CHAPTER III

THE TAGINS

The Tagins, one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, is inhabited in different parts of the Upper Subansiri District of the state. As per 1991 census the Tagin population consists of 36,217 souls. They are included in the Indo-Mongoloid racial stock. It is evident mainly from the physical features, such as light yellowish skin colour, leotrichons hair, prominent cheekbones, and oblique eyes with epicanthic folds, scanty body hair and short to medium stature. Physically, majorities of the Tagins are well built and sturdy and have the capacity to undertake strenuous work.

According to Grierson’s linguistic classification, the dialect spoken by the community is Tagin. This belongs to North Assam branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The Tagin language has no script. It is also found that some pronunciations among the Tagins differ from village to village or region to region. Broken Assamese and Hindi is often used to serve as the medium of language between the different tribal groups and between themselves and other groups of people. Presently, Hindi has become much popular and this language even is being used by them in their household.
The Tagins prefer to select site for their villages (*nampom*) on the slopes and shadow of hills to avail of a natural protection. A Tagin village is generally composed of two to twenty households. Prominent natural features, such as, rivers, ridges and mountains demarcate the area of each village from that of others. Such boundaries are well known and respected. According to the use, the village land may be classified into three categories: residential, agricultural and forest land, used for hunting, fishing, collecting, etc. Traditionally a Tagin village is occupied by the members of a single clan. Clan homogeneity is still a salient feature of the Tagin village only with a few exceptions. A village is named after the clan of the first settler. Generally, the people of other clans are not allowed to reside in the village. However, exemptions are made in the cases of son-in-law and sometimes for their brothers as well. They can construct their dwelling houses at any place in the residential area of the village. They may cultivate and fish in the land and fishing spots of their father-in-law. They can also request other members of the first settler’s clan to allow them to cultivate in the village land on payment in kind of a pig or a few fowls. They are also allowed to purchase cultivable land from the members of the first settler’s clan and have the ownership right. Some of the villages are so small as to contain two or three houses dwelt by a few families, known as *mosi* and some are large with ten to twenty or more houses and known as *dasi* or *hangai.*

**MATERIAL CULTURE**

1. **House Type**

   The Tagins invariably live in pile dwellings. A Tagin residential house is a
long rectangular structure made of split bamboo supported by wooden or bamboo pillars. One of the longer end of the house is constructed above 4 to 6 meters from the ground, while the other end is constructed about above two meters height. Bamboo is used in various ways in the construction of a Tagin house. It is crushed and weaved finely to make the floor mats and the side walls. The two sloped roofs of a house are thatched with wild banana leaves or *toku* (a species of palm tree) leaves. Sometimes, thick and long wood or bamboo poles are used to protect the side wall panels or to support the house, which extends its life. A traditional Tagin house is devoid of window and consists of only two doors in front and back of it. A long notched wooden ladder is fixed in the front side for entrance and exit from the house. Three sides of the house are provided with verandas. A long bamboo structure is constructed in the front veranda for sitting. One side veranda is used to store different household items as well as for husking of paddy, cleaning of utensils, etc. Poultry are used to rear in the back veranda. The place below the floor is used as pigsty, although some of them construct it separately. Partition wall is not integral to a Tagin house. However, it is divided into several compartments with a hearth in each division for each family unit. Approximately, two meters above the hearth, a three stair square size bamboo tray is hung from the roof. Different parts of this tray is used for different purposes: the lower one (*raki*) is used to dry up food grains, meat, fish, etc.; the middle one (*khitin kira*) and the upper one (*nika*) are used to store fire wood and bamboo and cane implements.

In the side walls of the house, a few bamboo racks (*pobe*) are constructed to store
household utensils. In one corner of the house, skeletal remains of the hunted animals are displayed. In another corner, horns of the sacrificed mithuns are kept which are generally smeared with a fluid of rice powder, millet beer and ginger paste.

Generally, a priest is called to select the site before building a new house. Through divination, the priest selects the suitable site. The kins, friends and co-villagers help in the construction of the house. Whatever may be the size of the house, it does not take more than three to four days to complete the construction. The helpers are served with rice, meat and country liquor. It can be mentioned here that due to the impact of modernization, some changes are found in the house pattern of the Tagins. The tradition of long houses is slowly becoming uncommon, specially, among the town dwellers. Besides pile dwellings, thatched or C.I. sheet roofed houses on earthen plinths with mud or cement plastered walls are introduced. The pile granaries are constructed separately. If a man has more than one wife, he may divide the granary into many compartments with separate entrances for each wife. Generally, paddy and millet are kept in the granary.

