Chapter 3: Expressive World of the Hmar Women: Social Folk Customs

3.1. Defining Social Folk Customs:

Social Folk Custom is another very important area of folklore and folk life of a community. Its studies mainly concerns on the community observances of the people rather than the individual skills or performances. “Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances” maintains Handoo (J. Handoo 2000, 17). Of community observances of the people, we generally refer to the different social customs and ritualistic observances performed at the time of birth, puberty, marriage and death, generally known as ‘rites of passage’. This area of studies also includes the rituals and customs associated with traditional festivals, indigenous modes of worship and agricultural activities. Other customs and ritualistic practices that are observed for the sake of rains and agricultural prosperity and for warding off natural calamities such as floods and famines are also included within the ambit of this section. Folk Custom comprises the part of cultural life that people of that community have created, practised and transmitted in their endeavors to satisfy their needs at various stages of their cultural social life. Deep-rooted in the cultural life of the community, folk customary practices are passed down from generation to generation in a temporal dimension and spread from one place to another in a spatial dimension. This folk custom is a community process. It acts as a dynamic resource for collecting the social data of that community. It provides a point through the people’s culture from which the values intrinsic in that community may be easily gathered. Thus, the study of Social Folk Custom provides us a good understanding of the society and the culture of that community.

3.2. Different sub-genres:

The different sub-genres that will be included within the ambit of this section here are the different customary practices associated with ‘rites of passage’, the nature of belief in supernatural powers like the traditional beliefs and customs, traditional holy dreads, traditional female deities the tribe believes and worships and, role of women
in religious rituals; their different rituals and customary practices associated with
group observances in hunting and agricultural activities, festivals, folk medicine,
fruits and vegetables foraging and institutionalized custom of courting girls where
female members of the society get importantly involved.

3.3. Rites of Passage:

A 'rite of passage' is a ritual event that denotes marking a person's transitional phase
from childhood to the last stage of human's life. It is the social customs and ritualistic
observances performed at the time of birth, puberty, marriage and death. The Hmars
do not have much elaborate set of rituals performed on events related to birth,
puberty, marriage and death. But they have their own set of social customs in every
transitional stage except for pubertal stage.

3.3.1. Birth Rites:

As mentioned earlier, the community performs a simple set of traditional observances
at different transitional phases of life starting from childhood to the last stage of
human's life. Even event of birth is marked by simple ritualistic observances (with
less explicit religious aspect) with the tribe's own social customs of tending the
occasion. Fertility is considered the completion of a woman and it is the most
cherished and desired incident in her life. If a wife miscarries babies after babies or, if
her successive children die shortly after their birth or, if she is barren, the Hmars
perform a fertility rite called 'Theibabul Inthawi' (Sielmat Bible College 2010, 77) to
ensure fertility to the wife. In this sacrifice, thiempu invokes heavenly god and earthly
god to enable the woman get conceived to give birth to a number of living children.
An informant, Lalramhnem said, "If a new bride shows her fertility by conceiving the
month she gets married, it is greatly welcomed by the in-laws. We even used to mark
such joyous incidents by killing animal, inviting the entire kinsmen to feast on it." A
pregnant Hmar woman generally develops a great desire to eat sour things or sweets.
Some pregnant women desire to eat small pieces of sandstone called lungbuot and
some; ziel väm (cigarette ash).
However, there are no folk songs sung on child-birth events. But event of child-birth is marked and solemnized with a simple community observance. The Hmars are said to be equally happy at the birth of both male and female child. In patriarchal societies like the Hmar society, continuity of the lineage, no doubt, depends on a son. Practically, preference is to have at least one son, the biological root of the family. Yet, there is no record of a girl child being less desired or less welcomed.

Moreover in Hmar culture, a girl’s marriage does not involve heavy expenditure for absence of dowry system like we find in other communities of India. Birth of a child in a family, irrespective of the sex of the child, is considered a happy event. However, there is one remarkable thing at the time of child-birth. The tribe has a less elaborate set of birth rites called piengni sakhuo. After a child is born, Nau Lai Āt is performed. Nau Lai Āt is cutting the umbilical cord “with tlaihnāt (a sharp blade made of bamboo). Tlaihnāt is obtained from the right pillar (from inside) of the main door for a son, and from the left pillar for a daughter” (Mawia Pudaite). This customary practice of Nau Lai Āt is performed “generally by an expert old woman of the village” (H. Thangzo). If a female child is born, those relatives or other people sitting near the mother never fail to remark, ‘se man ding’ (for the price of a mithun). This refers to one of the Hmar customary practices of ‘mo man’ (bride-price). A girl child is often nicknamed Sieli or Sielpui, a female siel which means ‘mithun’.

