6.1 Birth and its ceremonies

The customary laws and justice are enforced in the case of birth and its ceremonies. Birth means the passage of the young from her mother’s body. Normally, it happens at the end of gestation, the time the baby develops within mother. They call it ‘Nah puanmei’ (Nah puanmei means child birth; nah=child, puanmei= birth). After birth, the young baby is developed, several from the mothers’ body and becomes an independent individual. Now, the woman also has changed to a socially responsible mother. The period of transition of a woman continues for five days after birth and after five days, the taboo is lifted from her and returned to the society with a new status.

Birth is always believed to be an important social event; round which gather many traditional practices and often associated with religion. The Ruangmei woman normally bears children without great difficulty and pain when the pregnant woman starts to feel labour pain; arrangements for birth are made as quickly as possible. And a local mid-wife or in the absence of mid-wife, an old woman of ‘Kengiapui’ attends her to accomplish the process of birth. Still they practice the traditional way of child birth. But her husband, the expectant father is not allowed to join the party during the process.1 This is believed to be the cause of the taboo condition of the parturient woman that

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would be transmitted to others who present.\(^2\) Among the Patkoi Nagas, the expectant father is also allowed to present but only as a confused and incapable bystander and he cautiously waits outside the house.\(^3\) But the Todas are allowed to present in the process of birth because the expectant mother kneels her head relaxing on the breast of her husband who grasp his hands behind the neck during delivery.\(^4\)

Normally, delivery takes place in the family dwelling, but in a place of seclusion which is withdrawn from the kitchen and from the entrance. It is mainly because of the condition of taboo placed on a parturient that delivery takes place in privacy or secularism.\(^5\) It is separated from the kitchen in the belief that it may pollute the kitchen and it must also be far from the entrance in order to protect from evil spirits that might enter through door.\(^6\) Another important taboo to be followed is that a murderer or a robber or a violator of marriage code is prohibited to enter into the house where a woman is about to give birth in order to refrain from any evil influence on the child.\(^7\) The Kacha Nagas place all edibles and eligible things outside the house when a woman is


\(^3\) Major General Pande Sardesh S.C. The Patkoi Nagas, op. cit., p.32.


\(^5\) James Hasting, op.cit., p. 636.

\(^6\) Stephen Fuchs, The Korkus of the Vindhya Hills, Inter-India publications, New Delhi, First published in India, 1988, p. 223.

about to give birth. As a care to avoid trouble during labour a woman cracks away the necklace of beads when she is about to give birth to a child.

The woman in labour is made to lay on the floor where a mate made of bamboo pieces must be spread with little cloth on it, because birth and death must take place on mother earth known as Apui Kandhi (Apui Kandhi literally means mother earth, Apui=mother, Kandhi=earth.

Hot water is kept ready and every requirement is made available by the family to the midwife when demanded. The midwife assists the woman with her delivery, massaging the abdomen slowly and encouraging her. If there is complexity or if the labour pains go on for a long time without a result, they perform a rite called “Changkham Gatmei” (Changkham Gatmei means to remove the obstruction; Chang-road, Kham = blockade, Gatmei = remove) to hasten it. In this rite, the priest called ‘Mhu’ offers a chicken to the god to remove the blockade by saying “Apou Tingkao Ragwang, the supreme God you have created this woman, give her no trouble and obstacle when she gives birth, delivers to her the child without pain, you are offered a chicken; it is a message of ‘Mhai Mhu’ che.”

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10 Stephen Fuchs, op. cit., p. 223.
When the birth takes place, a fire is lighted near her and kept burning during the period of pollution.\textsuperscript{13} The period of five days counted from the birth of a child is considered as a polluted and fire is kept constantly burning in the house of the newly born baby to protect form the evil power.\textsuperscript{14}

When the child is delivered, the first thing to be done before cutting the umbilical cord is to call upon the soul of the baby called “Buh Kaomei”\textsuperscript{15} (Buh = soul, Kaomei = calling). After that, she will tie the cord at the suitable place with a black thread called ‘Khim’. Then, the priests cut the cord a ‘Nuhbang’ a bamboo blade that is attained by splitting the rind piece of matured bamboo which indicates the division of the baby from the mother.\textsuperscript{16} The mother lays a few drops of her breast milk on the wound of the navel to dry it quickly.\textsuperscript{17} It is a taboo to use knife or stone in cutting the cord because the customs of the Ruangmei do not authorise to use such implements to cut the navel cord. It is alleged that in ancient time.

Usually, bamboo scale is employed by the Ruangmeis for the purpose of cutting the umbilical cord but it is doubtful regarding the origin of this culture. It may be stated that this materials aspect of culture is associated with ecological factor because ‘Mongoloid culture’ is invariably directed a bamboo

\textsuperscript{13} W. Crooke, The Tribes and castes of the North Western India in Four Volumes, Vol-II, Cosmo publications, Delhi, 1974, p.8.
\textsuperscript{14} Jogesh Das, Folk Flore of Assam, op. cit., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{15} Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, Ringlon Khatni Theilon, Imphal, 2002, p. 2.
culture since the whole of South Asia is prosperous in bamboo. Most of the Naga tribes have such practices.