2. Economy

The multi-facet changes in modern times have driven some of the Tagins to urban life. Now a days, some of them follow various urban occupations. Still, the bulk of the population lives in villages where they primarily depend on agriculture. In villages they also make use of domesticating animals. Besides, in their quest of food the utilization of such food gathering pursuits like hunting, fishing and collecting is
also noted. Some of the Tagins are also found to be engaged as government servants, contractors, traders, labourers and businessmen. There is very limited road length available to vehicular traffic in the Tagin area, and so transportation of material has to be done with human porterage. Many of them have availed this opportunity to earn cash. Some of the villagers near the administrative centres earn amount by selling firewood, which they collect from the nearby jungles. Some of the villagers bring poultry eggs, vegetables and occasionally hunted animals and fish for sale to the government officials as well as to the general people in the administrative centres.

(a) Agriculture

Agriculture is not merely a source of their livelihood but is more than that. It is their way of life and gives an expression to their socio-biological existence. Shifting cultivation by slash-and-burn method called jhum is the type of agriculture practised by them. Jhuming is an age-old indigenous mode of agriculture done with simple tools, such as, machete, hoe and pointed wooden or bamboo digging stick. Moreover, a plot of land under jhum is used only periodically and then left to allow the natural recuperation of soil fertility, so as to use it again after a lapse of 3-4 years. When a person feels that a particular plot of his land has remained fallow for a good number of years and he wants to open it for cultivation, he goes to a diviner to find out whether he will be benefited or not, in jhuming. If negative responses found, another plot of land is chosen for cultivation. The agricultural activities are generally managed by the members of each individual family. If outside help is required, they have two systems
to meet such requirement. In one, labour is hired on payment in cash or kind. The members of poor families generally work as agricultural labourer. The wage is equal to both the sexes. In another, several persons work by turn in each other’s field in co-operation. They cut down the jungle of the plot selected for cultivation in February-March and leave it there to dry. The dried jungle is burnt in April-May. A small temporary house (nere) is constructed in the field where they keep their belongings and take rest and even spend nights during strenuous working season. This is followed by sowing.

They raise a mixed crop in their jhum field. In the same plot, they sow paddy, maize, millet, arum, potato, chilli, gourd, cucumber, bean, ginger, sweet potato, tobacco, sesame, etc. The millet seeds are sown broadcasted while other crops are sown by putting two or three seeds in the holes dug by the digging stick. They carry out weeding at least twice which is done by hand as well as with a bamboo weeder (ek). If there is any wilting of the leaves of paddy, millet or other cultivated plants or attack by pests, they consult a priest to find out spirit responsible for it and the essential sacrifice required for its appeasement. As per the advice of the priest, the spirit is propitiated with necessary sacrifice. They harvest each crop as and when it is ripe with the help of knives.

(b) Domestication

*Mithun* is the most important domesticated animal of the Tagins. It is sacrificed during various rituals and the meat is relished by them. Its role in marriage is
crucial in the sense that the major part of bride price has to be paid in mithun. It is also the standard compensation to be paid for settlement of several major crimes. These animals are generally left free to graze in the surrounding jungles and forests. As per necessity a search for it is made, and it is brought to the village. If a mithun falls sick, they resort to divination to find out the spirit responsible for the ailment. Accordingly, that spirit is worshiped with the required sacrifice to cure the ailment. Presently a mithun costs Rs. 8000.00 to Rs. 10,000.00 approximately.