“Seven days following the birth, the new born is Ser-awp. Ser-awp is a custom of confining the baby within the four walls of a room” (Ngulkhumchawng). This customary observance is entrusted to the child’s caretaker- either its lactating mother or its grandmother. During these seven Ser-awp days, Sāwihna (a bunch of green twigs) is hung in the two exterior sides of the main door with a stem of aihrielaid across the head of the main door. Informant, Ngulkhumchawng informed that Aihrie (a plant of tall grass of ginger family) is traditionally believed to have the power to prevent any kind of harmful germs. Hanging of sāwihna and aihrie is an indicator that the family observes ser-awp and that no visitors or guests are allowed to enter that house. “On the seventh day, inmates of the family observe umni inkhām (staying back from all kinds of works including jhum work) as this day is called lu inmat
"ni (the day the two sides of the child's skull get joined)" (Mawia Pudaite). As most infants die before or on the seventh day, a new-born child outliving this day is expected to live. On this day, the child's caretaker would with one hand carry the child and in the other hand, would bring a thinghubawng (wood-burnt light; a log burning at one end) and a patzámte (a short thread piece) and go out of the house up to silphii (doorstep connecting the lawn and the house). In the doorstep, she would burn the thread piece in the burning log and say out loud,

"Naute meisentuol kan in suo ta ie" or "Meisen leh tuolkan suok ta ie."

(With a burning log, we have stepped out of the house)

This is a rite that indicates the ser-awp period is over. Visitors and guests, including thiempu and thiemi are now allowed to enter the house. During the ser-awpperiod, the lactating mother is treated with most gentle care. She is made to bathe in the namthlák (downhill side of the house, raised about one foot above the main floor). "She does not perform any domestic work including cooking because, she is impure" (Lienchawngtho).

According to H. V Sunga, in one of the immediate days following the seventh day, naming of the new-born baby is solemnized where the parents summon a thiempu or a thiemi. The thiempu (priest) or thiemi (priestess) performs Zu Sáwr Pei ritual or Tui Pei ritual. It is a ritual that requires the performing priest to put a mouthful of zu in his/her mouth and instantly throw it out while chanting a mantra. This mouthful of zu is khawhri's share. Khawhri is an evil spirit who the tribe believes need to be pacified with zu. This observance centres round the tribe's belief that khawhri, an evil spirit used to visit each and every new-born child. "If khawhri is not pacified with zu, he is believed to take revenge on the parents by killing their new born child" (H.V Sunga).

Mostly near and dear relatives are invited for the hmingsakna (naming). The naming of the baby is performed either by the child's paternal grandparents or maternal grandparents; preferably, the paternal grandparents. On that auspicious day, nihai (paternal aunts or, female members of the baby's father's clan) used to make patsum-bangle and tie it in the wrist of the baby. Patsum-bangle also called patbun is a strand of white cotton yarn. Before tying the bangle, the two extreme ends of the thread is
soaked in turmeric dyes. This custom is performed with a traditional belief to ensure healthy life, long life and good wishes to and for the baby (Bapui 2007, 59).

A community ceremony known as khawduop is performed every year for all the children born in the same year. This ceremony is observed to ensure sound health to the babies (Bapui 2007, 58). This ceremony requires little preparation like; hanging of a bamboo piece called tek at the end of a long bamboo which is planted at the centre of the selected spot around which small branches of trees and bamboos are temporarily planted. As the ceremony begins, the young men play rawsem(a mouth organ) and mothers, with their child carried on the back or held in their arms, dance as they sing lullabies, “I lull my babe; I lull my babe for a couple of years” (Thiek 2013, 299). Whereas according to Sri. Lienchawngtho, during this community ceremony which is solemnized generally toward the fag-end of a year, parents who have begotten a son during the year would make an imitative bird with hnîng (traditional cord made of immature bamboo) which they hang it at the end of a long bamboo like a fishing pole. They gather together at the selected spot – either at the house of the village chief or any chosen spot of the village- where mothers would rock their son and sing lullaby,

“Nau ka awi,
Nau ka awi a,
Lenbong thuom ah nau ka awi a.
Simzawngin nau a awi a,
Nau ka awi, ka awi a”. (Lienchawngtho)

(I lull my babe, I lull my babe, I lull my babe in a banyan tree, A monkey lulls her babe, I lull my babe, I lull my babe.)