On the very day of the birth of a child, the boys or girls of the dormitory according to the sex advance to the family of the newly born baby and present an egg as a proper request to become members of the particular dormitory when it grows up. If the child is a male, boys of the dormitory will come and if it is a female, girls will come to present the egg. This part of the rites of passage would not be taken as complete without saying a word on the importance of the birth of the male child in Ruangmei society. The story of ‘Luwang Khunthiba Pokpa’, the birth of ‘Luwang Khunthiba in Ningthourol Sheireng’ gives us the importance of the birth of a male child preservation, safeguard, welfare, growth and expansion of the clan to which he developed.

Thus, the birth of a male was received with pleasure. But it does mean the birth of a female was at all undesirable. However, birth of a male was preferred due to inter-village and clan feuds rather than the social and economic condition in olden days. In this situation there must have been the tendency to multiply the population of the male member of the clan groups to claim, their superiority in strength and power to each other. Whitely says, “The

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19 Th. Baba Chandra Singha, op.cit., p. 80.
happiness lot for a man, as far as birth is concerned, is that it should be such as to give him but little occasion to think much about it."  

When a newly born baby bears a mark which is likened to a particularly deceased of a lineage or clan and in that case, it is believed that, that particular person is reborn which shows that the Ruangmeis believe in the theory of reincarnation. This also indicates that the baby is disunited from the land of dead and returned into the world of the living. Whether it may be right or wrong, a belief which have been observed by the Ruangmei since long time ago.

6.1.1 Paan thakong Thamei

When the child is given birth, a male member of the family with some rice and cotton on two pieces of plantain leaves will be given to the upper and lower village deities locally known as ‘Bamboo’ or Shong; as it is informed to the deities that a new members has arrived in the family and to protect the baby from evil spirits. This rite is locally known as “Paan thakong Thamei”.

6.1.2 Kashan Kanmei

Kashan Kanmei literally denotes to protect the baby’s future; This rite is performed for the wellbeing of the baby. In this rite, the priestess with a dry leaf of ‘kham’ in her right hand will swing on the forehead of the child once or thrice with a prayer to the god for wellbeing and safety of the child from the

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23 Arnold Van Gennep, op.cit., p. 53.
24 Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 212.
evil forces. Ruangmeis believe that ‘Kham’ is the tongue of ‘Tenglam’, the divine priest of the Supreme God, Tingkao Ragawng and hence it is used toward off or to drive off the malevolence forces.

6.1.3 Nap Mummei

Nap Mummei literally means to feed the child with rice’, (nap-rice, mummei= to feed). In this rite, the child is put a little chewed rice in its mouth which denotes that the baby is claimed because human food is given. It is also alleged to be for the healthy and long life of the child.

6.1.4 Nata Duiloumei

Nata Duiloumei literally means to bath the child; (nata=child, Duiloumeei = to bath). In this rite, the child is bathed with luke warm water. The old woman or midwife who acts as priestess accomplishes the rite by uttering: Duithan Kumthan Duiling Kum ling Shitong Routong Katana Lou-Kok Keilou ka tong the che.

As pure as clear water and takes away all contaminations.

The first bath of the baby is only for hygiene purpose and it is also a rite of separation from his mother.

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28 Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, op.cit. p.2.
29 Ibid.
30 Arnold Van Gennep, op.cit., p. 52.
6.1.5 Nata Jaithaomei

Nata Jaithaomei literally means to hold up the child: (Nata= child, jaithaomei = to hold up). The priestess holds up the child from the ground pronouncing: ‘shang’ Shangdai, Dai Kapui Kapou kapei Khang shong Shangri Dairi Lotho che.\(^{31}\)

Let the child grow higher and higher than his parents and grandparents.

6.1.6 Langmumei Taloumei

Langmumei Taloumei means to faster the child with black thread; (Langmumei = black thread, Taloumei = to bind). The body is fastened around with a black thread at the neck, wrists and ankles by saying: “Tameipu Puikhang Kapui Kapu Shumeirui Haipou Tingkao Ragwang Khang Talou Tongthe Shitong Routong Shudat Numkhe che”.\(^{32}\)

This boy or girl is confined by his or her parents with a chain of Tingkao Ragwang and no damage is to be given to the baby. This signifies to the evil spirits that the baby who comes from the other world is locked up with the human world.\(^{33}\)

6.1.7 Nalam phupmei

Nalam phupmei denotes to bury the placenta; (Nalam = placenta, phupmei = to burry. Like the Poumai Naga,\(^{34}\) they also burry the placenta

