CHAPTER 2: Socio-Cultural Life of the Poumais

2.1. Social structure

2.1.1. Family

Family or ‘Kilo’ in Poula is the smallest and primary social unit in the Poumais Society. The form of the Poumai family is a nuclear one consisting of the father, mother and their unmarried children. They follow patriarchal as well as patrilocal system. Sons after getting married establish their independent households and families with their wives, whereas daughters went to their husbands’ houses and live with them. Joint or extended family system is not practiced among them. However, usually, when the parents grew too old to survive by themselves, one of the sons usually the youngest live with the parents and take care of them. Father is the central figure of the family and naturally all the important authorities are vested on him. In case of his death the wife usually takes over the charge of the family until her eldest son becomes mature enough to discharge the responsibilities.

For the Poumais, kilo is the most important institution where they perform their main economic functions and impart the basic cultural ethos to the children so as to fit them into society. “...all the aspects of an individual life ranging from deterministic biological to deterministic cultural are considerably influenced and made possible by the family groupings.”¹ This unit when extended to a number of families of a well-known common forefather formed a sub-lineage known as “piimounae”. The members of a piimounae are tightly knitted with the bond of emotional attachment, love, sense of mutual respect and responsibility towards each other. However, they are better known by the name of their wider group “pounamai” or lineage, which is better recognized and occupies a more important position in the society. Pounamai

¹ D. N. Mayumdar, and T. N. Madan, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Noida, Mayoor paper backs, Tenth print, 1996, P. 51.
comprises two or more *piumounae* whose descendants are traced to a common ancestor. As they followed patrinymic system, a *poumami* is generally named after the common ancestor and its members are known by its name, which also is commonly used by them as their common title. The members of *poumami* manifested their solidarity in maintenance of co-operation, sharing of problems and all affairs of common concern, right and duties, privileges and obligations, etc. “A lineage (*poumami*) is exclusive in its membership and is normally corporate, its members exercising rights in common and being collectively subject to obligations”.

There is still another wider group known as *khii* (clan) in *poula* (the Poumai language), commonly known as *khel* by the Nagas. *Khii* is formed by the combination of two or more *poumami* who may or may not be the descendants of a common ancestor. However, the members of *khii* consider themselves as brothers and sisters and maintain cordial family relationship, share problems and observe strict sex taboo. *Khii* occupies a particular area of a village and the combination of two or more *khii* usually forms a village.

2.1.2. Kinship

The Poumais are well knitted together in groups by the bonds of kinship or ‘*taerai’* in *poula*. ‘Kinship’ literally means “The Socially recognized relationship between people in a culture who are held to be biologically related or who are given the status of relatives by marriage, adoption or other ritual.”

The kinship system the Poumais follow is not different from the above definition. The main systems of kinship they recognize are i) the affinal kinship, which is a socially and legally recognized marital relationship, ii) consanguineous kinship based on same blood ties. According to Madan and Majumdar, the former is “the bond between spouses and their relatives on

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2 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 10/02/05.
either side and the latter is between parents and children and that between siblings of the same parents.  

Kinship among the Poumals is not only propagated through blood ties and marital relationship. When someone or a group of people migrated to a village and settled there, generally a clan or lineage comes up to adopt them and the immigrants and their descendants became the kins of their adopter regardless of blood and marital relationship. Besides, according to Poumai tradition, when a person or lineage faces un-relievable problem due to natural calamities, sickness, etc. a lineage or clan usually comes forward to their rescue by way of labour, material assistance, ritual performance or whatever it may be helpful. In return, as a sign of respect and gratitude, the rescued became the kin members of the rescuers by sharing all their traditional ritual activities as well as other social activities and problems.

Another interesting system of kinship prevailing among the Poumals is a special kinship commonly known as “Kho” and “Khopii” which refer to kinship between two males and two females respectively. In fact, it is a legal and socially recognized relationship established by presenting or exchanging jars of rice-wine during feast of merit celebration. The relationship is as close as the members of a same lineage. They share all the joys; sorrows and problems of one another and marriage of siblings between the two is taboo. This relationship continuous even between their siblings unless it is legally broken by giving away the lungs of the cattle that was slaughtered at the time of the death of one of them to the living friend.

2.2. Socio – Community Life

The Poumals are socially classless and casteless. There is neither high nor low, nor very rich nor very poor among them. Equal respect and treatment

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5 D. N. Majumdar, and T. N. Madan, op. cit., P. 84.
6 Interview with Th. Phuping Tao, 10/02/05.
7 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 16/08/05.
8 Interview with Saothe Soni, 16/08/05.
from everyone is meted out to everybody of their same age group. Obviously, elders, parents and grand parents occupy higher position of respect. All the members of the community enjoy equal rights and privileges without discrimination. "The democratic principles of freedom, liberty, equality and justice are all enshrined in the social system of the Nagas".  

9 This social system of the Nagas is considered as one of the best systems of human social life.  

Regarding their villages, for the Poumais it is the hub of their community and their corporate life revolves within it. From sleeping to ploughing fields, construction of house to destruction, celebrating festivals to headhunting war, all were done in groups. They have a loving and caring disposition towards the weak and downtrodden. To them, the greatest sin is to injure someone without proper reason; it is bad to hurt a man specially old and destitute one. To help a man in need and be kind to some one who is in trouble is good; to give food to the hungry is the great virtue. If a stranger comes from far away, to entertain him is obligatory.  

11 When someone feels sick, friends and relatives pour in with gourds of rice-wine for the sick and help in taking care of the patient. In times of misfortune, the villagers volunteer and help the victim out.  

The Poumais, like the rest of the other Naga tribes, are very hard working. They subscribe to the principle - 'he who does not work, neither shall he eat'. There is no place for idlemen in the Naga community.  

12 To quote Dr. M. Horam, "...if I were living in my village, I would be part and parcel of my village, if my village decide to clean the village area, I would have to help; if they are repairing the road approaching the village area, I must be present and active."  

13 Such conscience always binds them together into a corporate social

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9 R. R. Shimray, Origin and Culture of Nagas, Published by Mrs. Pamlehiphi Shimray, 1985, P. 105.  
10 The Shepoumarth in the Naga National Movements, Published by Shepoumarth Region, Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland, P. 40.  
12 Shepoumarth, op. cit., P. 40.  
13 M. Horam, op. cit., P. 34.
life. M. Horam further maintained that the members who failed to join the rest of the village in cleaning of the well from which the villagers drew water were treated as indisciplined by the village elders who promptly forbade them to use the village water supply for a certain period as punishment. Similarly, a family not helping in repairing a footpath will have no right to use the path and will have to use different track. The same will be true for the Poumais.

The principle of equality among all the people is deeply rooted in the society. This principle motivates and compels the rich to share with the poor so that none became too rich or remained too poor. Such sharing of wealth with the members of the community is manifested in time of performing a series of feast of merit. The generosity of the have-nots was boundless. From rice-wine to crops and from vegetables to meat, all are shared with the community members. Fishes caught and wild animals hunted are freely distributed to the neighbours, relatives and friends. Their generosity and free distribution of hard earned treasures fetched them fame and social status. This sharing had an equalizing effect between the rich and the poor, and bound everyone in the hub of community as a solid corporate body. “They always put community before self and each member is thus selfless, all laws and traditions which strengthen community life are respected and all virtues admired which bring them together in peace and happiness”.

2.2.1. Women in Society

Among the Poumai Nagas, woman is never less preferred than man. The birth of both baby boy and girl are equally welcome. To them, women are understood as those who enrich the world and help in making human relation more honest and authentic through their womanhood. The women of Poumai occupy a prominent position in the society and enjoy considerable rights and

\[14\] Ibid., P. 36.
\[15\] Ibid., P. 39.
privileges. During their youth they enjoyed the freedom of socializing in their age group dormitories. From there they obtained basic traditional education including folk songs, folklores, social norms and discipline, spinning, weaving, knitting, embroidery and other manual works. They were also allowed to interact with the boys of their age group in time of festivals, playing games, doing social works and field works.\textsuperscript{17}

They also participated in certain social and religious ceremonies. In performing family rites and rituals both husband and wife equally took part. While performing feast of merit both the husband and wife were equally entitled to wear the prestigious Hasha (Shawl which was awarded to the feast performer). During the feast, it was for the wife to bless all the wooden vats of rice-wine before giving them to the villagers. The sisters who had married were gifted with the limbs of animals that were killed for the feast. Several gourds of the best wine were also given to them. These presentations were considered precious and brought to her husband's house. The rice wine so brought was offered to the elders of the husband's clan that enhances her position and strengthens her relationship with her in-laws.\textsuperscript{18} Panger Imchem wrote about the Ao's women, "Women have a high place in society, much higher than that in vedic texts of Hinduism, the old testament of ancient Jews, Koranic law, early Greek and so-called tribals both ancient and modern".\textsuperscript{19} The same applies for women among the Poumaids.

The Poumai women occupy almost equal position with their husbands as the leader, administrator and manager of the family. Almost every household and domestic affair is under her care and control. The family's Tachibii (treasury box where valuable things, money, etc. are kept) was taboo to touch by anyone other than the wife or the woman head of the family even in case of

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with L. Dowang, 22/12/2005.
the house catching fire. After the death of husband, the wife is the automatic head of the family. In case of the death of a chief and absence of adult male child, his wife took over all the charges and responsibilities of the chief. The Poumai women also enjoy the freedom to earn social recognition and title in the community by performing feast of merit. A stone erection marking a feast performed by a woman named Pi Yuni (grand-ma Yuni) is still lying below the Oinam village on the way to Koide. A stone resting platform also built by the same woman is lying near the boundary line of Oinam and Purul.

The Poumai women also played a very important role in waging war against their enemies. Rev. Piano Pani maintained that qualified and capable women were given the privilege to lead war. There is a folk song that praises a woman who avenged the enemies by beheading a warrior on the pretext of visiting him as lover. Another folk song also mentions a woman beheading another woman in course of their competition to be the more beautiful one. Women who had married to their rival villages occupied a very high position and played a very important role in peace making whenever animosity or wars occurred between the villages.