This community ceremony is performed as a thanksgiving ceremony as well as a sacrifice to ensure the sound health of the little children. This is one kind of festival where community mothers participate with great enthusiasm amidst drinking lavish zu. Ceremonies related with Coming of Age occasions are non-existent with the tribe. Perhaps, due to ignorance, many babies used to die a hlæmzui death. Hlæmzui death is a term used to refer to death at birth or, a baby which dies within a short period after
its birth. A mother, who begets babies which diesuccessive hlamzui death, takes the first next new born baby to Buonzawlater its umbilical cord is cut and is bathed clean. In the Buonzawl, the child is customarily displayed for mock-sale as a slave and a couple who has begotten and successfully raised living children would buy it. The new parents would take the baby to their home, lay it on their bed, boil an egg for it, make a patsum-bangle made of warp thread and tie it on its wrist and then, they would send it back to its rightful parents. As the baby advances in months, a chicken is killed and nicely skinned in the foster parents’ house and the meat is consumed with great relish in the house of the child’s biological parents. This ceremony is performed to ensure living life to the baby (Bapui 2007, 58).

3.3.2. Puberty Rites:

This is one of the remarkable transitional phases in a female’s life. Sue defines this crossing of the threshold as, “Puberty is defined as the age or period at which a person is first capable of sexual reproduction, in other eras of history, a rite or celebration of this landmark event was a part of the culture. This is true of tribal societies that exist today, but for most of us, puberty as a specific event is part of a much more complicated piece of our lives called adolescence.” An investigation into the tribe’s social customs reveals total absence of any ritualistic observances performed in connection with pubertal phase of life. All my informants individually confirmed the absence of puberty rites in Hmar Social Custom. Rather than any kind of social observances in relation to pubertal phase, “We were shy about it. We never shared with our family members, especially the males” (Sumneizir). On this subject, a male informant, H.V Sunga informed that in most cases, the menfolks came to know about their women’s pubertal stage of life only after a year or two as they used to conceal it from them due to shyness. “We do not develop any sense of disgust or detestation to a menstruating girl” (Lienchawngtho). This being the behaviour of the tribe in connection with the pubertal stage of their female folks, it may be so that the tribesmen consider pubertal stage of life as natural as teeth-falling stage of an infant. Another male informant claimed, “If need be, I even wash my wife’s inners smeared
with her menstrual blood” (Vanlallawmsang). This may be interpreted as the tribe’s profound internalization of the concept that a husband and a wife are one body. Because of its total non-existence, there is no ethnic terminology for this particular rite.

3.3.3. Marriage Rites:

The tribe has a more elaborate set of customs in matters of marriage (inneina) performed not necessarily as part of religious but of traditional or secular ceremony. The tribe’s marriage institution contains simple rules and procedures. There are no much rituals other than the traditional system of marriage negotiations, payment of bride-price, the special role played by far and zuor (sisters, cousin sisters or women folks who belong to the same clan of the person/s concerned) and the Pu’s, thiempu’s and parents’ blessings to the girl. Marriage rites is called inneina sakhuo.

Traditionally, there are “three ways of marriage: Chawngmolak, Sawngpui, and Inrûk” (H.V Sunga). Whereas according to Lal Dena (Lal Dena 2010), in a traditional Hmar society, there were four types of marriages: Sawngpui Innei, Chawngmolak, Arasi Hnuoia Innei and Inlun. Under Inlun marriage, if the girl succeeds in spending even a single night in the house of the boy, irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse, they are considered married. If the boy or his parents refuse to accept her and send her away, they are to pay a hmaimâwk man (fine for disgracing someone) of Rs 500/-. Likewise, if the boy succeeds in hanging his haversack in the house of the girl, irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse, he is considered successful. In case of the boy sacrificing himself to the girl for marriage, he is required to stay in the girl’s house at least for two consecutive years. Having completed two years’ stay, he can evade payment of bride-price.