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\(^{31}\) Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 214.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) Tingkao Ragwang Cahp Riak, op. cit., p.3.
inside the house, which is near the mother’s bed close to the wall and never outside the house.\textsuperscript{35} A burial pit about one foot and some inches in dept is dug. It must be dug by a man. It is assumed that the child would bear from recurrent vomiting if the pit is less than this dept. In this rite, the priestess cloaks the placenta with a cloth of its mother and inters if uttering: “Diye Karampou Karampei Nngam Rukhon Nngdi Lukhou Tameipui-pu Karam phukeinimeihei shtiong Routong Tilouriu che”.\textsuperscript{36}

Karampou karampei (the deity of earth) don’t give any trouble to the baby when its placenta buries on you. Special care is taken at the time of burial that the cord side must be preserved upward in the belief that the woman would not conceive again if it is not followed.\textsuperscript{37} Why they bury inside the house is mainly with the idea that the child will sense itself endlessly drawn to its parent’s house even after it has grown up.\textsuperscript{38}

6.1.8 Janphokmei

Janphokmei literally means name giving: (Jan = name, phokmei = giving). Traditionally, when a child is born, the old woman or midwife who attends at the delivery will give a temporary name at one according to the sex of the baby. It is performed because of the faith that if naming is delayed, the

\textsuperscript{35}K.S. Singh, op.cit., p.61.
\textsuperscript{36}Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, op.cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{37}Khasim Ruivah, Social change Among the Nagas (Tangkhul), Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{38}James Hasting, op.cit., p. 639.
evil forces would name the child first, and this may lead to untimely death to the child.\textsuperscript{39}

6.2 Taboo condition of the child

The new born baby is calculated as unclean,\textsuperscript{40} a taboo since the contagion of the pregnant woman is communicated to the baby.\textsuperscript{41} With the commemoration of birth ceremony on the fifth day after birth, the child is free from taboo condition and introduces into the family as a new member. It is said that taboo is indivisible of any person from his birth, marriage, and death because it establishes his position in the society.\textsuperscript{42}

6.2.1 Food of the mother

Normally, after birth of a child, the mother is advised to take only plain foods such as rice, dry fish or meat along with salt for certain days or months. She uses only boiled water for all purposes drinking and washing. She is not given to drink rice beer for five days and only after five days, she is allowed. She is suggested not to eat fresh meat, chili etc. in the belief that these foods are harmful to both the mother and offspring.\textsuperscript{43} But nowadays restriction is not strictly followed, instead of five days the father of the child takes five lumps of cook rice as plain food in the belief that he has observed the food taboo.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{39} Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 215.
\textsuperscript{40} Frank Dyron Jevons, The History of Religion, op.cit., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{41} Arnold Van Gennep, op.cit., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{42} J.H. Hutton, op.cit., p. 214.
\textsuperscript{43} Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 216.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. op.cit., p. 217.
6.2.2 Confinement of the mother

The mother will remain inside the house near the hearth which is kept burning for five days during the pollution period, and to avoid sunshine.\(^{45}\) During this period, the household is also under the condition of taboo and nobody is permitted to enter the house and nothing from that house may be given away.\(^{46}\) They hang down a bunch of leaves as a sign of prohibition on the frontal door of the house.\(^{47}\) Until the sacredness is removed she is dangerous and one is suggested to avoid.\(^{48}\) Frazer says “A woman at and after birth is pervaded by a certain dangerous influences, which can infect anything she touches: so that in the interest of the community it becomes necessary to exclude her from society for a while…..”\(^{49}\) With the celebration of birth ceremony on fifth day after birth of a child, the mother is released from taboo, and permitted to go out, which symbolizes that she is returned to the society. But she is advised not to move about too much and not to do even the household chores particularly for the first one month. To look after the baby is her main work. Generally, husband and wife must follow certain periodic prohibitions on sexual relation such as during menstruation, but normal sex fulfilment is never permanently denied to them.\(^{50}\) Among the Ruangmei, marital relation is strictly prohibited during this period of captivity.\(^{51}\)

\(^{45}\) M. Jitendra Singh, op.cit., p. 162.
\(^{47}\) Th. Baba Chandra Singha, op.cit., p. 267.
\(^{48}\) James hastings, op.cit., 706.
\(^{50}\) George Peter Murdock, Social structure, Macmillan Company, New York, 1960, p.4.
6.3 Naphin (Twin-birth)

Unlike the Angami,\textsuperscript{52} twin’ birth are not welcomed and measured as a bad omen.\textsuperscript{53} It is however a very rare and unusual occurrence in Ruangmei society. It is also said that the second born child to be the elder between them.\textsuperscript{54} As a care to disconnect them, both are always divided in the belief that the evil sway of one may not transmit to the other.\textsuperscript{55} The mother gives her breast milk one after another, not at the same time and also sleeps between them.