Next in importance is the pig. Every family rears a good number of pigs. It is the most common sacrificial animal in their festivals and ceremonies. It is also paid as a part of the bride price and for settlement of various crimes. Pigs are kept in the pigsty, and are feed on husk of paddy and millet, remains of brewing, rind of arum, leaves of sweet potato and banana mixed with warm water. Domestication of dog is a common practice among the Tagins. Fowls are kept in large numbers by every family. They are in great demand for sacrifice in the religious ceremonies. Eggs and chicken are essential for divination. Fowls are kept in bamboo cages at night, and during day, these are freed. The fowls are sometimes given paddy and maize as food. Dogs are useful mainly in guarding their houses and helping in hunts. It is also used as the sacrificial animal in some of the rituals though they do not consume meat of dog. Dogs are allowed to enter the house and sleep near the fireplace of the master. They are fed only on the left over meals. Goats are reared in comparatively small numbers. They consume meat of the goats and also are sacrificed in some rituals. Goats graze here and
there in the village surroundings and pass the night beneath the floor of the house. Rearing of cows have started recently. Now a days, these are also being given in sacrifice in a few rituals. The Tagins do not drink milk, but meat of cow is consumed by them. The cows graze in the outskirts of the village and pass the night under the open sky or under the pile dwellings. A member of a family may purchase domestic animals out of his/her personal income and keep these as individual property. If one member of a family has such personally owned domestic animals, his/her family can borrow such domestic animals from that member in the time of necessity.

(c) Fishing

Fishing is a subsidiary occupation among the Tagins, and it is done both as an individual and group enterprise throughout the year on the fishing sites. The good fishing sites in the streams other than Subansiri river are owned by particular families. In individual fishing, fishing by rod and line as well as by cast net is popular. In some cases they construct a fence in the stream with bamboo, stone, etc. leaving some gaps. In the gaps they set automatic fishing trap (eder) made of bamboo with single and multiple valve. Another valveless fish trap (sekhom) is also used by them. Before group fishing, they take the help of a diviner to find out the suitable site having a prospect of good catch. In the group fishing, total catch is collected in one place and equally divided among the participants of the expedition.

(d) Hunting, etc.

Hunting, both individual and group, are subsidiary occupations, which adds
to the meat supply of the family. They do not have any particular season or occasion for individual or group hunting. It is practised in leisure time. They have no regular training in hunting but it is learnt through the process of sociolization. A good hunter is called *nigam*. The hunters wear a cane or hide hat, and a black fibre cloak on the back in addition to their usual dress. Their main weapons for hunting are the bows and arrows. They smear the arrow-tips with poison. Before group hunting, they take the help of a diviner for prospective hunting area. Presently, guns are also used for hunting. The Tagins hunt mainly for their own use. If it is a big game, part of its meat is sold to the fellow villagers. They take the meat of all jungle animals and birds, except, a few.

Collecting and gathering of different edible fruits, roots, tubers, leafy vegetables, bamboo shoots, etc. are practised by the Tagins. Particularly women folk and juveniles go out in the near by jungles for collecting whatever they get as per convenience. This practice also helps to add various items in their food.

3. Food and Drinks

Rice is the staple food of the Tagins, which is supplemented by maize and millet. Large number of wild leafy vegetables, roots, tubers and fruits as well as potato, pumpkin, brinjal, ginger, onion, mustard leaf, chilli, bamboo shoot, etc. are included in their diet. The people are fond of fish and meat. These are often dried up and preserved for future consumption. Traditional food of the Tagins is devoid of oil and spices. According to them, food like rice, maize, millet, vegetable, fish and meat possesses high nutritive value and a person should include these items in every day’s menu. Rice
(achin) is cooked in the metal utensils. In most of the cases during rice preparation, remaining water is allowed to dry up in the cooked rice itself, which provides them extra food value. Boiled vegetables, meat or fish flavoured with chilli and salt is taken with rice. Maize come next to rice which is abundantly grown in their jhum field as well as in their kitchen garden. Maize is boiled in water with salt. Sometimes roasted maize is also consumed, flavoured with chilli and salt. Expectant mother is not provided with any special diet during the time of pregnancy, except home prepared fermented rice (nayangring). According to the Tagins, nayangring contains sufficient food value. Mother milk is only preferred for the new born. After few months, rice chewed by the mother is given to the baby for easy taking.

