (bow and arrow), Raikhai (sword), Khairei (dao), and Kuisikhainao (knife). There is an addition of guns as their weapons with the introduction of modern technology. The implements they use regularly are tin (hoe) and Khai (dao), Ngaha (axe), Zangkui (sickle), Karphang etc. Women use Zeithing (iron staff) as a drill and as a support when climbing up and down the hills.

**Music and Dance:** The Tangkhuls are music lovers and their songs are soft and melodious. Apart from encoding into the music, the varied seasonal and cultural ideas and philosophies, music is a medium wherein historical events are also related
in the lyrics of folksongs. In as much as religious fervor is incorporated and composed in the folksongs, the romantic nature of the people also finds its expressions in the music. Their folk songs can be sung by anybody, anytime, while some folksongs have specific musical expressive melodies of every region or area. The Tangkhuls folksongs can be played or accompanied with musical instruments.

Some of their musical instruments are Tingteilā (Hao violin), Talla (Trumpet), Phung (Drum), Mazui (Woman’s mouth-piece), Sipa (Flute), Kaha Ngashingkhon (Bamboo pipe) etc. Corresponding to the rhythmic composition of the folksongs, the dances of the Tangkhuls are also rhythmic, exciting and vigorous. Thrilling as they are, there are also some special occasional dances, like the Kathi Mahon - dance for the dead, Laa Khanganui - virgin dance or maiden dance during Luira Phanit (seed sowing festival), Rai Pheichak (war dance) etc. The Tangkhul youth are also fond of western music and dance.

**Games and Sports:** The Tangkhuls are lovers of sports and games. The Tangkhul games in general involve a lot of action and therefore require physical strength. For instance, Thingneira Khangakhun (tug-of-war) is one of the most played games by the Tangkhuls. It is usually played during Luira Phanit (seed sowing festival). In the game called swathing-pherkashai played by the boys, a long log is sent, by hitting with stick from a fixed point, to a boundary. The one, who sends it far away from the boundary or at least to the boundary with a minimum number of strikes, wins. Harwangashangkoi, another game played by the boys, has on one side a group numbering around nine. All the members of the group hold each other around the waist and stand behind a boundary line. The leader of the line who stands in the front is called the ‘mother’. The one who stands opposite to this group is called the
tiger-man called Khangayei. Khangayei runs along the boundary to touch any member of the group; whoever is touched by the tiger-man is counted as out.

*Lungkotlā* is a game played by spreading seeds (generally beans) on the ground. Throwing one seed above, the girl picks up as many seeds as possible from the ground without disturbing the adjacent seeds and catches the seed thrown above before it reaches the ground. The one who picks up a maximum number of seeds is the winner. *Saotheilā* is played by girls, keeping a big bean on one foot and hopping with one leg to a fixed point. The bean kept on the foot, should not fall down while hopping. Wrestling, hunting and fishing are the favourite pastimes of the Tangkhuls (Arokianathan 1982).

**Festivals:** The Tangkhul have many festivals. Most of their festivals are largely associated with their agricultural activities. Some of the important festivals are *Luira Phanit* (seed sowing festival), which is considered as the New Year Festival of the Tangkhuls. *Yarra Phanit* is a youth festival usually celebrated in the month of April and May. After completion of transplantation, *Mangkhap* festival is observed. During this festival, every family slaughters their domestic animals like buffalo, cow, pig and chicken according to their ability. As a sign of happiness and joy, every family lights up resinated pinewood in front of their house. This symbolically shows that from the dark gloomy hard work of busiest days they have now passed over to a brighter period of happiness and a brighter future.

To protect the standing crops from the danger of insects and pests, *Kashong Kahao* festival is observed in the Month of July. The village priest in consultation with the village council fixes the day. Before the actual harvest begins, *Dharshāt* festival is observed. This festival is observed to ensure a good harvest and to protect the crops from unforeseen dangers.
*Chumphaga* is a three-day festival where women play an important role. This festival marks the beginning of taking out newly harvested rice from the granary. At the time of taking out the paddy from the granary, the women offer prayer to the deity, so that she and her family may have enough food for the whole year round. *Thisham* festival takes place about the end of January every year. This is a feast given in honor of the departed souls of that year as the final ceremony for the deceased (Hodson 1911). This festival was celebrated in the pre-Christian period.

Most of the Tangkhul traditional festivals are no longer observed or can be considered as forgotten festivals. Some of the surviving traditional festivals include *Luirq Phanit* (seed sowing festival), *Yarra Phanit* (youth festival), and *Mangk hop Phanit* (*‘thanks giving’* festivals after paddy transplantation) among others. Today, the Tangkhuls give more importance to the Christian festivals like Christmas.