Abnormal birth is felt to be even more dangerous and terrifying than death, and a larger circle of relatives is held to be in dangers than are in danger from a corpse\textsuperscript{56}. The Ruangmeis have a strong belief that the life span of the parents who gives birth twins may cut short. In case dead is happened to one of the twins, they will hide the other inside a plunge of basket at the neighbour’s house until the funeral ceremonies is over in the belief that the deceased twin would not able to carry away the surviving twin.\textsuperscript{57}

6.4 The First Born

Among the Ruangmei, the first birth has a social significance, because with the birth of a child, the mother is no longer a mere woman, she raises her moral and social position and becomes a legitimate wife of the husband.\textsuperscript{58} It is

\begin{itemize}
\item J.H. Hutton, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 217.
\item James Hasting \textit{op.cit.}, 496.
\item K.P. Bahadur, Caste, Tribe and culture of India, Vol-ii, \textit{op.cit.}, 74.
\item Kamei Budha Kabui., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 219.
\item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
not possible to get a divorce from a woman who is given birth to one or more children; among the people whose customs permit divorce easy.\textsuperscript{59}

The child is considered a certificate of the parent’s union and kind of bond token between them. There is a custom of Ruangmeis that parents designating themselves by the name of the first born, say, ‘Gaingamlung’, and father of Gaingmlung and mother of Gaingamlung’. It is a widespread custom. It is believed to be created in the natural pride of the parents at the birth of a child in whom they are essence to immerse their personality.\textsuperscript{60}

6.5 Penbam -Reimei Ceremony

When the baby completes for five days, a ceremony called ‘Penbam – Reimei is observed in the early morning of the fifth day. It is supposed that the deity called penbam-pu-penbampui’ may give arm to the child when they come to obtain the placenta that was hidden inside the house. As a precaution, they are propitiated not to give any kind of damage to the child. This is the first and compulsory ceremony in the life cycle of an individual. It is performed by a priest (Mhu) just on the outside wall where the placenta was interred. The items include in the ceremony are a cock, a ginger, a plantain leaf, and a plantain cup. The ceremony has got its methodical procedure.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Arnold Van Gennep, op.cit., p. 49.  
\textsuperscript{60} James Hastings, op.cit., p. 31.  
\textsuperscript{61} Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 224.
6.6 Najum Gaimei and Nasan Kanmei ceremony

When a child has completed a minimum of five days, the ceremony called ‘Najum Gaimei and Nasan’ is observed. It is said that in the life cycle of a man this ceremony is the first and biggest rite of worship of the supreme God, for longevity, good fortune and issues of the child.62

It is said the ‘birth ceremony’ which is celebrated on fifth day has been fixed on the basis of the faith of the people in the menstruation period, who takes bath and wash her cloth on the fifth day of the said period.63 When a child dies before the performance of this ceremony is considered as unnatural death and also buried outside the village without formal ceremony.64 Before this ceremony, child is not recognized as a human being. After this rite, he achieves the status of a human being. Williams J. Goode has pointed out that this birth rituals declares the existence of child to the society and readily accepted by their family to bring up the child.65

In this ceremony, the two elders of village pei not below the rank of ‘banja’ who act as priests called ‘Mhu’ and his assistant who is known as ‘Mhujeb’ will make the fortune or announce the future of the child with a prayer to the supreme god, Tingkao-Ragwang. This is called ‘Kashan Kanmei’. The child is blessed with a bright future, long life and happiness and prosperity.

62 Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, op.cit., p. 5.
63 M. Jitendra Singh, op.cit., p. 163.
64 Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 227.
successes in reproduction, victory over the enemies and to overcome all the socio-religious obligations and throw merit feast etc.\textsuperscript{66}

The objects such as a big cock called Sangdai, a hen called Sanglou, two pieces ginger, and two lumps of cooked rice, a right leaf of plantain tree, two plantain leaf cups and two gourds of rice beer are included in the ceremony. In case of twin birth, the items of the ceremony are made double.

6.7 Nashan Kanmei

Another ritual aspect of Najum Gaimei is called ‘Nashan Kanmei’. Nashan Kanmei is performed for the longevity of life, wealthy and bright future of the baby. The rituals of Nashan Kanmei are discussed below:

(a) Guli kashan Kanmei: in this ritual, the ‘Mhu’ with a ginger in his right hand will chant: Tingkao Ragwang, the supreme god, today, this baby is secured with this God’s ginger by rubbing from his head to toe from now onward, let the child turn out to be as pure as God’s ginger.

Just after the chant, the priest rubs the ginger on the child from his head to toe thrice which symbolizes that the child is made safety with the god’s ginger from evil forces. This ritual is locally known as ‘Guli kashan kanmei’.\textsuperscript{67}

(b) Loithinli Kashan kanmei: Here, the priest (Mhu) with some cooked rice along with a piece of liver of ‘Sangdai’ in his hand puts the same on the forehead of the child.