2.2.2. Restrictions against the Poumai Women

In spite of all the above rights and freedom she enjoyed, a number of limitations and restrictions were also laid before the Poumai women. The practice of patriarchal system on the one hand and her biological differences from her counterpart male on the other were responsible for a number of restrictions that lay against her freedom. The patriarchal system took woman to husband’s house and denied her the right to stay at her original home and so denied the right to inherit immoveable property of her parents. Women are known physically weaker than male because of their biological differences and

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21 Rev. Piano Pani, op. cit., P. 44.
22 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 16/08/05.
23 Interview with S. Pani, 03/03/2006.
so they are restricted from taking part in hunting, eating the meat of wild animals, birds, sacrificial meat, etc. She was also forbidden to eat chicken that laid eggs here and there lest she becomes unfaithful to her husband. Buying of meat by woman was a taboo as it was believed that it will make her greedy. During menstrual period she was considered unclean and forbidden to enter the king's house, to do or touch a number of things. According to K. S. Benjamin Banee, though women occupied prominent position within the family, in certain cases she is looked down as untouchable. A woman should not cross or jump over man. She should not touch the spear and shield of man for those are the weapons of battle. It is considered that the sanctity and efficiency of the weapons are lost the moment she touches them. She was also prohibited to enter the field of wrestling and comment anything whatsoever. Women who died in childbirth were not properly buried and the usual necessary rites were also not performed for them. Game that was killed by woman was taboo for man to eat. Further, women were given no place to attend public meeting and give speech. They were also “forbidden to listen to any sort of war strategy of the village for being feared of their becoming spy of the enemy” in spite of the fact that they were known for their valuable roles of intervening and stopping war and bringing peace between warring groups.

2.3. Economic Life

The basic traditional economic system of the Poumais was one of subsistence nature. The mode of their economic production was traditional, indigenous and culturally predominant. They were their own enterprisers, workers, producers as well as consumers. They followed a mixture of various economic occupations rather than specialization of functions. This will be true

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27 Interview with Th. Ruoping Tao, 10/02/2005.
with all the other tribes as well. As Madan and Majumdar remarked: "The fact is that a tribe uses all kinds of occupations to eke out its subsistence".29

The Poumais have their own land ownership system. There are common village's land, clan's land, lineage's land, family's land as well as individual land. Asoso Yunuo once said about the Nagas "All the household Nagas are women owning their own soil and it is a disgrace to have none. What is noteworthy about the economic life of the Nagas is the economic uniformity that they have no big landlords, no extreme paupers, no millionaires, no slums and no beggars. In other words, everyone has everything fairly enough to meet the needs of life, neither richness nor poverty".30 The same is true for the Poumais. In olden days, their system of distribution was linked with barter system or mutual exchange of goods. 'Goods were exchanged with goods. Money was not known before, as it was introduced and popularly used in the Poumai area only after the Second World War.31

2.3.1. Agriculture

a) Terrace Cultivation

Agriculture is extensively practiced by the Poumais. All the down and lowland regions of their areas are covered with terraces. The terraces are of two types, viz., wet and dry. The wet terrace fields are known as 'Diitu' or 'Dula' which are permanently kept under water. The dry fields 'Thelu' or 'Pai' are kept completely dry until the days of paddy transplantation.

b) Jhum Cultivation

Jhum cultivation is an age-old method of agricultural practice in all the
areas inhabited by tribals and pramaive population. This practice of cultivation was not absent among the Poumais, though they extensively practiced terrace cultivation. Jhum field was known to them as 'Laolu' or 'Laola' and it was considered the field of poor and big family who has not enough terrace fields. In jhum fields they mainly cultivated paddy, millet, job's tears, etc. Besides these main crops, they grow secondary crops such as, chilies, brinjals, pumpkins, beans, potatoes, maize, tomatoes, gourds, etc. in the jhum fields. However, successful yield of crops and good harvest entirely depend on rain. Therefore, in times of less rainfall, crops usually fail to yield and the people who totally depend on jhum cultivation face hardships of poverty.

2.3.2. Animal Husbandry

The land of the Poumai is blessed with various types of natural vegetations and is quite suitable for cattle rearing. It facilitates grazing land for cattles throughout all seasons. In olden days, cows were most commonly reared by the Poumais and buffaloes by a few. Rearing of horse, goat, sheep, etc. were not known to them. Almost every household was found rearing a few numbers of cattle but big herd of cattle was rarely reared. It was believed that 'torturing and shedding cattle’s tears led to the failure of rearing cattle in large numbers.' As such, cattle were properly cared and usually kept in the porch during night and took into fields for grazing during daytime. After harvest they were usually set free into jungle without taking much care until the spring season comes and the paddy seeds start sprouting. Their main purpose of rearing cattle was neither to use in doing works nor for milking but as a source of meat and to generate income and raise their economic condition.
Dog was one of the most important domesticated animals for the Poumais. They kept dogs as guards against enemies, thieves and wild beasts. Some special dogs were reared mainly for hunting purposes. Hunting dogs were given special treatment. The killing of one was punished by exile. No woman crosses over a hunting dog lying asleep or hit one with a stick. Tails of puppies were usually chopped off when they were about ten days old and at the same time the ears of male puppies were also cut off to indicate their gender.

The Poumais also rear cats. Cat is considered the oldest domesticated animal and they valued it very high. Killing and eating its meat is taboo to them. Cats are also reared for the purpose of guarding their paddy against rats. Besides, they also commonly reared pigs mainly as a source of meat. “Male piglets are generally castrated at the age of two to three months. At the time of castration the tips of the tail and the ears are chop-off”. Ears of the piglet that brought from other places for rearing purpose are usually bored and some threads are kept dangled there which is believed to make them homely and grow quickly. Moreover, broods of chickens are found reared by every household of the Poumais not for the purpose of selling but mainly for their own consumption and they very rarely bought chicken from others.

2.3.3. Hunting

The Poumais are very fond of hunting and possess very high skill in the profession. They practice hunting in solo as well as in group on leisures and mostly during village genna. Spear, sword and gun are their main implements for hunting. Expert dogs are commonly used in group hunting. Group hunting is usually done with spears, swords and guns. In group hunting the hunters with

arms surround a certain area of jungle mostly gorge or ridge where wild games like deer, stage, boar, bear, etc. are expected to live. Dogs are set free into the surrounded area and the dogs' masters follow them shouting and cheering loud in order to boost up the zeal of the hunting dogs. Once the dogs lighted upon a fresh scent of animal they start yapping vociferously and chasing the animal at their top speed. The animal has no other means but to run away and soon as it runs towards the surrounded border, it will be waylaid there and slew with guns and spears. When any game is killed, a hind limb of the game is usually awarded to the person who first wounded or killed the game. The second and third persons to the killing spot also receive big chunks of meat and the dogs that participated in securing the game are given big share including head. The rest of the meat is equally shared among all the hunters.\textsuperscript{37} In solo hunting, games are either tracked down through their foot prints or waylaid on a branch of tree beside a lane which is often used by games or fruit trees which the games usually frequent for fallen fruits.

Besides, the Poumai are great experts in laying traps and snares. Pit trap was one of the most popular traps used by the Poumai hunters. Pits were usually dug at places often frequented by animals. A number of pointed bamboo or wooden sticks and spears were kept struck all over the bottom of the pits. Then the pit was properly covered with small sticks and leaves. Above that fine dust were spread to make it look like natural. Any game that stepped over the covered pit naturally fell inside and stricken to death with the sticks and spears inside.\textsuperscript{38}

Another common trap was that of the one where a gun is properly tied on two posts pointing its barrel towards the lane frequented by animals. The trap is laid with the help of a fine creeper that stretched across the lane by tying one of its ends at the trigger of the gun. When the prey passes through and as it

\textsuperscript{37} Interview with Ng. Rephenang, 07/12/2005.
\textsuperscript{38} Interview with R. Khiya, 15/12/2005.
touches the stretched creeper it was knocked down at the spot with the bullet from the laid gun.\textsuperscript{39}

Besides, various methods and techniques of trapping and snaring birds by using glue extracted from fruits, noose strings, flat boards woven of bamboo sticks, etc. were widely practiced by the Poumais. Jayeseelam has rightly commented, “All the hillmen were very fond of meat and were clever at trapping games”.\textsuperscript{40}

In spite of possessing high skills in hunting and trapping, and also in spite of having killed a number of games, it was genna for a hunter to eat the meat of the game killed by him unless his killings rose to hundred or more excluding small birds and animals.\textsuperscript{41} But then, wild animals were aplenty then, and it was not difficult for man to kill that number of animals without spending many years.

2.3.4. Fishing

Though the Poumais practiced fishing, there is neither sea, nor lake for fishing in their region. Their only fishing sites are rivers, streams and paddy fields. Their main fishing implements have been bamboo baskets, nets, tar piston, etc. and sometimes they use barks and leaves of certain plants as poisoning or stupefying agents.\textsuperscript{42}

2.3.5. Pottery Industry

Earthen pot was the life and the soul of the Nagas of Makhel origin. From the days of yore pottery industry occupied a very prominent place in their life. It was the earthen pot that nurtured and gave life to them. However, the manufacture of earthen pot was solely practiced by the women folks of Oinam.

\textsuperscript{39} Interview with R. Khyaa, 15/12/2005.
\textsuperscript{40} L. Jayeseelam, op. cit., P. 48.
\textsuperscript{41} J. H. Hutton, op. cit., P. 84.
\textsuperscript{42} Interview with L. Ngao, 16/05/2006.
of the Poumai community. "It is the only village in the whole Senapati district where pottery is practiced".\textsuperscript{43}

a) **Origin of the Pottery**

The origin of earthen pot making by the women folk of Oinam is as old as the story of Makhel origin. Earthen pot making was done prior to the dispersal of all the Naga tribes from Makhel. According to legendary tales and songs of the Poumais, after the death of the ancestral father of mankind, the ancestral mother ‘Painaorou’ lived with her children for some period of time. When she knew that her time to leave the world was drawing nearer she summoned all her children one by one. According to this theory, the ancestral mother gifted the progenitor of Meiteis with a solid ball of alluminium along with a piece of advice of making pot and other wares. She then presented a soft ball of clay to the progenitor of Oinam, and advised him to make earthen wares with that ball of clay, not only for utensils but also to be used in performing ceremonial rites and rituals. Without an earthen pot no rite or ritual performed would be perfect.\textsuperscript{44} Hence, the earthen pot had been inseparably associated with the socio-religious life of the Nagas of Makhel origin.

b) **Pottery, the special gift of God**

It is interesting to note that within the Poumai tribe, pottery is in the exclusive domain of the women folk of Oinam. It is taboo for menfolk to make pots. Poumai or non-Poumai whose origin is not from Oinam can not engage in pottery. Quite interestingly a potter who got married outside the village can no longer posit engagement in pottery in spite of possessing high skill in the craft. It is believed that a pot made by such a married woman or any other outside woman would break or crack while baking. However, a woman of Oinam who

\textsuperscript{43} Dr. Laishram Imoba, Rabikanta, Thiyam and Rajketan, Chirom, ‘Pottery in Manipur’ Mutua Museum, 1999, P. 31.