Meat and fish are integral part of their diet with some prohibition. Meat of tiger (patte), wolf (sacha), cat (ahale), jungle cat (sarch), dog (eke), leopard (karte), etc. are tabooed for the Tagins. Moreover, the female members are restricted from eating the meat of monkey (sibi), bat (sajo), snow cat (sokongponang), etc. All the Tagins irrespective of age and sex take country liquor (apo) at any time of day and night. They prepare beer from rice and millet. Foreign liquor becomes much popular in the present decade. Tea is not a popular beverage. Only recently, milk and milk products are added to their food. They are accustomed to chewing locally available tobacco (guye) leaves which is also smoked with the help of home made smoking pipe (tungdung). Some people chew tobacco, which are available in the market and also smoke bidi and cigarette.
4. Dress and Ornaments

In the remote past the Tagins had little knowledge of the art of weaving and as such they were not fond of dress very much. An imported Tibetan blanket or a piece of endi (a warm cloth prepared from the thread extracted from the cocoons of *Attaccus ricini*) was all that a Tagin needed to cover the body. They were also partly dependent on animal skins to wrap themselves. Different colours like white, maroon, grey, chequered design Tibetan blankets were bartered. The exchange value of a blanket depending on quality and durability varied from three to five pigs. Besides the blanket, a man wore a thick coat, which was also imported one, and a strips of cloth as under garment. Some of them wore a sort of traditional garb (egin) fashioned out of a piece of wood, bamboo or metal, which was fastened to a cane belt, and served to hide only the pudenda. Tagins women had no special dress but used the same woollen blanket as were used by men. The young girls sometimes would prefer to put on their heads round woollen and maroon Tibetan caps. To cover the lower part of the body, women used a grass skirt (*bekar*). The use of grass skirt of late has gone down. Recently, the Tagins have however taking to weaving. Now, a long cloth (*gale*) is used as lower garment by a woman. Mill made cloths are also coming into fashion. When very young, some of the girls wear *anap*, which is a metal disc, hung in front of private organ with a string around waist. It is dispensed with when she starts wearing cloths.

In the present day, different types of modern dress items have been introduced. Most of the males have given up their traditional dress and use shirt,
trousers, jackets, caps, shoes, etc., which have become very much part of their day-to-day life. So far as the female folk are concerned, it is seen that elderly women use home made gales as lower garment along with modern shirts to cover the upper parts of the body. The young girls, when come out from home, dress themselves in modern skirts and tops, salwar kameej or frocks. Using of different types of sandals has also become common.

As headgear, Tagin men use cane hats (botung). Alternatively, leather hats fashioned out of mithun hide or deerskin are also used. Such hat often protrudes at the back with a separate piece of hide attached to it to serve as an extra covering. Some special dresses to protect them during wars and raids were used by the people in the past. A back protector (tache nara) made of cane and fibres extracted from a kind of jungle palm, used in the past is still in use for protecting them from sun and rain. A hand protector (lakbu), made of thick animal hide, used during war in the past, is now a part of the traditional dress which the Tagins display on special occasions.

The Tagins are very fond of different types of ornaments. The ornaments, generally worn by the women are bead necklaces, bell-metal bangles, cane rings around the waist, and big brass ear-rings kept supported by string passed over the crown of the head so that the ear lobes do not got torn by the weight of the ear-rings. A waist-belt (dingshe) composed of seven circular brass-discs fitted to leather or cotton belt is also used by women. Men wear a waist-girdle of cane decorated with cowries, bell-metal bangles and head necklaces. Some of them wear ear-rings fitted with a blue
stone. Now a days, the Tagin women also use imitative ornaments available in the local market.

5. Household Implements

The common household implements made of cane and bamboo of the Tagins are bamboo mats, cane basket, containers, water vessels, fishing-traps, fishing-nets, head-gears, agricultural and hunting implements, mugs, spoons, plates, smoking pipes, etc. They weave mats for sleeping from the flat and long leaves of a species of palm called *toku*. In the bygone days, earthen pots (*pishing*) were used as cooking vessels. Presently, this craft is almost on the verge of dying out as the Tagins have taken to the use of aluminum and iron pots, which are now plentifully available in the market.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

1. The Tribe: Naming and Migration

It is believed that the name Tagin was first given by the Tibetan traders. However, the Tagins themselves seem to have always used this term. According to Singh, (1995:308) the word Tagin is believed to be a derivative of the word *egin* (the cloth which cover the male genital). As per the traditional version, Abo Tani, the mythical ancestor of the Tagins, had two wives, one from Tibet proper and another from lower Tibet. The wife from Tibet proper is named as Kozom Mapungee and the wife of the lower Tibet is named as Ane-Yeppi. The Tagins consider themselves to be
the children of Ane-Yeppi. Being driven out by the children of Kozom Mapungee, the
sons and daughters of Ane-Yeppi, called Tagin Sinik or Chinik came down to the
present habitat along the course of the different tributaries of Subansiri river.