Chawngmolakor Chawngmova Lâkis a form of marriage that takes place between a small young boy and a small young girl, before the girl reaches maturity. It is the primitive form of child marriage. In such cases, after thirdam is kept in the girl’s
house, the girl is taken to the groom’s house with her parents’ consent. *Thirdam*, literally a living iron, is a metallic tool, mostly an axe or a hand hoe wrapped with a cloth. The cloth is called *Puondam* which literally is a living cloth. It can be *Hmar-däm* (a traditional cloth) or any piece of loin-cloth, mostly black cloth (also *thangsuopuon* in modern days). *Thirdam* is a symbol of engagement. She does not instantly get treatment of a bride in her in-law’s house. Rather, the girl would not sleep with her would-be husband but she is made to sleep with her in-laws until she reaches marriageable age. As soon as she reaches marriageable age, she is handed over to her husband to serve and act as a full-fledged wife. The marriage is now treated as *Sawngpuia Innei*. This form of marriage is now discontinued.

The second form of marriage is *Sawngpuia Innei*, perhaps the most respectable form of marriages. This marriage takes place between a matured young man and a matured young woman. This form of marriage requires a certain set of procedures. First, the groom’s parents send *palai*, go-between, which mainly is a group consisted of at least three members. All selected members must all be married men and women among the kinsmen and, inclusion of *mâkpa* is a must who also is the leader of the party. A *mâkpa* is their son-in-law or a man who has married into the clan. “The inclusion of a married lady in the team is preferred” (Bapui 2011, 93) If the girl is from the same village, a larger number of *palai* is preferred. The go-between is the integral part of the business from the beginning till the final marriage. Even after successful marriage, if any misunderstanding takes place between the husband and the wife, the *palai* becomes the first main consultant. The *palai* informs the girl’s parents before hand of its plan and date of their purposeful visit. This proposal visit called *Inbiekna* generally takes place at night so as not to disturb day’s work. On the first visit, *palai* carries a pot of *zu* (replaced by tea after conversion into Christianity) which the two parties sip as they discuss the matter. “This visit is called Sarawk Dëng” (H.V Sunga). It being the first visit is understood as a way of feeling the opinion of the girl’s party. If negotiation goes fine during the first visit, a second visit is carried out with a more customary approach. During this second visit, the *palai* carries a *Thirdam* wrapped with *Puondam*. If the girl’s parents agree to the proposal, the *palai* leaves the *thirdam*. 
with them which is now under the custody of the girl’s parents and which they retain with utmost care. The girl is now betrothed to the boy. What now remains is another meeting between the two parties to decide and fix the date of marriage. If ever the symbolic metallic piece is returned, it is understood that the girl has retraced and nullified the agreement. In such rare cases, the girl becomes the victim of social disapproval and criticism and the whole society treats the girl as unreliable and indecisive. The night before the marriage day, another round of meeting between the parties is held where payment bride-price is made by the groom’s party. “Bride-price is paid in terms of siel (mithun) which is a unit of measurement in monetary values” (Thiek 2013, 279) and is paid on a leidâr (a winnowing sieve). Payment of bride-price is a traditional symbolic significance used for sealing a marriage bond. “The bride-price was often very high, especially for Chief’s daughters” (Lalremsiem 1988, 76). It has now been regulated from time to time by the community representative. For instance, Chapter 2 of Hmar Hnam Dânclearly lays down the different categories and the share of each category that fall under the term ‘bride-price’: Pa Ina Lût Ding (the girl’s father’s share)= Rs 820/-, Pu Ina Lût Ding (the girl’s maternal uncle’s share)= Rs 120/-, Man Siper (miscellaneous fee)= Rs 100/-, Man Chuanghai (other necessary fee)= Rs 265/- for marriage that takes place in the same village and, Rs 330/- for marriage outside one’s village and, Man Thungpha (returnable fee) Rs 50/-. The marital relationship under this way of marriage can be said to reveal gendered culture. For instance, a man requests (active) the hand of a girl for marriage, while a girl is requested (passive). After marriage, the man takes the girl to his homestead. This simply indicates that men are possessors while women are the possessed, bought with mo man (bride-price). Further, a word inrai (becoming pregnant, passive) is used for women, while sukrai (impregnating, active) is used for men.