\textsuperscript{44} Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 19/07/06.
returned and resettled in her natal village because of divorce or any other reason can resume pottery successfully.\textsuperscript{45}

c) Types of pots

The women of Oinam were pretty skillful in making varieties of beautiful designs of earthen wares. They employed various techniques and skills to make them as thin as 1-2 mm which is hard enough and can be used for cooking food, carrying and storing water, brewing rice-wine, using as plates, jugs, follower vessels, etc. Some of the popular wares they manufacture are \textit{Lakho} (cooking pot), \textit{Daone} (jug for serving wine), \textit{Daoso} (medium size of pot for carrying rice-wine), \textit{Dao} (water carrying pot), \textit{Soula} (water and wine storing pitcher), \textit{Zudaq} (wine storing vessel), \textit{Koup}u (plate), \textit{Koune} (bowl),\textsuperscript{46} etc.

d) Significance of the earthen pots

Since time immemorial, earthen wares of Oinam were not only used as utensils but they occupied a very significant place in the socio-religious life of the people. It was the earthen pot with which they performed all their important rites and rituals connected with feast of merit, construction of house, during child birth, harvesting, marriage, etc. While performing such rites and rituals, if a complete pot was not available then even a small broken piece of Oinam earthen pot will be used, without which no ritual was considered perfect.\textsuperscript{47}

As such, until the days of Christianity and before brass and aluminium wares were introduced into rural markets, pottery industry and its trade continued to flourish in the region. Pots were exchanged with both edible as well as non-edible goods. People not only from the Poumai community but the Maos, Marams, Chakhesangs, Angamis, Tangkhuls, etc. joined the trade.

\textsuperscript{45} Imoba, Dr. Laishram; Rabikanta, Thiyam and Rajketan, Chirom, op. cit., P. 32.
However, it was the manufacturers who enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the trade.\textsuperscript{48}

2.3.6. Handloom Industry

Handloom was a widely practiced industry among the women of Poumai. During childhood, girls were properly trained in the field and when they reached adult stage they became experts in the profession. Though they did not produce in large scale, they managed to meet the demands and necessities of their own use.

In the handloom industry, they mainly used cotton and fiber looms. Cotton was one of the important raw materials for their handloom industry which was commonly grown by them in large scale. However, with their traditional method of spinning, it took them days to spine threads for making a complete cloth. Important and luxurious shawls and cloths were woven with cotton. Some of their common products include; \textit{Pounii} (kilt for man and waist wrapper for women), \textit{Shapu} (sleeveless bodice for women), \textit{Khyakho} (band belt), \textit{Hasha} (white shawl for feast performers), \textit{Rusha} (white shawl for boys and girls), etc.\textsuperscript{49}

The Poumais also used fibers extracted from certain shrubs and plants which abundantly grew in their jungle. The fibers they mainly used are \textit{Diilou}, \textit{Siilou}, \textit{Khailou} and \textit{Ngulou} (nettle). The first two are reddish brown and the latter two are grey in colour. The cloths woven with the fibers are very thick, rough and durable which were worn as shawl, waist wrapper by women, bed sheet, blanket and some even stitched into shirt and trouser. Besides, the cloths were also used for carrying paddy, vegetables and other goods.

a) Weaving

No machine for weaving was known to them. Their primitive method of

\textsuperscript{48} Interview with Shanglong Ngaoni, 11/09/05.
\textsuperscript{49} Sone Khaone, 18/08/2005.
weaving by hand was the only method they employed. While weaving, cloths were designed at intervals by using colour threads and sometimes by knitting. It took them weeks to weave a cloth. Weaving was generally prohibited while the weaver's husband or father had gone for war, hunting or trading. It is believed that breaking of the prohibition generally leads to misfortune upon the husband or the father.\textsuperscript{50}

2.3.7. Poutai (Salt) manufacturing

According to a myth, there was a grand old woman by the name Paishi who was known as the salt carrier. Wherever she struck her walking stick or pissed, brine sprung out, from which the Poumais manufactured salt form time immemorial.\textsuperscript{51} Before the Poumais had wide contact with outsiders, manufacturing of Poutai was taken up as a profession by the Poumais, mainly by the villagers of Ngari and Thiwa. Even to these days, Poutai is being manufactured and used by the people as health tonic. It is believed that the salt contains medicinal values and it is also used as thirst-raiser.\textsuperscript{52}

2.3.8. Cane and Bamboo works

The Poumais are known for their artistic designs of cane and bamboo works. The works are exclusively under the domain of malefolks and mostly undertaken during autumn when raw materials are sufficiently available. Those who are exceptionally skilled in the profession spent most of their days in the works. Some of their common products include Za or Ching (mat), Siilai or Khulai (basket for carrying and storing paddy), Deah or Ko (basket used in harvesting crops), Roh or Ring (carrying basket for water and other goods), Bao

\textsuperscript{50} Interview with S. Ngaoni, and Kho Sai, 11/09/2005.
\textsuperscript{51} Interview with S. P. Henry, 05/04/2006.
\textsuperscript{52} J. H. Hutton, op. cit., P. 70.
or Bu (paddy barn), Phii or Nae (band for carrying load), Peirii or Peirii (hat), etc. 53

2.3.9. Black-smithy

From time immemorial black-smithy was practiced among the Poumas. They did not depend much on the outside world for the tools of their own use. 54 Some of the common tools they manufactured are Pou-phou (Pou-spade), Pou-reih (Pou-axe) and Pou-hou (Pou-spear). 55

The traditional implements used in smithy were rather very simple. A pair of bamboo or hollow wooden bellows with a pair of pistons made of bamboo sticks whose lower ends are covered with thick feather or soft fur is used to pump air alternately inside the bellows. And a pincer made of split and flattened bamboo and hammer of oval stone were the important implements used in black-smithy. 56 With those simple and crude implements they produced very simple and rough tools for carrying out their field as well as household works and war arms.

2.3.10. Food, Drink and Narcotic

a) Food

Rice is the staple food for the Poumas. They normally have three heavy meals a day. The components of their meal are rather simple. Boiled rice and vegetables with added flavour of dry fish and meat made their daily meal. They are very fond of meat and fish, which they used as their special diet and health toner. During festivals and heavy works, meat and fish formed their main dishes. Chunks of meat and fishes are usually found smoking and drying above

53 Interview with Khazi Nasii, 05/08/2006
54 Interview with Longni Dowang, 22/12/2005.
55 Memorandum submitted to Shri Jual Oram, Hon’ble Union Minister, on the demand of Poumai Tribe Recognition, 31st May, 2002.
56 Interview with Longni Dowang, 22/12/2005.
the hearth of every house either hanging all exposed or keeping inside small baskets. For them dishes of dried meat and fish are considered very special.

b) **Drink**

*Pouzao*, an indigenous locally brewed rice-wine is their favourite drink and it is one of their most important food components. In time of festivities and performing rites and rituals *pouzao* was one of the indispensable items for making offerings to God as well as for consuming. During these occasions, the heads of the households usually abstained from food except *pouzao*. It is also interesting to note that every morning and evening family members were usually found sitting around the family's hearth, sipping *pouzao* and gossiping. For adult members, noon meal was usually replaced by *pouzao*.

c) **Narcotic**

The only narcotic used by the Poumais is a mild locally growth tobacco known as 'Khaotu' which is abundantly found growing in the kitchen garden of every household. It is used for smoking by rolling inside the cover of maize. On the other hand, they also smoke *khaotu* through water that contained in a tool made of beaker locally called 'Teibii'. *Teibii* is made of a beaker connected with a bamboo pipe at its shoulder and another pipe fixed at the middle of the beaker's mouth. The lower end of the second pipe extended near the bottom of the beaker and a clay funnel is mounted over the upper end of the beaker. The beaker is half field with water and the funnel is filled with *khaotu*. A burning charcoal is dropped over the *khaotu* mounted funnel. When sucking from the pipe, the burning smoke of the *khaotu* passes through the water and turns the latter into nicotine water.57 When the water got sufficiently saturated with nicotine it is poured into a bamboo phial, which is then tucked in the waistband. Sips of this nicotine water are taken from time to time when smoking is out of question. However, the liquid is not consumed but merely retained in the mouth.

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57 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 16/08/05.
for a while and spit out when it loses its tang. Another method of using khaotu is that the leaf of khaotu is heated so as to make it soft and tender. The heated and soft leaf is then retained in mouth until its tang has gone out of it.

2.4. Dresses and Ornaments

2.4.1. Dresses

The traditional dresses of the Poumais were rather simple. They were neither fashionable nor they did cover their whole body. From cradle to grave they remained bare footed and half naked. Their style of dressing and fashion were very simple exhibiting the natural beauty of a person. However, their festive dresses were very attractive and graceful. By and large the Poumai women were very expert in using the right colours and designs in the right place to produce their own very attractive and grand looking cloths.

a) Children dress

There was no particular dress for the Poumai children. They generally remain bared until they reached the age of puberty. However, during cold seasons they wrapped their bodies with cloths and protect themselves from cold.

b) Male dresses

Male casual dresses consist of a Pounii (kilt) made of cotton and a Lousah (shawl) woven of bark fibers. Pounii is a small piece of cloth usually wrapped around the waist that covers down to half of the upper thighs.

c) Festive Dresses:

During grand and festive occasions the Poumais usually wore attractive dresses of different colours, designs and insignia. Some of the common festive dresses are briefed as under:

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i) **Tousiirouni (Kilt)**

It is a pure black kilt designed with three straight lines of white cowrie shells for the commoners whereas the warriors who had hunted enemies head or performed ‘Khaonaenou’* or won a physical relationship with woman were entitled to wear four lines of cowrie shells.  

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ii) **Phaoha (Sash)**

Phaoha is an exotic and attractive festive dress composed of a pair of long bands, well designed with various colours. A half pair of it was worn on the right shoulder with its two ends pinned together at the left side waist, while the other half was wrapped on the opposite shoulder with its tow ends pinned together at the right side waist.

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iii) **Louvii**

**Louvii** is another traditional costume exclusively for males. It is a finger size band of cotton threads that tied around the waist from which about 6 to 8 strings of white cotton threads decorated with colourful wools dangled down below the knee. It is interesting to note that, **louvii** is exclusively worn by the males who had won physical relation with one or more women. As a norm and custom, making of **louvii** is done either by the woman with whom the would be wearer had physical relation or by other woman in which case it is a must that some threads are taken from the woman for making it.  