The Tagins had the folklore of their ancestry and migration. It is significant
to note that a good number of tribes like the Nishis, the Adis, the Apatanis and the Hill
Miris, the Tagins also trace their descent from a common mythical ancestor called Abo
Tani. It is mentioned in the Gazetteer of Arunachal Pradesh, Subansiri District (1981:
69) that the Tagins are believed to have migrated from Penji, a village in Tibet, to
Tadadege region. They came to their present abodes probably from Tadadege. There is
another tradition. The country of the Tagins stretches form little beyond the junction of
Sippi with the Subansiri river and along the bank of the former. They believed that
their ancestors came from a place called Pui Pudu, further beyond the river Sippi. They
have no clear remembrance as to where the place was exactly located but believed that
it was across the frontier, in the land of Nimme (Tibet). From Pui Pudu they came to
Pumta and from there to Dibeh. The first to come was their mythical ancestor Abo Tani
who reached a place called Nide Lanking and died there. The followers of Abo Tani
pursued the course of migration from Debeh to Nari and from Nari to Nalo which is
another name of the present village Siggen. They retain the memory that, in course of
movement, their ancestors had crossed Subansiri and Kuru rivers.

2. Clan and Lineage

The Tagin’s clan are strictly exogamous. No secondary information is
available regarding the total number of their clan. Sarkar (1999:99-115) highlighted genealogy of the twenty two clans of the Tagins. The people of the study villages belong to the Dulom, Gyadu, Kardu, Leui, Ligu, Marbom, Tamin and yeaker clan. No villagers of the study area have been able to trace out all the clans of their community. The Tagin clans are ramified with the passage of time and split into a number of lineages, which are also patrilineal and exogamous in nature. They use a common term opi for both the clan and lineage. The density of cohesion is stronger in lineage than in a clan. It is the duty of a person to help fellow members of his/her lineage in crisis and distress.

One of the informant Mr. Same Timba traced his lineage as follows.

Fig: 4 Genealogical representation of a Tagin group.
3. Class System

The Tagin society is divided into distinct classes. A man's status is determined by the class he belongs to. The classes are arranged in a hierarchical order. Reckoned from the top to the downward, they are Nyibu or the Priest, Nite or the rich, Open or the poor, and Nyira or the slave. A middle class, going by the term Jetor, is also recognized.

The Nyibus, who command respect and influence, are the repository of traditional myths and lore. They are the shamans with the knowledge and power of negotiations with the spiritual world. Their services are sought during rituals and festivals. Moreover, Nyibus are called during illness or in misfortunes. They prescribe the necessary rites or sacrifices for propitiating the spirit/s responsible for such evil acts. The Nite or the rich class comprises people who possess considerable property in the form of mithun, pigs, Tibetan swords, deo-ghantas (a kind of metal bell), etc. The Open or the poor class is composed of a good number of Tagins. They practically starve or at best earn a precarious living. The class Jetor is not much in currency owing, perhaps, to the confusion as to the persons who can properly be included under this category. Social mobility is generally restricted by the circumstances in which the people find themselves. A poor man, for instance, can not hope to marry above his situation for he cannot afford to pay the bride price. Though it goes without saying that a Nyira or a slave is at the bottom of the ladder, his lot is not necessarily altogether miserable. In the past, any one captured in course of inter-tribal raid or feud was made
into slave. The other means of securing slaves was by outright purchase. Under changed circumstances following establishment of regular civil administration in their midst, the institution of slavery, as everywhere in Arunachal Pradesh, is decaying. Among the Tagins, a slave, who has lived very long with his master and where a deep attachment has grown between them, will address him as abo (father) or achi (brother). The general term of address is, however, ato, corresponding to father’s father. A slave is never asked to perform a job which an average Tagin is not expected to do. The greatest drawback from which a slave suffers is that he cannot marry unless and until he has found a girl, who is a slave, like himself, and accumulated the requisite bride price to be paid to her master. Fortune may sometimes, though rarely, smile at a slave when he inherits the property of his master, died without any issue. In such a case, he also inherits his master’s wife, should she prefer him or had she been in love with him.