\textsuperscript{66} Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 228.
It is a prayer to the supreme God (Tingkao Ragwang) so that the child lives with peace and prosperity, healthy, wealthy and wise and longevity of life, and a long line of offspring and regeneration.

The ‘mhujeb’ also repeats a similar performance with some cooked rice along with a piece of liver of ‘Sanglou’. This ritual is called ‘Loithinli Kashan Kanmei’.

(c) Jouli Kahsan kanmei

In the ritual, with a leaf cup of rice beer called ‘Jou loiduk’ in his right hand and the ‘Mhu’ will pour the rice beer on the temple of the child in the name of Supreme God by uttering:

Tingkao Ragwang (Supreme god), you are offered holy wine (Zoupal keimei) before nobody starts drinking it and from now on let the infant also become a fortunate man in his entire life. This ritual is locally called ‘Zouli kashan Kanmei’.”

6.8 Najan Thuanmei (Name giving)

Fuller says, “A name is a kind of face whereby one is known”. On the fifth day after birth of a child a ceremony locally known as Najum Gaimei and Nasan Kanmei is held. In this ceremony, the elders of the village compromising ‘Banja’ of pei and old woman of ‘Kenjapui’ will confer a fresh

70 James Hasting, op.cit., p. 130.
name of the child\textsuperscript{71} or get confirmed the provisional name (given on the day of its birth) which was found better without giving a second name. It is a rite of incorporation which introduces the child into the family because without a name a person cannot be counted as a member of the family.\textsuperscript{72}

Most commonly the ancestor names are given to the children. The name is given sometime having some definite signification, mostly alluding to some supposed quality or to some accidental circumstances which have happened at the time of birth.\textsuperscript{73} They do not confer the name of a living relative because it is considered to be unlucky and if a name is conferred so it is assumed that the latter will die soon since a substitute for him bearing the same, name has been provided for this earth.\textsuperscript{74} So, they prefer the name of the dead ancestors for a child. Colonel McCulloch writes that ‘five days after the birth of a child it is named with various ceremonies. Names are not given at random but are compounds of father’s and grandfather’s names or these of other near relations.”\textsuperscript{75}

Among the Ruangmei, a new born baby is not taken out for four days after its birth in the faith that evil spirits would do harm to the child. On the fifth day with the celebration of birth ceremony locally known as “Najum Gaimei and Nayan Kanmei”, it is permitted to take out the child. When a baby is to be dressed in new clothes, the clothes must first get in touch with fire. This

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Arnold Van Gennep, op.cit., Pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{73} James Hasting, op.cit., p. 133.
\textsuperscript{74} Th. Babachandra Singha, op.cit., p. 269.
\textsuperscript{75} T.C. Hodson, op.cit., p. 143.
is called ‘Maihammei’ and it is strictly obeyed till the child is about years old. Cutting the nails of a child on its birthday is strictly prohibited in the assurance that the bright future and life span of the child would be cleared off. It is believed that it would destroy the good fortune of a child if he eats the head, leg and liver portion of fowl, hence it is strictly prohibited. Children are not given to eat any kind of twin fruit by the parents in the belief that it would give birth to twins in future. Thus, a child is brought up in the midst of numerous beliefs and practices.

In Ruangmei society, feeding the child with mother’s milk is the normal practice and feed their children as long as milk is available in the breasts. If continues till the arrival of the next baby because milk of the mother is considered best. It is a normal feature that an offspring has to depend on its mother for its nourishment and bodily comfort. “Physiologically there exists a passionate instinctive interest of the mother in the child and a craving of the suckling for the maternal organisms, for the warmth of her body, the support of her arms and above all, the milk and contact of her breast”. Everywhere ‘it is to the mother the immediate care of the children chiefly belongs, which the father is the protector and guardian of the family…… the simplest duties are….. universally recognized’.

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77 Bronsilaw Malinowski, Sex and Repression in Savage Society, op.cit., p. 18.  
6.9 Purumkhang –purumlu Rarei

When a child becomes a young teenager, the ceremony called Purumkhang –purumlu Rarei is observed. In this ceremony, a cock on behalf of the teenager sacrificed to the deity in the belief that the teenager (young boy or girl) will not have the strange feeling of sexual behaviour or conduct locally known as ‘Tha Barakmei’ in future. An elder of pei who acts as priest (mhu) will accomplish the rituals with a prayer to the deity.

6.10 Nasam Mei (Feeding the child)

Na-sam-Mei means feeding the child with food for the first time. This rite is observed in any lucky day when the child attains five or six months in which the child gets first solid food for the first time. The family cooks a beautiful bird or fish of white colour on this occasion and feeds the child with ritually. Just before this, the mother baths the child and purifies ritually, and then the child is put on a new dress. The feeding of curry of beautiful bird or fish is in the belief that the child would become beautiful or handsome when it grows up. Feeding the child with solid food is very important when the child reaches this age, with the growth of its body, the child is not satisfied with the milk of the mother. Now, something solid is necessitated as its food. This is for this factor that the child is given ceremoniously with the solid food, which symbolizes the milk of the mother earth, which is called as second mother of the child. The first mother is the real mother of the child.