The girl is sent off to her new in-law’s house with her Pu’sand parents’ blessings. Pu (one’s maternal uncle; mother’s brother) is “highly revered in theHmar society...The Pu would arrange a special feast for the girl- his Tunu - and gives gifts” (Thiek 2013,
The girl's parents—either the father or the mother—would also bless hersaying,

"Ka naunu, malsawmna tamtak phurin, vawi a sari, chang a sari, In khang lien, In dung sei, nuruol sari, paruol sari i lutna Inah lut pui rawh" (Lienchawngtho).

(My daughter, carrying lot of blessings you enter into your in-laws' to increase the length and breadth of their house.)

On the day of marriage, Hmar women play an important customary role. The new bride is followed by the groom's far le zuorhai (the sisters and cousin sisters). "In some cases, the zuors smear the groom's party with murky mud or charcoal as a symbolic sign of their hesitation to part with their zuorpui (sister)" (H.V Sunga). It is the responsibility of the bride's zuor to accompany the bride to her in-law's house. Zuors are the cousin sisters of the marrying girl or the women folk from the same clan of the girl's father. Hmar traditional form of marriage is devoid of any oath-taking ceremony or wedding-ring. As the girl is already betrothed to the boy since placing of the thirdam, she is plainly sent away after thiempu incants mantras. Before she moves out of her father's house, thiempu wets her feet with a wetted broom while chanting words of blessings;

"May Khuon/Khuopa bless you with thousands and hundreds of paddy sacks. May you be fertile and increase the length and breadth of your in-law's house" (Hlinei).

After the priest finishes reciting these words of blessings, the girl steps out of the door putting her right leg out first, followed by her maid, zuors and the other invitees. Each zuor carries the bride's properties according to her capacity. Generally, the bride's properties consist of "clothes, baskets, necklace, a country loom, spinning wheel, sometimes animals and other personal belongings including a big cloth known as Puonri......The dowry is never given in cash. Sometimes, the girl's dowry exceeds her Bride-Price" (Thiek 2013, 281). The properties can also include items like hreipui (an axe), dawrāwn (a very large closed basket used extensively during harvest), kāwngvār (open baskets meant for carrying things of larger materials), thuthlaw (hand
hoe), thingrem (wooden box), rēl (a basket with a lid and locking arrangement), bēlvār (silver cauldron), and hmui (gin or charkha like instrument). Besides this, she can also carry her personal belongings like dress, shoes, relpuon, skirt etc. to distribute among her husband’s sisters and cousins. This is called mofam. Relpuons are cloths, thicker and warmer than loin-cloths, made with loin-loom. On reaching the groom’s house with all the bride’s assets, it is customary for the groom’s party to distribute zuor man (zuor price) to each and every zuor. Literally, zuor man may be interpreted as items carrying charge. Zuors are of two types: zuor upa (senior zuor) and zuor naupang (junior zuor). “Traditional Zuorman is a petty amount. Junior zuor is paid seki (twenty five paisa) where as, senior zuor gets duli (fifty paisa)” (Lienchawngtho). In modern days, zuorman is fixed at Rs 10/- for senior zuor in one’s village and, Rs 20/- outside one’s village, and Rs 5/- for junior zuor in one’s village and, Rs 10/- outside one’s village. Practically, in modern days, zuor man payment is made depending on the financial strength of the groom. The zuor will not take their seat unless being paid zuor man. This customary practice of the zuor standing in demand of zuor man is known as Zuor man Thin. On receiving the payment, the zuors go back to the bride’s parents’ house and dine a small feast arranged for them and in their name known as Zuor Thlèng. On such day, the girl’s parents kill a pig. Excluding the head and the intestines, the killed animal is divided length-wise into two halves; one half is consumed by the girl’s kinsmen while the other half with the tail called sahrāp goes with the girl. Killing of pig is symbolic by nature. The tribe believes that of all the animals, the pig is fertile and it begets a good number of offspring. Killing it on such auspicious day symbolizes the parents’ warm wishes that their daughter too becomes fertile and bears a fruitful offspring (Bapui 2007, 47).