4. Family and Inheritance

A Tagin family normally consists of the father, mother and their sons and unmarried daughters. The married daughter, if not yet adolescent, may also live/remain in the parent’s family group till she attains adolescence and goes finally to her husband’s house. The polygynous family group consists of a man and two or more wives and their unmarried children. In a polygynous family, each wife has a separate hearth. All the wives are independent of each other, and none has any control over others. The husband generally lives with the first wife, though he sleeps by turn with other wives also. It is the members of a hearth who form together an economic unit.
They cultivate the same field, store the produce in their own granary, rear livestock and poultry separately, and have food together cooked by the mistress in her hearth. In the polygynous family, the husband works by turns in the fields of the wives. In some cases, neolocal families are also found. The Tagins are patrilineal and patrilocal in nature. It is observed that a group of families are found to be living in an elongated house, like a joint family and the senior most male member is regarded as the head of the unit. In their family life, they practise no segregation of the sexes, nor do they observe seclusion of women. There are some sorts of divisions of labour between the sexes in the running of the family as a functional unit. The men perform tasks which require hard labour, such as, building houses, felling trees, reclaiming land, hunting and fishing, etc. The women do the cooking, feed the domesticated animals and birds, fetch water, bring firewood. They do the weaving, collect the food items, work in the agricultural fields and also look after the children.

If the father dies, the property is looked after by the mother provided she does not marry again. The wife acquires a right over the property after her husband’s death, but she cannot dispose it of. She can however, sell the property among the relatives of her deceased husband provided she has no children. The property is equally divided among the sons, and a married son may allow his younger brother a large share. All the properties, real estate, weapons, cash, cattle, etc., including jhum land are also divided among the male children. Daughters as a rule do not inherit any property.

5. Birth

The Tagins believed that woman conceives only by the blessing of God and
pregnancy is considered as a natural phenomenon. They do not seem to be interested in having regular medical check-up and taking modern medicines during pregnancy. Only a few educated and well-to-do families go for the same in the nearby medical centres. A parturient mother does all the household works till she does not feel any physical problem. No special food is given to her except fermented rice. Such women are to be observed a series of taboos. Generally, childbirth takes place inside the dwelling house, where elderly women take part. No male member is permitted inside the labour room. Umbilical cord is detached with the help of a sharp bamboo split. In case of complexity during child birth, which could not be solved by traditional manner, they seek help from the physicians of nearby hospital. After childbirth till the falling of umbilical cord, the mother is restricted to go out from the house, and she takes food separately. During that period, if the new born baby suffers from any physical problem, they believe that, it is due to the breach of taboo by some consanguineal or affinal kin of the child or due to the action of malignant spirits. In this case, local priest through divination identifies the responsible spirit/s, and necessary propitiation and sacrifices are done.

6. Adolescent

Among the Tagins, generally the girls attain puberty at the age of twelve to fourteen years. A girl, who just attains puberty, has to stay in a demarcated area, generally in the right side of the fireplace, which is situated near the main entrance of the dwelling house. She is not permitted to take part in any ritual. The girl is also not
allowed to go to the spot, where from persons start their venture for hunting. She is tabooed to take meat of wild and sacrificed animal. The period of pollution lifted when flow of blood is totally stopped through a purificatory bath of the girl. No ritual is performed to mark the adolescence of a boy.