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60  Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 16/08/05.  
61  *('Khaonaenou' is a kind of feast of merit/honour performed when a tiger is killed.)  
d) **Women Dresses**

The Poumai women are expert weavers and thus produced their own sufficient clothes with their own styles, designs and significance. Their traditional dresses looked very grand, attractive and colourful. Some of their common dresses are:

i) **Shapu (Bodice)**

In place of blouse, the women of Poumai wore *Shapu*, a sort of sleeveless bodice. Usually unmarried women wore a combination of two bodices one blue and another black. The blue was worn as inner bodice that crosses under the right arm and the two upper corners are knotted on the left shoulder while the black bodice is an outer one that crosses under the opposite arm and is knotted on the other shoulder. The married women wore only the black bodice and leave the right side of the body uncovered.\(^{63}\)

ii) **Pounii (waist wrapper)**

It is a traditional women’s waist wrapper woven of cotton that wraps around the waist and covers down to the lower end of the thighs. A few stripes of black, green, red and yellow run along the length of the two borders.

e) **Sah (Shawl)**

*Sah* is another important dress for the Poumais. They are very fond of wearing varieties of sah or shawls. Certain shawls are highly valued and entitled to the high achievers and warriors. Some of the varieties of shawls are as follows:

\(^{63}\) Interview with Saothe Sone 16/08/2005.
i)  \textit{Teisha}

It is a black shawl with three red and two yellow stripes running along the length of both sides. The outer stripes are red in colour, four to five times bigger than the other stripes. Designs of different colours are woven across the breath at the two ends of the length. It is worn by unmarried boys as well as girls.\textsuperscript{64}

ii)  \textit{Rusha}

\textit{Rusha} is a white shawl with four small stripes of black and blue colours that run along the length at equal intervals. Comparatively, it is smaller than \textit{teisha} and worn by both boys and girls.\textsuperscript{65}

iii)  \textit{Lousha}

\textit{Lousha} is an indigenous shawl of the Poumais made of bark fibers of certain shrubs and plants. There are four varieties of \textit{lousha} made by the Poumais namely, \textit{Dolousha}, \textit{Ngulousha}, \textit{Khailousha} and \textit{Sitlousha}. They are different in colours and quality but same in style and designs. A \textit{Lousha} is designed with four black and blue small stripes that run across the length into five equal intervals. It is used as cloth, bed-sheet, blanket, and so also for carrying vegetables, collecting paddy during harvest, etc.

iv)  \textit{Zosha}

The most important and prestigious shawls of the Poumais are \textit{‘Hasha’} or \textit{‘Riidusha’} and \textit{‘Hapeiteisha’}, commonly known as \textit{‘Zosha’} which have ritualistic and symbolic significance. \textit{‘Hasha’} is the most coveted cloth worn by both males and females who had hosted the prestigious feast of merit and honour known as \textquote{Zosou’}. It is purely made of white cotton cloth of four equal


\textsuperscript{65} K. S. Benjamin, Banee, op. cit., P. 134.
strips, stitched together with large strings of rolled cotton threads. The stitches are usually knotted into finger sizes that run throughout the length like the animal's backbone. 'Hapeiteisha' is another prestigious cloth worn by males who had performed 'Zhosou'. For some Lepaona villages, the cloth is exclusively entitled to the males who had performed a kind of honourable deed known as 'Khaonanou' (a rite perform on killing of tiger). The shawl is black in background, knitted with several designs including elephants throughout its length. A number of stripes of red, white and yellow colours running through its length and a few stripes of different colours running across the breadth of its two ends make it the most decorated and colourful cloth.66

f) Rain Dresses

The Poumais manufacture their own rainproof dresses, viz., Hii, Nae and Peiri, which are used to protect them from rain as well as the Sun while working in fields. 'Hii' is a male's raincoat plaited of palm leaves with their ends dangling down loosely to keep off the water. Nae is another rain proof sheet exclusively used by females. It is a rectangular sheet of broad leaves sandwiched between two thinly woven bamboo sheets. Besides, a hat locally known as 'Peiri' made of two uniformly woven bamboo hats into the shape of a cowboy hat with broad leaves sandwiched in between is used to protect from the sun and rain.67

2.4.2. Ornaments

The Poumais are the lovers of ornaments. Since time immemorial they have been using varieties of valuable ornaments. However, many of their important ornamental materials are not found in this country. Story tells us that in course of the Nagas migration from the central and south East Asia, they

66 Interview with Khaie Railang, 06/02/2006.
67 Interview with Shanso Ka, 04/03/2004.
carried variety of precious ornaments which they have been using even to these
days.

a) **Male Ornaments**

i) **Roh-lai (Diadem)**

*Roh-lai* is a male traditional diadem made of a number of finger size and
about two feet long bamboo bands fixed around a round-headed small wooden
plank. The base of the bands are woven with stripes of red, green, yellow, and
black woolen threads one after another so as to form a rainbow like design. At
the upper end of the bands white feathers are glued to picturesque it. This is
worn at the back of the head with the help of a band that is tied around the
head.

ii) **Pheikho**

*Pheikho* is a small male’s ring ornament made of fine pieces of cane
dyed in black colour. It is worn at the upper calf and shin below the knee. A
lover of traditional ornaments usually wear them in bunches of more than one
thousand rings at a time.\(^{68}\)

iii) **Pheida (Legging)**

It is another male ornamental dress woven of thin slices of cane with
designs of different colours. *It is worn in pairs as leg gloves between ankle and
knee on festive and other special occasions.*\(^ {69}\)

iv) **Baokha (Armlet)**

*Baokha* is a big, flat and very thick male ornamental arm ring specially
made of ivory, worn exclusively by male during festive occasions.

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\(^{68}\) K. S. Benjamin Bance, op. cit., P. 324.

\(^{69}\) Kajen Mongro, op. cit., P. 67.
v) Vaohouziimai

It is a very beautiful wing feather obtained from a very rare and colourful bird known as Vaohouzii, worn between head and upper ear lobes. However, it is a herculean task to procure the feather as the bird could be seen once in a blue moon when it pays seasonal visit to villages.\(^70\)

vi) Loubo (Ear ring)

Loubo is an ear ornament used by the man who won the favour of having physical relation with a woman or a lover. It is made either by the woman from whom he received favour or at least some of her threads are used in making it.\(^71\)

b) Ornaments for Warriors

Successful warriors were honoured with entitlement to some distinct ornaments other than the ornaments worn by the commoners. According to S. P. Henry, the following ornaments were exclusively entitled to the successful warriors and hunters.

i) Houreih (Spear)

It is a distinct spear decorated with very long human’s hair worn around the middle of its shaft. It is used by the warriors who had taken one or more human life.\(^72\)

ii) Reihmalu

It is a long lock of human’s hair used as ornament, hanging at the ears of the warriors who had taken human’s life.

\(^70\) Interview with Th. Phuping Tao, 10/02/2005.
\(^71\) Interview with S. P. Henry, 05/04/2006.
iii) **Khaobei**

*Khaobei* is another ornament for the warriors who had killed tiger. It is a metal ornament that is kept dangling down over the buttock, and produces jingle sound while moving.

iv) **Khaomi**

It is a tail like ornament decorated with tiger’s hairs throughout its length. This ornament is specially awarded to the hunters who killed tiger. It is worn at the posterior end of the body like a tail.

v) **Romai**

*Romai* is a bird’s feather, black and white in colour, used as an ornament at the middle of the head. It is exclusively worn by the people who killed an eagle.\(^73\)

c) **Women’s Ornaments**

The Poumai women are very fond ornaments. They like decorating and adding luster to their bodies and making themselves attractive with beautiful ornaments.

i) **Baosha (Bangle)**

*Baosha* is one of their most beautiful and favourite ornaments of the Poumai women. They wear a variety of bangles and bracelets made of brass, metal and copper. They wear coils of shining spirals encircling the upper arms about a dozen times.

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\(^73\) Interview with Woba Khazi, 08/08/2006.
ii) **Tou (Necklace)**

*Tou* is an important ornament for the Poumai women. They wear *tou* of different colours like green, yellow, blue, red and white colours specially made of bones, shell beads, cornelians, transverse pieces of horn, hard nuts, etc. Strings of different colours and designs of *tou* were usually worn by the women around their neck dangling over the chest. ‘Girl who wears chestful of *tou* is surely a daughter of a rich family.’

iii) **Noubo (Earring)**

*Noubo* is not less preferred than other ornaments by the Poumais. The size of *Noubo* in original form is extraordinarily big and heavy. Young girls preferred to wear threads of different colours bounded together at their ends evenly cut off to form a flower like shape and fitting into the hole of ear lobes with the help of a few plaited threads extended from behind.

**d) Hair Dresses**

The male children of Poumai keep their hair shaved until they reached adolescence. However, they usually rear a finger point size of hair lock at the back top of the head that signifies masculine gender. Adult males wore hair on the upper part of their heads starting from above the ears while keeping the lower portion shaved.

In case of women, like the Rengma Nagas, the unmarried Poumai girls used to keep their hair shaved until they were betrothed or married. However, an unmarried girl who is getting late for marriage, is allowed to keep long hair. Otherwise, girls will grow hair usually after getting betrothed. As the hair grows longer they bound it around the head with a black tape. After completion of two years of marriage the tape is removed and kept the hair into a neat bun.

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2. Interview with Mrs. Ka Longdala, 04/03/2004.
by rolling and tying over a knot and suspended on the nape that signifies her becoming a matured mother or housewife.\textsuperscript{77}

e) Toiletries

In olden days, soaps, detergents, cosmetics, etc. were not known to the Poumais. Rice-water taken out of soaked rice, \textit{Lae} (a type of shrub) and bark of \textit{Vesii} (a type of plant) were used to wash their head. The slippery fluid squeezed out of \textit{Raibungnetha} (fruit of a thorny shrub) and \textit{Bitrai} (a climbing creeper) were used for washing clothes. Fats of pig and chicken were used as hair oil. They also used comb made of bamboo split and a jug of clear water was used as mirror for dressing their hair and make up.\textsuperscript{78}

2.5. Traditional House Structure

The traditional house of the Poumais never faces west. It was believed that spirits of dead usually visit the resting place of the house facing westward and life becomes short.\textsuperscript{79} The traditional house of the Poumais is tent like in shape with thatch roofing. The eaves of roof drop very low and the houses are walled with either rough wooden planks or woven bamboos. The front side of the house is wider and higher gradually tapering and sloping backward. The house is divided into porch, granary cum pig shed, bedroom and kitchen. The porch is usually used as the shelter for cows and chickens. Skulls of wild as well as domestic animals decorate the walls. There are two doors one at the right and another at the left side. The right side door leads to the granary where barns of paddy were kept and the left side door leads to the sleeping room. A hearth lies in the middle of the sleeping room which is used for cooking food for dogs and pigs. Cooking human’s food over there was forbidden as the

\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Kadu Daiahri, 01/10/2006.
\textsuperscript{78} Interview with Saothe Soni, and Th. Raoping Tao, 13/02/2005.
\textsuperscript{79} Interview with K.K. Khova, 10/04/2006.
hearth was considered unclean. From this room one door will be connected to granary and another to the kitchen where they prepare family food, brew rice wine, store water, etc. High above the hearth a wide bamboo shelf lies across the room which is used to store baskets, mats, vats, etc. The rooms are generally very dark as there is neither ventilation nor window. As such, fire in the hearth is kept on burning to light the house. The family members usually sat around the hearth drinking, eating and gossiping until they retired.