In the house of the groom, the arrival of the new bride is joyously celebrated by serving great lavish zu. After the celebration is over, women folks join in the joyous singing of Mo Thuoi Hla (Bride’s Song). “A woman, generally the new bride, beats the drum, a man dances while all men and women sing” (Sumneizir). Sri Chawngtho maintains that on bride-coming celebration day, the tribe sings mainly four songs: Khiengthar Hla, Mauleng Hla, Liendāng Hla and Zāwntui Hla. He further contends
that on such auspicious day, a woman, generally the new bride, beats the drum while a single male dancer dances.

Marriage of the third form is called Inrûk Innei, which is elopement. Inrûk Innei is less respectable as it evades the elaborate custom of sending palai and the different series of marriage negotiations and settlement. But it does not escape payment of bride-price which is paid-off after the marriage. After the bride-price is paid, the girl’s parents, according to their convenience, solemnize a send-off ceremony for their daughter. On such send-off ceremony day, an animal, generally a pig is killed where the parents invite all their kinsmen to dine the feast. On this day, the zuors perform their traditional role of carrying the girl’s assets to her husband’s house which is followed by Zuor Man Thîn.

Another way of marriage is Kâwnghlaw. This form requires the boy staying in the house of the beloved girl for a good number of years. After staying for the mutually-consented number of years, the boy takes the girl to his house. In such form of marriage, payment of bride-price is waived as the boy’s hard toil during his stay in the girl’s house is believed to have well exceeded the bride-price (Bapui 2007, 48).

Three types of engagement:

Engagement can be initiated in three types: from a boy’s side, from a girl’s side and, mutual engagement with a proper witness. If the marriage negotiation is initiated by the boy’s side, the go-between gives the girl’s party Thîrdam as a token of engagement. If the initiation is to spring from the girl’s side, there is a system called Záwlpuonpha (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 9). If the girl’s mother has a special liking for one of the wooers to be her mâkpa (husband of her daughter), after all other group members have left; she would prepare a zawlpuon (spreading sheet of cloth signifying sleeping arrangement, generally on the floor) for him. If the boy agrees to the symbolic proposal, he would sleep on that spread sheet for the night. Irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse with the girl during the night, it is considered a sign of his acceptance. He is now engaged to the girl. If the boy later breaches his promise and rejects the girl, he is convicted and fined to pay Rs 500/- as hmainâwk man. If a boy and a girl mutually want to get engaged, they can swear so
in the presence of their respective parents or any other witnesses. *Hmar Hnam* Dän approves such form of engagement and if any of the parties breaches the engagement later, penalty will be paid by the wrong doer.

**Divorce System:**

In Hmar, divorce system is called *inrá dan*. The bond of matrimony is loose. In the case of a girl seeking a divorce, she simply has to persuade her parents to agree to refund the price they had received.

This is called *suminsuo*. “In the case of the boy seeking a divorce, he simply makes *mák man* (divorce fee) payment of Rs 500/-” (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 17) to the girl’s parents or kinsmen and takes her to her parents’ home with her dowry. If the two had separated by mutual agreement called *Pèksachang* and *Inthañ* and wish to re-marry, they can do so without making any bride-price payment. In matters of divorce, the existing Customary Law imposes customary penalty on the wrong doer. The husband does not enjoy monopoly power over the wife. In spite of social disapproval, divorcedoes take place in the society.

Widow re-marriage (*pasal nei nawk*) is sanctioned by the tribe and is prevalent among the people. “But, a widow is not supposed to re-marry until and unless she performs *hringinkir*” (Lallawmkung). *Hringinkir* is a feast prepared by the widow’s *jahai* (brothers) in the presence of reliable witnesses or the dead husband’s kinsmen for a public recognition that their sister is going back to her biological parents. This customary practice signifies that she is now fit to re-marry. If before arrangement of such public recognition through a feast she happens to fall in love with a man or if she re-maries, she is considered an adulterous. (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 30) Whereas according to Bapui, a widow is not supposed to re-marry until and unless memorial stone of her late husband is laid. If that happens, she is considered an adulteress (Bapui 2007, 62).