7. Marriage

Monogamy is the general rule of marriage (nida) among the Tagins, which occurs through negotiation. However, polygyny is also widely practised. Bride price is inevitable among them. Child marriage is an age-old practice. Due to the modern impact some of the young boys and girls are practising love marriage. Marriage among the Tagins is generally performed through negotiation on payment of bride price. If a marriage is settled, the boy’s father arranges a great feast with meat and drink in which all the kin and clan members are invited. On the date of marriage, the groom’s party starts in a procession for the bride’s village carrying with them a few mithuns, pigs and millet bear. When they approach the house of the bride’s father, the hosts pull out swords as a sign of resistance. The groom’s party also pretends in a similar gesture, and there ensures a mock fight between the two parties for a few minutes. Ultimately, the bride’s party allows the groom’s party to enter the house, which is followed by entertainment and feasts, offered by both the parties and exchange of gifts. The groom’s parents make a present of long and costly swords to the head of the bride’s family. The bride’s parents in their turn also give a long sword to the father of the groom. This exchange of swords symbolizes reciprocal honour and friendship. The
bride’s parents also give their daughter gifts in the form of ornaments like Tibetan bracelet, bead necklace, earrings, etc. The role of the priest, who conduct the marriage ceremony, is very important and he is rewarded suitably by both the parties. On the third day, the groom’s party leaves the bride’s village. The bride is allowed to stay back with her parents for a few months before she goes to her husband’s house to live with him permanently. Marriage by capture and elopement are also recognized by the Tagins. Such a marriage seldom takes place. In such cases also the man who captured or eloped a girl has to pay bride price afterwards. Various forms of marriages, such as, cross cousin, both senior and junior types of levirate are prevalent among the Tagins. Sororate is also in practice and both the senior and junior sororate are recognized. One may marry his mother’s sister (amu), mother’s sister’s daughter (mui), sister’s daughter (ku), father’s sister’s daughter (ku), and mother’s brother’s daughter (mui). but one cannot marry his brother’s daughter (burme), father’s sister (anyi) or father’s brother’s daughter (burme). One can marry his step mother (ane) after the death of his father, but now-a-days that custom is not favoured. A brother, as a rule, may marry the widow of the elder/younger brother, if the widow desires. She may marry outside the family provided the compensation for the bride price is paid to her husband’s family by the man who marries her. Such widow is not allowed to take her sibling with her. But she may take the baby and bring the child up, to a certain age, and then she returns to her husband’s family. There is no restriction of age in marriage among the Tagins. Divorce is very rare among them, which is achieved only through a complicated process.
Adultery and bareness of a woman may lead to a divorce.

8. Death

Death is believed to be the separation of soul (*sema*) from the body and according to the Tagins, after death the soul goes to the land of the dead. Death due to old age is considered as natural and immature death by disease, accident or suicide is believed to be abnormal and caused by the effect of the evil spirits (*wiýus*). They practise burial for disposal of the dead body. If a baby's birth and death take place in the same lunar month, then the corpse is put inside an earthen pot. It is then placed in a cave or beneath a rock securely covered with stone so that the dead body cannot be eaten away by wild beasts. When death occurs in a household, the corpse is kept lying on its side with the legs flexed at the knees slightly away from the fireplace for one night. In the night, the malignant spirits are believed to visit the bereaved household. The fire in the hearth is kept alight and the adult members of the household do not sleep for that night. They throw stones against the walls and roof of the house and beat the floor with sticks at some intervals. These are done to frighten the malevolent spirits. It is believed that if the spirits enter the house, there will be more disease and death in the household. Arrangement are made in the following morning to bury the dead body. The grave is dug inside the village, sometimes beside the house of the deceased. Grave goods are also offered. A monkey, thought to be the next to man in intelligence, who can climb up the hills, is considered essential to accompany the soul of the dead on its journey to the land of dead. Accordingly a monkey is killed and placed with the dead
body during the burial. The dead body is covered with cloths and leaves, before it is buried. Members of the bereaved family observe a taboo for ten days during which no one, except the clan members, are allowed to enter the house of the dead person.

9. Village Council

There was no recognized village council among the Tagins in the bygone days. The arbitrators (gedungs), who had command and influence over the fellow members, settled the disputes. Presently, the Tagins have adopted kebang system where elderly and influential male members of the village sit together to solve any kind of dispute arising in the society. The wrongdoers are punished with compensations of fine in cash, property items or live stocks, like mithun, pig, etc. No evidence in respect of dormitory system is found among the Tagins.

10. Beliefs and Practices

A complex system of faith in the spiritual world and side by side, the concept of supreme being, are the two important factors which characterize religious aspects of the Tagins. They believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits. The evil spirits are believed to be capable of causing diseases, miseries and misfortunes to human beings who have the power to exert influence on man in both of his earthly life and after life. Propitiation of the evil sprits is an important religious aspect of the Tagins. They believe in a high god known as Donyi Polo. According to the Tagins, Donyi (sun) is female and Polo (moon) is male. Besides their literal meaning, the
combined word Dony-Polo refers to a divine force operating from heaven.