The house of the village Chief is usually decorated with horns and is roofed with wooden planks. Well decorated huge wooden posts and planks with well-curved tigers, heads of buffalo, cow, man, etc. are used in building the house. The houses that belong to rich men are also well adorned with crude curving heads of buffalo, cow and of man. These crafts indicate richness of the house owner. Building of such house involves huge expenditure and a number of rites are also performed like that of remaining chaste, fasting, abstaining from certain foods, observing strict gennas, etc.  

2.6. Musical Instruments

The Poumais are great lovers of music. They use many distinctive and indigenous musical instruments. Some of the most commonly used instruments of the Poumais are the following:

2.6.1. Hakai (Buffalo’s-horn trumpet)

Hakai is a trumpet type of indigenous musical instrument made of buffalo’s horn with a big bamboo pipe connected to it. It is usually blown by males on public platforms or on raised places.

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80 Interview with Th. Phuping Tao, 13/02/05.
81 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 10/02/2005.
2.6.2. Soukai (Bamboo trumpet)

It is another distinctive indigenous hakai type of instrument made of a big bamboo pipe firmly connected with another small bamboo pipe that serves as mouthpiece. It is about three feet long and usually played by males on public platforms.83

2.6.3. Bhe (Trumpet)

Bhe is an indigenous trumpet used by the Pounais from time immemorial. It is made of a dried stem of Bhe (a type of shrub) after which the instrument is named.84

2.6.4. Sha

Sha is a flute type of instrument made of dried Bhe stem. It bears a hole each nearby the two sealed ends. The bigger hole serves as mouthpiece and the other as finger hole.85

2.6.5. Shakhei

It is another type of flute made of Bhe. It comprises two arms fixed at about 45° to one another. The two open ends are tightly sealed and a hole each is bored nearby the end points of the two arms. One hole serves as mouthpiece and another as finger hole.86

2.6.6. Gaigong (fiddle)

Gaigong is a fiddle type of instrument named after the sound that is produced by the instrument. It is made of the hard cover of a gourd by cutting it into a funnel like shape. The bulging end is covered with animal’s urinary bladder and a stiff bamboo stick about 5 feet long is horizontally fixed beneath

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83 Interview with P. S. Henry, 04/04/2006.
84 R. Ngupani Tao, op.cit.
85 Ibid.,
86 Ibid.,
the bulging edge keeping a half inch of the stick projected to other side of the
gourd. A well plaited cotton string is tied at the projected stick and stretched
over the bladder with the help of a tuning key fixed at the other end of the stick.
A small wooden piece known as bridge is placed between the bladder and the
string to support tuning. It is played with the forefingers of both the hands.\textsuperscript{87}

2.6.7. \textit{Lanae} (Violin)

\textit{Lanae} is a single string violin type of instrument which is same as
gai\textit{gong} in all respect except it is about two and half feet long and played with
the help of a bow made of human's hair. About this instrument Kajen Mongro
wrote: “The artisan usually collects the hair from his lady lover since the
instruments will be used in praise of her beauty... when the lovers are totally
immersed in their passionate moment and girl goes in a state of deep slumber,
the boys bite a lock of hair from her nape without her knowledge”.\textsuperscript{88}

2.6.8. \textit{Chii} (Jew's Herb)

\textit{Chii} is a small mouth organ made of a piece of thin and flat bamboo
about half inch in breadth and five inch in length. A long prong known as 'Lii'
(tongue) is curved out in the middle and when played the \textit{Lii} produces vibrant
music. It is mainly played by the women folks.\textsuperscript{89}

2.6.9. Flute

It is a very simple instrument made of either \textit{Bhe} or a very thin bamboo.
It bears six finger holes and a mouthpiece hole that produces beautiful music of
different tunes.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.\textsuperscript{,}
\textsuperscript{88} Kajen Mongro, op. cit., P. 114.
\textsuperscript{89} J. H. Hutton, op. cit., P. 57.
\textsuperscript{90} Kajen Mongro, op. cit., P. 115.
2.6.10. Straw Flute

It is the simplest and the smallest instrument played by children during harvest. It is made of the stump of paddy plant broken into four parts near the closed knot to form holes for blowing the instrument. “The flute is played by all the Naga tribes but the organ is not played during dancing and festivals”. ⑨¹

a) Seasons of using the instruments

All the above musical instruments except Gaigong, Lanae and flute were forbidden to play during the month of Zalepokhou, Doroupolokhou and Doniikhou (September, October and November) which is the period when the paddy in the fields got ripen and harvested. It is believed that playing of these instruments during the months may invite natural calamities or a bad harvest. ⑨²

2.7. Songs and Dances

2.7.1. Songs

Songs occupied a very important place in the life of the Poumais. During festivals and special occasions, songs played a major part in their entertainment. Any public speech, lecture, story telling or casual discussions were usually supported by songs at intervals. Such songs supported speeches were considered rather more authenticated. ⑨³ Whenever, they gathered together, songs automatically flew out of their lips as fluently as delivering speech. In the past, every young and old Poumai was comfortable to tune their traditional songs and enjoy their social lives at their hearts’ content.

It is interesting to note that the Poumais are romantic as well as poetic. Their songs are very poetically composed. In times of festivities boys and girls usually had time of ‘loudayu’ (exchanging or competing songs), during which they express their feelings and praises to one another through songs. At times,

⑨¹ Ibid., P. 116.
⑨² Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, and Shanglong Soni, 15/08/2005.
⑨³ Panger Imchen, op. cit., P. 130.
they spent whole day and night in competing or exchanging songs unless one of the parties surrendered to the other. During festive and other special occasions, Loudoyu was also practiced between the boys and girls of neighbouring villages. Sometimes they also organized special loudoyu programme at paddy field that lies between the two villages. In such occasions they brought special rice wine as well as dishes of chicken, pork, fishes, etc. and spent the day together exchanging songs of love and praises to one another and feasting together with the special dishes they brought.\footnote{Interview with Ng. Rephenang, 07/12/2005.}

There are songs for every occasion. There are songs of love, praise or admiration, war, happiness or joy, sorrow or lamentation, divorce, farewell, prayer, blessing, songs sung while working, songs in the form of story, etc.\footnote{Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 10/02/05.} All the songs are tuned more or less similar except the chanting songs known as 'koulili' and 'Hih'. Koulili is a song of sorrow and lamentation usually sung by a person during the departure of his or her beloved ones. Whereas Hih is a chanting song sung while doing works. There are different types of Hih. Some of them are 'Khohih' a special chanting song performed while ploughing or digging ground, 'Lukhaih' a chant for weeding paddy field, 'Thoupiih' a chant for carrying paddy sung by males, etc. Besides, there are also different types of chanting songs like 'Reih-hvo' which is a chant of victory in war, performed during the ritual celebration of the hunted head; 'Vodu' a special type of chant sung during the occasion of feast of merit; 'Chusiivo' a chanting song for pulling stone monolith of feast of merit; 'Taipohvo' another special chant performed while carrying big pillar for building village Chief's and richman's house; 'Sahvo' a chant specially sung during festivals; 'Raiivo' another chant for special occasion or celebration; etc.\footnote{Interview with Ka. Longdala, 08/02/2006.} Thus, songs were the fuel that boost their energy, interest and endurance in performing any type of hard or normal task. They are the music that sends messages to their dear and
beloved ones, the records that tell stories and the important sources of joy and happiness for them.

2.7.2. Dances

Traditionally, dances were very common among the Pounais. Dance of merry making, war, cultivation, etc. were some of the popular dances performed by boys and girls.97 “These dances do not go alone; they are always accompanied with songs” 98

2.8. Games and Sports

The Pounais are very fond of games and sports. They play a number of games and people excelling in any games were highly respected and honoured. Some of the common games they play are:

2.8.1. Poyu (wrestling)

Among all the games, Poyu is one of the most popular boys’ game of the Pounais. However, the season of playing the game varies from village to village. During festivals different villages organized and hosted inter-village friendly Poyu competition. The people of Lepaona region conduct Poyu competition during paddy transplanting festival known as Paoki and the people of Chilevai region conduct Poyu competition during Daonii festival.99 The people of Paomata conduct the game during Laonii festival that falls in the month of Laokhou (July)100

2.8.2. Toukhaoyu

Toukhaoyu is a seasonal boy’s game played by two groups of equal number. It is a game of hitting down the stones erected by their opponent

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97 Ibid.
98 Panger Imchen, op. cit., P. 132.
99 Interview with L. Puni, 15/10/2006.
100 Interview with Th. Nakhuo, 06/11/2006.
group. The group that hit down more number of stones is counted as the winner. However, it is taboo to play the game except after completion of harvest till the start of seed sowing.

2.8.3. Kakayu

It is a game that is played by girls in groups with the reddish seeds of sworo bean. Like Toukhaoyu, the group that hit down more number of erected bean seeds is the winner. The game is played from the first day of New Year till Siipanai\(^{101}\) which falls in Siipakhou (February).

2.8.4. Chulaiyu (Throwing stone)

The Poumais play two types of chulaiyu games. One game is played with a heavy stone ball lifted upon the shoulder and throwing it to the farthest possible distance. The other game is played with a heavy stone lifted up to the height of thigh by both the hands and throwing it to the farthest distance from the top of two stones slantingly erected in the form of v-shape.\(^{102}\)

2.8.5. Reiheipheayu

Reiheipheayu is a war game played by the young boys during the festival of Lukhaonii or Laonii. It is a game of hitting the opponent with the stems of a particular rhizome locally known as ‘Reibet’. Traditionally, this game was played as a part of war training for young boys, because during the olden days head hunting war was inevitable among the people.\(^{103}\)

2.8.6. Lenevudo or Seitoushuyu (Birds hunting)

It is a game of hunting birds jointly played by all the males of the village. Birds are hunted with stones and sticks and caught alive. Persons who

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\(^{101}\) P. D. Shelly, Indigenous Games, (Toukhaoyu and Kakayu) (Naga Traditional Games)

\(^{102}\) Interview with Saothe Soni, 16/08/2005.