**3.3.4. Death Rites:**

The Hmars categorize death into five main groups; i) *Hlamzui Thi* (death at birth or a baby that dies within within a short period after its birth, generally, three months of
its birth), ii) *Ramte Thi* (death of infant under one year), iii) *Thi Թha* (natural death), iv) *Mifha Thi* (death of distinguished people) and v) *Thi Sie* (unnatural death).

*Hlamzui Thi* is visited and condoled only by elderly people of the village who themselves prepare the grave and perform the burial service. The dead body is either wrapped with a cloth or put inside an earthen pot and is buried beneath the house after naming it. Death of this kind is not mourned by the community. No wake is supposed to be observed. Near relatives and even the mother never shed massive tears mourning. *Ramte Thi* too receives the same kind of light community treatment as *Hlamzui Thi*. A set of death rites is called *thinisakhuo*.

Victims of *Thi Թha* and *Mifha Thi* receive community treatment in the most natural and befitting manner. Funeral service is rendered by the whole community. The village men and women gather together for consolation at the house of the bereaved family. The *tlanglakte* (young lads) of the village under the guidance of their leader are responsible for carrying logs and bamboos required for the burial of the dead. They also collect one cup of rice from each house of the village for the bereaved family. The *tlangvals* (young unmarried men), under the guidance of *VälUpas*, dig the grave. They are responsible for performing all the requisites for decent burial of the dead. The making of *hlâng* (a stretcher made of bamboo) is considered the duty of the village old folks. The *nunghaks* (young unmarried women), under the guidance of *mâkpa* (a man marrying into the clan of the bereaved family), collect three strands of firewood from every house of the village for the bereaved family. In case of *nupa tâng թhe* (death resulted in couple separation), the young women increase the number of firewood strands to five. This is a sign of utmost condolence and sympathy shown to the left-behind partner. Besides being engaged in the collection of firewood, a group of village maidens join the grave-diggers and, another group joins the condolence party at home whom they occasionally serve with *zu* (now replaced by tea). *Far le Zuor* (a group of women folks who belongs to the same clan of the bereaved family's) would make a point not to fail to *rål* (to visit to console the
bereaved family with sympathy) and cover the deceased with a cloth, generally a black cloth.

All the unnatural deaths resulting from suicide, beast attack, childbirth and other accidents are called Thi Sie also known as Săr Thi. Such unnatural deaths are abhorrent to the society. Hmar Hnam Dân (26) proposes that people who die a Thi Sie should not be kept for a single night. Death resulting from beast attack, especially tiger attack, is considered the most serious Săr Thi. Of all forms of unnatural death, a woman’s death due to child-birth complications known as Raiche-a Thi is the most feared, especially among the Hmar women folk. The subsequent psychological reaction to this form of death that emanates from the village women folk seems to reveal another superstitious nature of the tribe. Thiek (Thiek 2013, 300) records that in the past, the superstitious tribesmen believed that the soul of the ill-fated woman could be going around from house to house to invite others to go with her and her entry to other houses would bring about the same kind of death to the family. For fear of this, every family would hang a branch of tree above the front door to show their refusal of her entry into their home. In some places, the people would bury an axe, a hand hoe or a dao with her dead body with a belief that her way to the spiritual realm was too rough and blocked and she would clear her own way with such implements. The village damsels would not even go to the village water-hole to fetch water, nor would they venture out of the house. “They are afraid that the spirit of the dead woman will catch hold of them and they will meet the same fate later in life” (Bapui 2011, 134). The soul of a woman who dies a Raiche Thi is believed to follow a very rough path. As such, the community would place an axe in her coffin for the departing soul to utilize it in clearing her path to Mithi Khuo (land of the dead).

On occasions of death in a village, young women play an important traditional role. When someone (above one year) dies in a village, it is the responsibility of the young women to serve the grave diggers in the graveyard and those bereavers (villagers at the deceased’s house) with zu. If the death requires a wake, young men and women together, under the guidance of Val Upas keep the wake. The young men and women, under the guidance of val upas pay condolence visits to the bereaved family the
following three nights of the burial ceremony. However "women are restricted from taking part in three social occasions: i) Hlamzui Thi, ii) Khawser (religious offerings observed for and on behalf of the whole village) and iii) Bersi (offerings to evil spirit)" (Sumneizir).