6.11 Khangchu Kailu Thaimei (Initiation to the dormitory)

79 Tingkao Ragyang Chapriak, Riglon Khatni Theilon, op.cit., p. 7.
80 Kamei Budha Kabui, op.cit., p. 237.
The transition from childhood to adolescence varies from society to society. In Ruangmei society, when a child attains the age of fourteen or fifteen year old, he or she is introduced to the particular dormitory (Khangchu for boys and Luchu for girls) as he or she was already claimed at the very day of its birth with a presentation of an egg to the family of the child to become its member when he or she grows up. The initiation rite is performed at the festival of ‘Gaan-Ngai’ in which a piece of meat will be given to him or her by the leader of the particular dormitory as formal ‘recognition’ of its member.  

6.12 Death

Death is the greatest misfortune that can occur to a family. All men are mortal as a result of which men cannot escape from the clutches of death. The cruel hands of death will befall on each one of the family and the world at large.

Death is also an important aspect of social activity for the people. Social control can also be maintained through the activities relating to the death of a person. There are certain rules and regulations for the people of the society irrespective of their sex, age or marital status. In death, a person may be either glorified or may bring about a bad name not only to him but also to the whole village, community, etc.

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81 Ibid, op. cit., p. 238.
82 Julius L.R. Marak, Garo Customary Laws and practices, Published by M.P. Mishra, new Delhi, 200, p. 200.
83 Adino Vitos, Customary Law and women, the Chakhesang Nagas, published by Regency publications, New Delhi, 2003, p.5.
The Ruangmei people believe in the existence of life after death. It means of the souls of dead go to two places: one is in Tingkaokai i.e., heavens and the other are in Taruairam (land of the dead). The soul of the dead those who live a righteous life during lifetime go to Tingkao Kai (heaven) and that of the persons with misdeeds during their lifetime go to Taruairam where dreadful king called Taruai Gwangh or Joungangpu looks after them. It is also said that the souls of the good after living in this land are reborn into this world.  

6.12.1 Classification of death

According to the traditional custom or Ruangmei, the death of Ruangmei may be classified into the following kinds of death:

1) Natural death- when a person died of sickness or diseases and due to old age. It was considered as a natural death.

2) Special death- The death of a person who successfully performed special ceremonies and religious festivals, such as Raarian loumei, Raagaidai Kimei, Mulengmei, Baanlumei, Tarangkai Sumei etc. in the name of the Almighty God.

3) Nashi Theimei- The death of woman during delivery of a child.

4) Naabung Theimei – Premature death of a child including the death occurred before the expiry of fifth day of the delivery. 

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5) Theisi Theimei (unnatural death)-the unnatural death consists of the following categories:

i) Kamang Rui Kailuaimei (Death killed by the tiger).

ii) Rih Dang Ruailomei Ramthei (Death killed by enemy or hostile)

iii) Thingbang Keiluailoumei (Death falling from the trees)

iv) Duikei luailoumei (Death falling into water)

v) Reng Thangna theimei (Suicide by hanging)\(^{86}\)

6.12.2 Death compensation

If a person killed any other person, customary fines wore imposed to compensate the human less known as Chuksumei among the Ruangmei tribe. The killer had to offer ten items to the affected family. Those items were:

1. Pot (Takhianh lai) for head (Pijaeng)
2. Hoe (Laogai) for teeth (Hujaeng)
3. Goats hair (Jiu Sung) for hair (Meisamjaeng)
4. Necklace (Tariutu) for intestine (Meireijaeng)
5. Shawl/cloth (Phei) for skin (Meigijaeng)
6. Cattle (Guaih) for body (Pumjaeng)
7. Plate (Jeisiankuak) for bottom (Lingkuakjaeng)
8. Neckband (Beih) for shoulder bone (Gwangkamjaeng)
9. Armulet (Nathang) for buttock (Meileijaeng)
10. Beads (Tuthuling) for eyes (Meimikjaeng)\(^{87}\)

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\(^{86}\) G.Makuga, The Rongmei Customary laws (in English) p. 166.

\(^{87}\) Personal Interview with Kariangpou Panmei, Village Authority, Raengkhung Village part I, II, III, pei (Thoubei), Tamenglong District, Manipur on 3\(^{rd}\) September, 2008.
6.12.3 Burial place

The burying of the dead body depended on the nature of death. As a custom of Ruangmei, the dead body was buried under the ground outside the house or in the graveyard. But in the case of unnatural death person was buried outside the village for the reason, that if buried inside it would bring luck to the whole village.\(^{88}\)

6.12.4 Equal procedure for bury of dead body

There was no difference between the death of an ordinary person and the death of important persons, the performance of burial functions or ceremony followed the same procedure in all Ruangmei villages in spite of slight different in spiritual performance form village to village.