\(^{103}\) M.C. Arum, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 62.
hunted more birds are counted blessed and honoured with respect. This is also a game related to war.\textsuperscript{104}

Besides, a number of games such as, \textit{Thingkhaokaedo} (high jump), \textit{Laivaeido} or \textit{Yajojaoyu} (long jump), \textit{Takoreido} or \textit{headaoyu} (a type of chess game played with small stones), etc. were played by the Poumai adults. Children also played a number of games such as \textit{Owmazaoye} (merry-making game), \textit{Phaibei} or \textit{peidevahyu} (kabadi type of game), \textit{Tutsiivayu} (hide and find), \textit{Khaopacharou} (tiger and man), \textit{Souhuyu} (hunting game), etc.

\section*{2.9. Feast and Festivals}

Feast and Festival are part and parcel of the Poumais life. To them, feasts and festivals are not only to have joyous celebrations but also to worship God with thanks giving and supplicate for protection, well being and prosperity. Their festivals are full of rites and are well connected with agricultural works. They celebrate a series of festivals every year. Some of the important festivals of the Poumais are as follows:

\subsection*{2.9.1. \textit{Thonii}}

\textit{Thonii} is the first, the oldest and the New Year festival generally celebrated in the month of \textit{Thoniikhou} (Dec./Jan.). However, the days of celebration \textit{Thonii} festival varies from village to village. Therefore, since 2002 the Poumais have agreed to have a common celebration starting from the 5\textsuperscript{th} January of every year.\textsuperscript{105} The celebration continues for five days. Apart from worshiping God, baking different types of special breads and exchanging them among the friends and relatives forms one of the main and remarkable features of the festival.\textsuperscript{106}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., P.59.
\textsuperscript{105} M.C. Arun, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 58.
\textsuperscript{106} Interview with L. Punt, 15/10/2006.
\end{flushright}
2.9.2. Taithounii

Taithounii is one of the most important festivals of the Poumais. 'Tai' means seed, 'thou' refers to sow and 'nii' is festival. Together it means 'seed sowing festival'. Traditionally, this festival was mainly celebrated for three days that fell in Roupakhou (February). The Proumai villages of Chilevai community celebrate it as Daonii while the other Chilevai villages celebrate it as Rounii.

The main features of the festival are as follows: In the early morning of Niidu (the main feast day), the mother of the house offers special prayer along with a few drops of wine to the Supreme God. As a part of the ritual, the newly collected firewood for the year is inaugurated on the day by burning a few sticks of the wood in cooking the meat of dog that was slaughtered by the performer of feast of merit in that particular year. The game of hunting 'Seitou' (a type of small bird) is conducted during the day as a part of war and hunting practice.

Friends and relatives of neighbouring villages are invited and most importantly the sisters who had married are bound to visit their parents' and brothers' house with their husbands and children. Their main feast and the joyous moment of the festival start in the evening with their respective age groups. Boys and girls celebrate together in girls' dormitories by exchanging rice-wine, delicious foods, songs, stories and pleasantries with humorous jokes. This celebration continues till the next day 'Niishepao'. On the day of Niishepao guests are generally sent off with gourds of special rice-wine, delicious food packs, chunks of raw meat and sometimes with cock or hen to special guests. The third day 'Niiranai' is the day they continue celebrating with neighbours and relatives. During the festival they pray to the Supreme

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108 Interview with Ph. Longsila, 10/02/2005.
109 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 19/07/06.
God for abundant growth of seeds to be sown and their protection from natural calamities.

This seed-sowing festival is celebrated by all the Naga tribes. After a great deal of studies, this festival is given a modern concept by naming it ‘Lui-Ngai-Ni’ which is coined from the words ‘Luirar + Gangai + Oni’ the names of the festivals used by the Tangkhuls, Kabuis and Shipfomeis respectively. In recognition of this zealous effort, in 1987 the government of Manipur declared the 15th February as Public holiday for the festival and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has also listed the festival as one of the Tourist festivals of India.  

2.9.3. Siingga or Sounii

Siingga is a festival mainly celebrated by the villages of Onaeme (Oinam), Ngamju, Tingsong, Khongdei, etc. This festival falls in the month of Khonikhou or Siho (April) and it is celebrated mainly for three days. The importance of this festival is to seek divine information about the weather and climatic condition of the current year in the region. The opportune day of paddy transplantation is also fixed on the main day of the festival. The paddy transplantation day as fixed by the Onaeme (Oinam) Elders’ Council is considered a blessed day for crops in the field. As such neighbouring villages sometimes try to coincide theirs paddy transplantation day with the day of Onaeme (Oinam). Further, it is also an important festival during which bachelors performed ‘Khangnethingthao’ or ‘Siitaopo’ an honourable bachelor’s deed. Right from the performance of the deed the performer is counted as a befitting bachelor or man in the society. Hence he is permitted to take part in every activities of the village.

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110 K. S. Benjamin, Banee, op. cit., P. 432.
112 M.C. Arun, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 60.
113 Interview with Railang Thio, 12/09/2005.
114 Interview with Sopha Longni, 20/08/2005.
2.9.4. Paonii

Paonii also known as Paoki is one of the best and the most lavishly celebrated festivals of the Poumais. It is celebrated with lively paddy transplanting works. The celebration takes place every year in the month of Ziikhou (May) to mark the first paddy-transplanting day of the year. It is said that, in olden days this festival was celebrated by a few villages situated in the middle part of the Poumai region namely, Onaeme (Oinam), Purul, Koide, Maiba, Phuba, etc.\textsuperscript{115} According to Benjamin Bance, Paonii is the best festival for the Lepaona, a sub-community of the Poumai and it is unknown to the other sister sub-communities.\textsuperscript{116} Paonii starts with the day of ‘Ranai’. On this day the paddy fields to be planted are kept ready by giving final touch and food stuff for the feast are collected. The second day ‘Thaopai’ is reserved for collection of seedling from jhumland. In the evening of the second day as the relatives and guests mostly youths (both boys and girls) from neighbouring villages started pouring into the festive village, the spirit of Paonii swung wild and high and every family heartily welcomes to host as much guests as possible. Guests are lavishly served with rice-wine and dishes of pork, fish, chicken, beef, etc. The night usually marked as the most memorable moment for the boys who participated in wrestling competition conducted between the host villagers and the guests. When the wrestlers of a guest village got exhausted another village wrestlers took place.\textsuperscript{117} Thus, sometimes, wrestling competition continues till the dawn of the next day. After closing the competition the guests usually spend the remaining time of the night visiting girls’ dormitories of the host village and the host boys visiting the guest girls’ dormitories. Rice-wine and delicious dishes are served to the boy visitors. They spent time together exchanging songs and pleasantries at intervals.\textsuperscript{118} On the next day ‘khanai’, the main day of Paonii festival, paddy plantation works starts in the early morning.

\textsuperscript{115} H. Gideon, op. cit., P. 22.
\textsuperscript{116} K. S. Benjamin, Bance, op. cit., P. 434.
\textsuperscript{118} H. Gedcon, op. cit., P. 23.
with a ritual performed by the housewife by offering fish and meat along with drops of wine to God and the paddy field deity asking for fertility and healthy growth of the paddy to be transplanted.\textsuperscript{119} During the day, boys pay visits to the girls they are interested and help them in planting paddy and enjoy delicious food and wine in return. As evening approaches, guests are usually sent off with gourds of wine, raw chunks of meat, fishes and delicious food packs. However, the festive spirit and mood continues the next day ‘\textit{khanaithai}’. On this day boys usually visit fields and extend help to the families who have fewer members and got their plantation works done.\textsuperscript{120}

2.9.5. Laonii

\textit{Laonii} is another common festival of the Poumai Nagas. It is a sacred festival celebrated on the completion of paddy transplanting works that falls in the month of \textit{Laokhou} (July). Any field that is not planted before the festival is to be abandoned for the year\textsuperscript{121} as it is believed that paddy transplanting after the festival usually does not yield crops.

Traditionally, \textit{Laonii} was celebrated in superfluous manner. “In \textit{Laonii} no one should be in want of food and wine. When someone asks paddy to borrow for the festival, it should not be denied”.\textsuperscript{122} On this special occasion brothers present chunks of pork to their sisters as a mark of their love and ties. The meat of the animal that was killed by the village Council particularly for performing ritual of the festival was shared to every household in exchange of paddy and the meat is used in performing all the important rituals of the year.\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Laonii} festival is full of ritual performances. It has ceremonial as well as religious significance. It is known as the festival of sanctification of male children. As such, newly born sons are given ceremonial birth celebration

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., P. 23.
\textsuperscript{120} M.C. Arum, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 61.
\textsuperscript{121} Rowland, Souvenir in Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of India Independence 1997, Senapati District, P. 1.
\textsuperscript{122} Interview with S. P. Henry, 04/04/2006.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.,
called 'Loutouyu'. Apart from the above, the festival is used as a special occasion to play a war related game 'Reibeipheavayu'. This game is played by the young boys as a part of training and rehearsal of spear war.

2.9.6. Ngemnii

Ngemnii is a very important festival celebrated for five days in Ngemkkhou (August/September). It is a festival mainly celebrated to obviate hailstorms from destroying crops in the fields and to have good harvest. According to Thozii Nakhu-o, during this festival no vegetable is to be collected, no cloth to be spread or hang outside, nor loud noise to be made, and no branch with full of leaves should be carried inside the village lest these attract hailstorm. It is also said that no stranger is allowed to enter the village till the end of the festival, trading are stopped, selling of domestic animals are forbidden, bonfire in paddy fields and wilderness are restricted.

It is also the festival of tasting new crops that are grown in paddy fields. The tasting is first done by the Vhe (Chief) followed by the general public on the next day. It may also be noted that during the festival they pray for multiplication of their cattle. Cattle are given special treatment; no harsh word is used to them. Slaughtering of any cattle and eating of any kind of meat are restricted. Breach of the restrictions is believed to adversely affect the rearing of cattle in future.