Religious practices of the Tagins are mainly shamanistic. Malignant spirits preponderate over the good ones, and receive attention most. Propitiation of these spirits seems to be the main concern of their religious practices. If the malevolent spirits are not propitiated regularly, they may bring disease and distress to the people. *Yalos* or *sema* (souls of dead persons) are considered to be a source of potential danger, and are always dreaded and avoided.

Besides *Dony-Polo*, other essentially benevolent sprits, though lower in the hierarchy, are *Bago*, *Yabu* and *Pakya*. In various ways they look after the welfare of men, and are actually guardian family sprits. They are not prone to take offence easily, but once displeased, may cause mortal injury to those incurring their wrath by some serious transgressions. Other sprits may cause prolonged sickness, but cannot take away the *yalo* (soul) of any person, thereby causing death, unless permitted by *Bago*, *Yabu* and *Pakya*. It is believed by the Tagins that different sprits are responsible for causing different diseases. They also believe that *Dony* decides the destiny of a new-born child. She is supposed to write in the heart (*apuk*) of each child its destiny, using certain mystic symbols or signs. A priest, who is divinely inspired, can read these sings, and reproduce them on plates of bamboo.

The priest performs integral role in the society who carries out all the functions for performing of rites and sacrifices. It is the priest or shaman, who advise the people before making a long journey, building a house, sowing in the field, sending
out an expedition, and so on. His services are essential for conducting rituals concerning birth, marriage and death. The priests are believed to have a knowledge of divination and when summoned in case of illness, temporal distress, etc., they consult omens to determine the nature of the misfortune and prescribes the ritual and sacrifice accordingly, to the responsible spirit. The priests are the preservers of tribal myths and they are regarded as endowed with spiritual power. Priesthood among the Tagins are not hereditary. Any men or women having special spiritual aptitude, which is self-manifested, may become a priest. He/she does not need to be trained by another priest. There are many stories and beliefs current in the Tagins society regarding attainment of priesthood.

Festivals form an inevitable aspect of the socio-cultural life of the Tagin, which give them ample opportunity to enjoy, dance, eat and to drink. The people in the community basis do arrangement of the festivals and the priests perform the ritual part of each festival. *Si-donyi*, which means the earth and the sun; is one of the most important festivals of the Tagin, which is celebrated from 4th to 6th January every year. *Si* and *Donyi* control the destiny of man. It is believed that nothing can happen on the earth without the knowledge of *Si* and *Donyi*. They believe that, *Si-Donyi’s* pleasure and anger cause happiness and sorrow to the human beings.

As the date of the festival approaches, all the Tagins engage themselves in preparatory works such as, preparation of local beer, collection of donation in the form of cash, *mithun*, pig, goat, fowl, etc. Now a days, a committee is formed for the smooth
functioning of the celebration. Different types of sports and cultural competitions are organized during this festival. In the festival ground a small hut is constructed for the priest. To perform the ritualistic activities during the celebration, a priest is selected through divination. The priest is the mediator between the deity/deities and the people. He invokes and performs the rituals by reciting spells in association with a helping priest for three consecutive days. The sacrifices are made at the altar (setu or nyigi).

Two mithuns. one for Si and the other for Donyi are sacrificed. For the construction of the altar, bamboo, wood, different types of leaves and branch of trees are used. The composing materials of the altar are so selected that various gods and goddesses are represented, and it is believed that Si and Donyi along with other deities and spirits gather at the altar on the sacrificial day to receive the sacrifices and offerings given to them. Dancing by different groups (setu jalik nam) around the altar is an essential part of the festival.

Different types of folk dances are performed throughout the celebration. The dancing troops are named as per various deities, such as Chune, Riabo, Takar Gene, Konibokar, Hoyipenam, et al. Anyi chune, a female group dance; Asi riabo, a male group dance and Takar gene, a female group dance are not mere cultural items for the show, but have their spiritual and mythical significance pertaining to the Tagin mythology and Si-donyi festival. Koniboker displayed by the male dancers in the traditional costumes and war wearing symbolizes challenging strength and warring valour. Hoypenam performed by a group of male dancers, symbolizes the victory and
joy. In addition to these dances, several other dancing troops take part in the celebration to please *Si Donyi* for men's prosperity. The custom of smearing of ginger and rice powder mixed with local beer known as *eti-taki* on the faces is also observed compulsorily during the festival.