6.12.5 Process for ritual function before burial ceremony

Rites and ritual were performed according to the customary duties, one after another before bury of any dead body of an ordinary or an important person excluding the dead body of unnatural death.\(^{89}\)

1. Kaho loumei

According to the custom, when a person just expire a man who happens to be near the dead body will shout, “Ho, Ho, Ho, Ue We. Nang Rampingna Tat Rio De”, Means by using the name of the dead person not to be afraid anything. Here, the word ‘Ho’ is shouted to inform God that the person is no more and the word ‘Aue We’ is shouted so as to give courage to the soul of the

\(^{88}\) G. Makuga, op.cit., p. 167.
\(^{89}\) Ibid.
dead in his journey to heaven. This is called Kaho loumei in the Ruangmei language.\footnote{Tingkao Ragwang Chap Riak, p. 16.}

ii) 2. Fusek Keimei

After the performance of Kaho loumei an elderly man shall offered a Gusek (ginger) to God with little wine or water in a Luiduk (Banana leaf) near the earth or fire place to the soul of the dead person with a few words of rites. After the ritual performance Munthengmei (fasting) was observed. It is strictly prohibited during the offering of Gusek keimei, nobody is not allowed to eat in the house. Only after the declaration of “Mun Kuak the” by the performer of the offerings, taking of food or drink was permitted in the household.

3. Munthengmei or Munthimmei

The observation of strict prohibition during the performance Gusek keikei, i.e., no body within and without of the house is allowed to take/ eat anything from the commencement to the end of the offering. Only after the taking of any drink or eat anything is permitted.\footnote{G.Makuga, op.cit., p. 167-168.}

4. Khoirammei

After the performance Gusek keimei, the dead body is given bath with a kind of creeper plant called Khoi, with this bath. It is believed that the dead body becomes clean in the land of the dead. A branch of a plant called Parin is also used to keep away the flies from the dead body.\footnote{Tingkao Ragwang Chap Riak, p. 16.}
5. Dui Loumei

The dead body was given bath with a plant called Chaakhung or Khaam Bang (the bark of the tree) will be put in the water of a pot or tub, and then the dead body will be cleaned with that water by a few adults in case of male or a few women in case of female.

6. Theimei Khang khun Khou Paolounimei

It means offering to the departed soul of old man or woman. The food items like meat, drinks to the departed soul by pouring meat or drink in the hole(pit) dug near the mouth of the lying dead body as if the spirit is still with the living person Khang nap Zou Paoloumei.

7. Chaakhun Poutatmei

It is the custom to reach the message of the death to all living relatives living in different localities through youths from early morning. It is prohibited to reach message during the night time “Chaakhun Poutatmei” means the message of the death.  

8. Zoungai

Zoungai means bid farewell to the deceased for which animal like dog, pig, and cow is killed. This is called taken in Ruangmei language. The animal is offered by the bereaved family. This is done to show a sign of love and concern in sharing the sorrows of the family.  

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94 Ibid.
9. Tarou Phukemei

‘Tarou’ means ‘grave’ and ‘Phukeimei’ means search to select the site for the grave known as the new home of the dead body. One of the deceased families will go to the site selected for the grave by holding one mattock (Laogai) with one cup of wine (Zoupan Kei Khang) on the ground site selected and after the offering, the wine, he or she will cut the earth with the mattock. Then the youths will start cutting the earth. After this offering, these villagers or public were prohibited to go back in the house of the dead person until the completion of burial ceremony is over.\(^95\)

10. Tarou Chaomei

It means digging the grave for burying the dead body, while waiting for the completion of digging of grave, songs of lamentation are sung by those who know the song.\(^96\) According to R. Brown, the grave is thus prepared a trench is first made, and at right angles to this the ground is excavated and a recess made, into which the coffin was instead, the earth being afterwards filled in. This grave is used again and again before a new one was opened.\(^97\)

11. Tangku Kasemmei

Tangku means coffin, adults who had knowledge of carpentry use to make coffin of the dead person. Preparation of tools and implement for the dead person: It is the traditional customs to arrange the following tools and implements for the dead person to be kept in the grave:

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\(^95\) Ibid.

\(^96\) Lamalu Thaimei, op.cit., p. 84.