2.9.7. Baoloutou

Baoloutou is a two days festival celebrated in the month of Doroupokhou (October/November) after completion of harvesting. It is neither

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125 Interview with Sangpo Longkhyu, 12/09/2005.
126 Interview with Thozii Nakhu-o, 06/11/2005.
127 R. K. James, op. cit., P. 81.
128 H. Gideon, op. cit., P. 30.
129 Ibid., P. 30.
a grand nor a lavish festival but is more ritualistic in nature. It is a festival of
worshiping God, dedicating the newly harvested granary to the Supreme Being
and tasting or inaugurating newly harvested paddy crops.\footnote{M.C. Arun, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 63.}

2.10. Feast of Merit

As per the Naga traditions, feasts of merit are the feasts of fame and
status, coveted by every one of them. They are generally performed by very
well to do families in order to gain social status. The performer of any such sort
of feast is highly honoured and is entitled to wear very prestigious and socially
recognized cloths, dresses or ornaments as per the feast performed by him.

There are various types of Naga traditional feasts of merit. However, the
number of feasts and the ways of performing them varies from tribe to tribe and
village to village. The feasts are very expensive and therefore in olden times,
the socio-economic status of a village was invariably judged by the number of
feasts performed in a year.\footnote{R. K. Thekho, Reminiscence of a Naga feast of Merit, Souvenir, Tungjoy Baptist Church,
Golden Jubilee publication, 1997, P. 18.}

2.10.1. Zhosou

Among the various feasts of merit, ‘Zhosou’ was the most popular and
mostly coveted feast. Performing the feast required a lot of time, labour and
wealth. The whole preparation and the entire process of performing the feast
take years. Therefore, preparation for the feast usually starts years ahead by
cultivating more fields and accumulating more wealth. However, the real
preparation for the feast generally starts in the first month of the year by
observing a number of do’s and dont’s and performing rites. Before reaching to
the main feast ‘Zhosou’, a number of steps are to be meticulously performed
with precision. The first step is Taeza or Mouzii in which the villagers are
offered meat that indicates his passage to the stage of preparing for performing
Zhosou and also to ward off natural calamities and diseases in the family. It is followed by *Chameyula‘* (*Tsiive zaaozhi*), which is the real step of preparation for Zhosou. On that day the intention of performing Zhosou is made public by offering rice wine to the *Tsiive/Chame* and the date of the feast is also fixed. Hence serious preparation starts from this day onwards.³²

a) Stone selection

Performing of feast of ‘Zhosou’ involves erection of a stone monolith, which is one of the most important parts of hosting the feast Zhosou. The process of selection and engagement of stone monolith generally starts three to four months ahead of the main feast. However, the real process of it starts two to three weeks before it is to be taken. When a suitable stone is found its surroundings are kept clean and the feast performer offers two pieces of ginger split, saying “Be my friend and my guest” and he goes to see a dream. If the revelation in dream is positive the final engagement is made or else he goes for another alternative stone.³³ It is believed that, stone monolith possesses soul and could reveal its sex as well as name in dreams.³⁴

b) Stone Hauling

The hauling of Stone Monolith is done about a week ahead of the main feast day. In the early morning of the stone hauling day the process of brewing rice-wine for the main feast is started. And until lunch the feast performer, the village Vhe (Chief), Lung (who accompanied the feast performer in performing all of the feast rituals), the napao (priest) and napai (priestess) abstains from taking any solid food except rice wine. However, rice wine is to be taken only from the designated cups of plantain leaves, which are specially designed as

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³² M.C. Arun., R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., Pp. 63-64.
³³ Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 19/07/06.
³⁴ Interview with Longkhya Longpani, 09/06/2006.
per one’s status. From that moment the feast performer husband and wife will start wearing the prestigious Hasha or Ritidusa.135

After lunch, all the males including the feast performer go to the spot where the monolith is lying. The stone monolith is properly tied over a sledge, and then the priest smears pig’s blood over the stone and offers rice wine and a live chicken to the spirit of the stone. Then, the priest inaugurates hauling of the stone monolith followed by the public. The hauling of the stone is always accompanied by traditional stone hauling ‘hih’ (chants). When the stone reaches the destination a party of good drinks is offered to all the participants. In case the stone failed to reach the destination, hauling of stone resumes the next day.136

c) Buffalo sacrificial ceremony

Buffalo sacrificial ceremony is one of the most important parts in performing the Zhosou. For the sacrificial ceremony, a blameless and perfect male buffalo is chosen and maximum care and nursing is taken for months in order to keep the buffalo in good health and strength.137 On the eve of the main feast day, the dramatic event of sacrificing the animal is held. As the process of sacrificing, the buffalo is dragged around the village public ground and some young village males with heavy wooden posts and pestles strike over the animal until it is about to fall. At last the animal is dragged home and pierced to death with spear and stick. This course of sacrificing the innocent animal is very painful and cruel. R. K. Thekho commented, the concluding part of this animal sacrifice is horrifying, pathetic and tragic.138

d) Hodu (The main feast)

On the day of hodu, the main feast day, the meat of the sacrificial animal is distributed to every household and it is obligatory to give a hind limb of the

135 Interview with Relang Khya, 15/12/2005
138 Ibid., P. 22.
animal to the village Chief as tribute and the forelimbs to the sisters who have got married.

The great feast starts in the evening with traditional vo (festive chant). Every young and old male with their colourful festive dresses joined the vo, excitedly chanting and whooping, dancing and jumping around with verve and glee. After closing of chanting vo, all the villagers gather at a village ground and enjoy lavishly prepared special qualities of rice-wine to their hearts’ content. Songs of honor are sung and jokes are cracked. The same celebration continues the next day known as ‘shepao’ meaning ‘to send off guests’. On this day the guests from outside villages are bid farewell with both raw as well as cooked foodstuffs and rice-wine.

This day is also marked specially for making legal friendship known as ‘Kho’ and ‘Khopii’ for boys and girls respectively, by presenting either rice-wine or meat to the person whom one desires to make friendship. The stone monolith of the feast is also erected on this day. However, this is not the end of the feast. Celebration continues for days with relatives, friends and neighbours and a number of rituals are performed months after month.\(^\text{139}\)

2.10.2. Kikaida (Building of horn house)

*Kikaida* or *Chiveisou* means building of horn house. Traditionally, the persons who had performed *Zhosou* alone can build horn house. Building it requires a lot of formalities including observation of gennas and performing a number of rites and rituals. According to S. P. Henry, performing of *Mouzii*, *Zhosou* and *Kikaida* are counted as the completion of one step of feast of merit.\(^\text{140}\)

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\(^\text{139}\) M.C. Arun, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 65.  
\(^\text{140}\) Interview with S. P. Henry, 04/04/2006.
2.10.3. Khokkho (Building of Stone Platform)

Like Zhosou, Khokkho is a deed of fame performed by the people who had already hosted the feast Zhosou. Khokkho means building of stone platform by piling up stones and erecting a small monolith over it. Animal sacrifice, meat distribution and feasting villagers in Khokkho are same as of Zhosou. However, Zhosou is more expensive and is more coveted by the people.\footnote{141}

2.10.4. Pouto-Dziidaoviihvii (Distribution of meat to every male member)

Pouto-dziidaoviihvii is a deed of fame which requires no rigorous preparation like Zhosou. No feast is to be thrown to the villagers. It mainly involves sacrificing cattle and distribution of the sacrificial meat to all the male members of the village regardless of age. Whosoever performed the deed is entitled to wear an ornament known as Shitou.\footnote{142}

2.10.5. Heihu (Distribution of live cattle)

Heihu is another step of feast of merit to be performed after Pouto-dziidaoviihvii. Here a live ox or buffalo is offered to the neighbouring villages. A title is awarded to the performer of the deed and he is entitled to use a particular spear known as Ngophaosa (a spear decorated with hairs).\footnote{143}

2.10.6. Thouvihvii (Distribution of paddy)

It is yet another deed of fame, in which one ‘vu’ (a locally measuring tin) full of paddy is distributed to each and every household of the village. This deed involved neither meat distribution nor hosting of feast.

\footnote{141}{Interview with Th. Phuping Tao, 13/02/2005.}
\footnote{142}{Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 08/09/06.}
\footnote{143}{Interview with Kadu Dathrii, 01/10/2006.}
2.10.7. Maihiilai-Souviilhvi (Distribution of meat to every population of the village)

Yet another deed of fame, it is usually performed by the people who had performed the above deeds except Thouvilhvi. In this, chunks of meat are to be distributed to every villager irrespective of sex and age.144

2.10.8. Kiki (Distribution of dry meat)

This is the last step of feast of merit to be performed in a person’s life. It is more ritualistic in manner rather than festive in nature. To perform this honourable deed a pig that has been reared for seven years is slaughtered and the meat is smoked to dry above the family’s hearth. The dried meat is then distributed to all the Chiefs and elder councilors of the village as well as the neighbouring villages. It is interesting to note that the meat is also to be distributed to the stones which are lying inside the village and having ritualistic significance. The distribution starts from the eldest village and ended at the youngest. After a person performs Kiki, he is honoured by all the villages that shared the dry meat. He is then given the title ‘Kikimai’ and enjoys the diplomatic immunity of freedom of movement from village to village. During head hunting era, no one could lay hands on him and he would be spared by warring groups.145

2.11. Marriage

Marriage is locally termed as ‘shiheiyu’. Where ‘shi’ means marriage of a man and ‘hei’ refers to marriage of a woman, together they mean marriage of man and woman. It is also termed as ‘kilosouyu’ in Poula meaning ‘setting up of a household’.

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144 M.C. Arun, R. Ngupani Tao & others, op. cit., P. 66.
145 Interview with Kadu Daihrii, 01/10/2006.
2.11.1. Concept of marriage

Marriage is a very old and well established institution of mankind where man and woman unite together physically, mentally as well as spiritually to form a permanent bond of socially approved relationship by setting up a family as husband and wife. Majumdar, H. T. defines marriage “as a socially sanctioned union of male and female, or as a secondary institution devised by society to sanction the union and mating of male and female for purposes of a) establishing a household, b) entering into sex relations, c) procreating and d) providing care for the offspring”.\textsuperscript{146} To the Poumais, marriage is a sacred and divine institution involving a long life union of man and woman for procreation of legitimate offsprings and caring them by parents and vice-versa.

2.11.2. Forms of marriage

The Poumais practice village endogamy. Clan and Khel exogamy is strictly observed as marriage among the members of a same clan or khel is considered incestuous and taboo. Breach of this custom is considered an act of defiling the family’s sanctity and brought shame to the family.\textsuperscript{147} It is believed that eloping or committing fornication among the members of the same blood, it was believed, incurs the curse of heaven and when he goes for hunting he will be devoured by tiger, or death branches will fall upon him and he will die a wild death. The defaulter is also debarred from taking the main rein in performing any important task or ritual.\textsuperscript{148}

The Poumais are traditionally monogamous. Polyandry is totally absent among them. However, polygyny is reported in very rare cases when a man’s wife is proved to be barren and could not procreate offspring, and the husband is allowed to marry with a second wife. Sororate and levirate are not totally absent among the Poumais. After one’s husband dies the younger brother of the

\textsuperscript{146} H. T. Majumdar, The Grammer of Sociology, Asia Publishing House, 1966, p. 582.
\textsuperscript{147} Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 08/09/06.
deceased may marry his brother’s widow in order to take care of the widow and bring up the children. The same may happen when the wife dies. “Levirate and sororate emphasize the acceptance of inter-familial obligations and the recognition of marriage as a tie between two families, and not only between two individuals”\(^{149}\)

2.11.3. Proposal of mate and betrothal

Unlike other tribal communities, the general and the only rule of acquiring mates for the Poumais during the pre-Christianity was marriage arranged by parents with or without the consent of the boy and the girl. The selection and proposal of mate was generally initiated by the boy’s parents. However, before putting up proposal to a girl, the boy’s parents invite divine wishes through dreams. If they had good dream, proposal was put forward and engagement followed only if the girl’s parents also had good dream and divine wishes.\(^{150}\)

According to their customs, negotiation and betrothal were done on an appointed day with a group of elders representing the clans of the boy as well as the girl. Genealogy and property were the two main considerations at the time of negotiation. Depending on the family status, bargaining of properties from both the sides was made so as to reach an agreement. The properties that must include are paddy, house, paddy field, wood land and jhum land if available from the boy’s side and barn of paddy, herd of cows and brood of chicken from the girl.\(^{151}\) These properties were neither considered as dowry nor bride or groom price but their parental gifts for their establishment of a new household.

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149 Interview with Th. Raoping Tao, 08/09/06.
150 K. S. Benjamin Bance, op. cit., P. 426.
After completion of negotiation both the parties respect and abide by the agreement. Violation of the negotiation leads to disharmony and the defaulter’s properties that are included in the parental presentations are to be forfeited.\textsuperscript{152}

2.11.4. Marriage Ceremony

Traditional Marriage Ceremony of the Poumai is rather simple. On the wedding day, send off party was given to the bride’s friends of the khel. In the evening a group of elder members of the groom including Napai (priestess) arrived to the bride’s residence. They were offered rice wine and meat. Then the Napai initiated the wedding process, holding the bride’s hand she asked her to proceed for the journey. “Normally, the bride in her thought of separation with the family members, friends, neighbours and villagers started weeping loudly and would not agree to go”.\textsuperscript{153} In the mean time her father blessed her saying,

\textit{“Anapai ne kasou-o, leveasou-o;}
\textit{Ne taho kilovei soulou-o;}
\textit{Rahteithesou theo;}
\textit{Khoupa vahsou vahlou-o;}
\textit{Lutah taho deiva daolou-o;}
\textit{Moukodu, moukoso;}
\textit{Vanae manae;}
\textit{Hanae manae;}
\textit{Peisousou, pousousou;}
\textit{Vettaho-o, mevet mulo”}.\textsuperscript{154}

\textbf{In translation:}

“My daughter, do not weep, do not worry;
Go and build a good household;

\textsuperscript{152} K. T. Soumai, op. cit., P. 13.
\textsuperscript{153} K. S. Benjamin, Banee, op. cit., P. 427.
\textsuperscript{154} Interview with Saothe Railang, 06/01/2007.
As the bright of morning light, may you shine;
As the moon shines, may you shine;
When you start tilling, till the magic land;
May the paddy grow big and tall;
Procreate as much as crab’s offsprings;
Procreate as much as spider’s offsprings;
Be free from any disease;
Go and have good dream”.

Then, in spite of her resistance, she was dragged away by the bride’s party. The boys and girls of the khell escorted her up to the boundary. On reaching the boundary, the boys sing very heart touching farewell songs. On hearing them, she cried louder and embraced all her friends with flood of tears rolling all over her cheeks. There, with full of tears her friends bade her farewell and the groom’s party took her away.

2.12. War and Head hunting

Nagas were known to the outside world for their nakedness and headhunting (reihpeihyou in poula) culture. They were most warlike tribes and also known for their bravery in war. Feuds and conflicts of intra as well as inter tribal and villages constantly took place among them. Unlike the modern and civilized people who prove their manhood through education, politics and sports, the victorious in head trophies, physical competitions and challenges proved their strength, ability and social status. Like any other Naga tribe the Pomai Nagas were fond of war and headhunting and they widely practiced the culture.

2.12.1. Origin of headhunting culture

To quote Eli Sagan, headhunting is an institutionalized cultural form that developed out of and replaced cannibalism. The aggressive desires that were
previously satisfied by cannibal activity have been sublimated and are now satisfied by head hunting. However, he further maintained that, “most cannibals are not head hunters; most head hunters are not cannibals” \(^{155}\).

The Nagas have their own story and version of the origin of head hunting. According to a Naga legend, the origin of head hunting among the Nagas was, “one day a bird dropped a berry from a tree. A lizard and an ant fought for it. The ant cut off the head of the lizard. The men who witnessed this learnt to take heads”. \(^{156}\) Similar to this legend there is a folk song of the Poumais that tells,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{"Khyahaino pouzii zo-a paozii zoropa,} \\
\text{Taino ahai peide peiva aedumo.} \\
\text{Chacha piino haisirono kaoropo,} \\
\text{Chacha piino haisirono peide peiva khaimovou;} \\
\text{Taino ahai kaoropo sudo-yeno".}^{157}
\end{align*}
\]

This means,

From Khyabil we sprung out from the same father and grand father,

That’s why head taken was not allowed.

The aggressive ants that built ditches and stockades,

The aggressive ants that took head;

That’s why we started building ditches and stockades.

This legend and song indicate that the Nagas learnt head hunting culture from the aggressive ants that killed its prey and took it home.

2.12.2. Causes and Significance of head hunting war

The head hunting war once prevalent among the Nagas was believed to have high economic importance, socio-political values and justice. It was not

\(^{155}\) Eli Sagan quoted in “The Sublimation of head-hunting among Nagas”, Sangai Express, 01/12/04.
\(^{156}\) Murkot Ramunny, The World of Nagas, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1988, P. 9
that they wanted to grab more land or to establish colonies, or build empires but they did value human’s head so high that it made them fight war after war and chopped off human heads as much as they can for they have their own philosophy and laws quite different from other people.\textsuperscript{158} For them, the whole existence of life whether blessing or curse, joy or sorrow, higher or lower status was determined through success in head hunting. They believed that the whole personality is in the human’s head which was believed to possess soul matter and vital power. It was also believed that taking and bringing human’s head home would inject vital energy into the aggressor’s village which in turn will help in the fertility of man and animal there.\textsuperscript{159} According to them it also enhances fertility of the soil.\textsuperscript{160}

In olden days, gaining social recognition and status depended not only on performing feast of merit but also on one’s skill and ability to capture and brought enemy’s head. A man who hunted more heads was placed to higher position in the society. They also have better say in the political affairs of the village and in inter-village Council.\textsuperscript{161} The village which brought the highest number of heads stood in the highest esteem and received annual tributes from the village they defeated.\textsuperscript{162} “To kill a baby in arms or a woman was accounted a greater feat than killing a man as it implied having penetrated to the innermost recesses of an enemy’s country whereas man might be killed anywhere by a successful ambush”.\textsuperscript{163} Above that, women’s heads were considered the most treasured war trophies because of their long hair, “with which the warriors embellished their weapons and ceremonial dresses”.\textsuperscript{164} The warriors who had taken one or more heads were entitled to use special warrior

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item R. R. Shimray, op. cit., P. 71.
\item Murkot Ramunny, op. cit., P. 9.
\item L. Jeyaseelam, op. cit., P. 44.
\item R. R. Shimray, op. cit., P. 72.
\item Rently Keitzur, Good News for North East India, A Theological Reader, Published by Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1995, P. 199.
\item James Johnstone, Manipur and the Naga tribe. Minar publication, Delhi, 1987, P. 30.
\item Milada Ganguli, A pilgrimage to the Nagas, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1984, P. 201.
\end{itemize}
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dresses, ornaments and decorated arms, which were highly coveted by the people. More importantly, a young warrior who scored more number of heads was admired and had high prospect of winning the favour and love of the fairest girl in the village. Conversely, “a young man with no head to his credit found it difficult to attract a suitable partner”. On the other hand, encroachment of land and boundary, breach of sexual sanction, sending back home a married woman without proper reasons, failure to pay customary tributes, failure to keep agreement, theft, etc. were also some of the other factors that led to head hunting war among the Naga tribes. Generally, village and inter-village councils settled such disputes. However, in case the settlement was not acceptable to either party or both stands for the righteous cause, the matter was usually decided by show of force to restore justice.

Head hunting war also had religious sanction as well as significance during those times. Human’s head was considered required to propitiate evil spirit, to obviate diseases, natural calamities and other dangers. According to R. S. Dowang, the practice of human sacrifice to evil spirit during the construction of Chief’s house or to stop the continuous landslide on certain area which involves paddy fields led the people to hunting expedition. Human sacrifice whether alive or dead was required in building a Chief’s house, on the death of a Chief or a queen. In such a situation, if human head could not be procured, any implement of the enemy or hair of someone outside the village was clandestinely collected and sacrificed to the evil spirit by burying it either by the Chief or priest. It was also believed that the souls of the war victims will be the slaves of the warrior who killed them. Therefore, they “were prompted to kill for they believed that after death those captured and killed would carry their luggage to the land of the death”. These were some of the reasons and

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166 R. S. Dowang, op. cit., P. 16.
significance attached which incited them to face war and physical challenges boldy and climb the ladder of social recognition, respect and honour in their life.

2. 13. Conclusion

All these age-old culture and traditions were once highly valued by the people. However, the advent of Christianity, introduction of modern education system, etc. among the people has tremendously transformed the life of the Poumais. Today, many of their culture and traditions have become redundant. The colorful dresses and ornaments of the people have become the things of the past. Economically, they are more in money making rather than food producing. Their traditional marriage system, feast and festivals, war and head hunting, etc. are no more practiced by the people. Thus, the importance of their traditional things has been significantly reduced as they have started embracing Christianity and modern ways of life. The changes which have taken place with regard to their socio-cultural life are being discussed in another chapter of the present work.