1) Phu Khat (one tiny spade)
2) Bang Khat (one sword)
3) Rih Khat (one axe)
4) Bui Khat (one spear)
5) Kaah Khat {one basket for carrying load in case of man, or Kalong Khat (a female basket in case of a female)}
6) Baang Dai Khat (one sickle)
7) Napduam Khat (one food packet)
8) Zou Muh Khat (one wine bottle)
9) Tuh Khat (one necklace)
10) Tangmu Tambean (one set of loin loom for weaving)
11) Taa Khat (one wristlet)
12) Nukuan Tadip Khat (One earring)
13) Saubaang ban Khat (One bunch of thorn for defending the attack of enemy)
14) Khaa Rou Khat (one piece of fish borne)
15) Guaiptasit Thai (the seeds of jungle nut in order to give to the notorious Jaougangpu a Monkey chief)

12. Theimei Khang Puansumei

The dead body is also dressed up with the traditional custom, when a warrior died, his tomb was decorated with shields and other decorations befitting a warrior. But it should be noted that on putting up the dresses, the ends of garments should be tied from left to right turn and not from right to left turn to the dead body.

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98 G.Makuga, op.cit., p. 169.
99 Dichamang Pamei, Liberty to captives, p.52.
13. Tarou Maihaammei

One of the youths who excavated the grave will sanctify the grave with burning flame. This is known as Tarou Maihaammei.

14. Theifaa Dapmei

After the Tarou Maihaammei, one of the old man offers a hen or cock which is called Theifaa Ruai to the dead person. Killing by hitting on the ground for the departed soul so that the cock will crow when the departed soul reaches it destination. Among the old men or women who attain the funeral rites used to cock rice and chicken separately for the dead person.\textsuperscript{100}

15. Theimei Khang Napduam Duammei

It means to pack all kinds of food meat, fruits, etc. for the dead person in seven different packages.

i) Reangbang Khou tunimei Napduam (the food packet for taking after crossing the boundary of village gate).

ii) Bam Duan Dai (when he or she reaches bam duan dai, a big resting place, he or she uses to take the food).

iii) Sharing the food with dear ones also who passed away, who come to receive him or her.

iv) Kanung Duipaang (the dead person take food when he or she reaches at the bank of Kanung Duipaang, river).

v) For feeding the dogs

vi) Khaana Naanun (giving food to the children who died prematurely).

\textsuperscript{100} G.Makuga, op.cit., p. 170.
vii) For distribution to grand-fathers, mothers, uncles, brothers, sisters or relatives who died earlier this is called Takan Jahn.\textsuperscript{101}

16. Performance of burial ceremony

(i) Theilaamei

After the completion of Napduam Duammei, different domestic articles and many other belongings of the corpse are pack together to be taken out of the house along with dead body. And they will lift the dead with a loud noise, “Ho Aue We” and put it into the coffin.

(ii) Theimei Ta Puanpatmei

The coffin is lifted up and turned three or four times in left direction and from there they will take out of the door headed by leg end of the coffin and then taken towards the grave.

(iii) Kaboumei

It is said that when the coffin is taken out of the main door, one of the old men will start shouting by holding a big dagger with a loud voice of “Ho: Aue We” and he will lead the mourners who followed the coffin towards the grave pleading the dead person not to fear the devil who kills you.\textsuperscript{102}

(iv) Tarou Khou Phuploumei

It means to lay the coffin of the dead person, on reaching the grave the youths who are carrying the dead body will turn three or four times in left direction after which the coffin is placed inside the grave.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. op. cit., p. 171.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
(v) Thei Kadimei

After the Tarou Phuploumei, one of the old men climbs down in the grave and he will finally bid all the commodities, food packages, tools and implements one by one provided for the dead person.

(vi) Roukham Teng Khunmei

A male member of the bereaved family will go down to the grave and a piece of bamboo or wooden post (Roukham Teng) tilling the departed soul with a loud voice “Ho: Aue We” calling the dead person. “Taruai Chang Ramping rio nang chai Bung baomei Ainaie”. Do not be afraid when you go to the land of the dead, here I am strong and your brother brave man.103

After that all the members will drop a piece of earth (Neng Duam) inside the grave. Then the grave is filled up with the loose earth by the youths. Then all who have come for the funeral rites will go back to the house of the bereaved family. After the ritual performance of Gaah Roumei (touching of turmeric), Thanjou Jungmei (drinking of holy rice beer) and then Kaiphekmei (cleaning of the house), all the people will then take food.104 Colonel McCulloch remarked that, “on occurrence of a death, if the deceased be a man of a wealthy family, a buffalo would be killed, and all his relatives and friends feasted. But the less well-to-do families remained contented by killing a goat or pig for feasting purposes.”105

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104 Tingkao Ragwang Chap Riak, Pp. 33-34.
105 M. McColluch, The Valley of Manipur, Delhi, 1980, p. 52.
After the burial, the funeral rites are finally concluded on the fifth day. On this day the grave is decorated and this is called Tarou-Puan-Sumei. Food and drinks are offered to the soul of dead and the relatives near and dear ones will come and participate in this programme. This programme is organized as a sign of the final separation between the soul of the dead and members of the family alive.\footnote{Lamalu Thaimoi, op.cit., p. 85.}