The Hmars have a traditional custom of glorifying certain dead body: the dead body of Thangsuo. Thangsuo is a man or a woman who has made an extraordinary achievement during his/her lifetime. And the tribe heavily reveres, honours and respects such persons. Such traditional admiration and full appreciation is shown to them both during and after their life. A thangsuo is believed to bypass mithi khuo (land of the dead) and directly go to Pielral (Paradise) where their souls do not get engaged in hard toil any more: whereas, the souls of the commoners go to mithi khuowhere they still have to toil hard for survival as on the earth. In order to be Thangsuo, a man, during his life, has to kill an elephant, a wild bison, a bear, a tiger, a deer, a wild boar, a barking deer, a lemur, a hawk and "a venomous snake called rûngân" (J. Batlien 2007, 113). A man who has bagged all these wild animals marks his extraordinary achievement by arranging a grand public feast during life-time by killing a mithun or a cow or a pig for public consumption and recognition. This achievement-commemorating grand feast is called Sa-In-Ei. Likewise, a festival connected with abundant harvests is called Bu-In-Ei. In order to be glorified after death, a man must have organized during his life-time at least five festivals. The credit of bountiful harvest of a family goes to the mother of that family. If a certain family arranges at least three grand public feasts commemorating abundant agricultural harvests, then the mother of that family is Thangsuo. When she dies, records Batlien (J. Batlien 2007, 119) the community would honour and glorify her dead body by carrying her in a hlâng (a stretcher made of bamboo) and take the body to each and every sumphuk (the front platform of a house) of her brothers. The brothers would serve the corpse-carriers with lavish zuand fire their guns.

In the past, Hmar women played another important customary role in connection with deaths in the community. On the days following the death of an adult until preparation of final farewell feast for the departed soul, the eldest female member of
the deceased family used to light fire every morning at the graveyard. A crude bamboo raised-platform used to be made near the buried place in the graveyard on which a small portion of the family dish would be placed every morning and evening for the soul of the departed one. (Bapui 2011, 135) Performance of that customary piece of the tribe’s traditions was the prerogative of that female member.

3.4. Religious Beliefs and Customs:

The nature of Hmar traditional belief was animism, animism in the sense that the tribesmen believed that spirits could reside in certain spots and places. Though they did not attribute living soul to inanimate objects, they believed the dead could exist through soul and could reborn and reappear in the form of living creatures (insects or animals), for which last farewell rite for the dead called thif1nwas performed. The Hmars did not worship nature or any celestial body. Practice of totemism was nonexistent in their belief. Taboo, “another sacred belief which is rather negative custom of any belief” (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976, 243), was an integral part of their traditional belief. Violation of taboo, they firmly believed, resulted in immediate disaster. Magico-religious form of sacrifice and healing was another backbone of their traditional religious life. Pipu Rau Biek (Ancestral Worship) occupied an important and significant place in their religious life. They believed that the souls of their ancestors had interest and intervening power in their worldly affairs. Spirits of dead ancestors were believed to have powers to decide the destiny of the living souls. Polytheism is another feature of the traditional belief of the tribe. The tribe believed in the existence of a cluster of gods and goddesses whom the tribesmen identified and grouped according to their respective departments and areas of influence.

The Hmars were deeply religious and, religion occupied the most pivotal place in their social, familial, economic and political life. Their intricate religious customs had a magnificent influence on their socio-cultural life. Each and every little act of their cultural life was carried out in conformity with their religious precepts. In this context, Ms. Lalremsiem has rightly quoted, “In a tribal society, a distinction cannot be made between religious, social and political elements. If one is affected, all are affected” (Lalremsiem 1988, 101).
The tribe believed in the existence of three types of spirits – protective or benevolent spirits, evil or malevolent spirits and ancestral spirits. In the traditional belief, evil spirits outnumbered benevolent spirits. Thiek (Thiek 2013, Chapter 15) records that there are six good spirits and seventeen malignant dreaded evil spirits. The tribesmen assigned each good spirit with different functions to perform towards them. These good spirits were regarded as benevolent and sacrifice to them was considered needless except observances of thanksgiving-related ceremonies solemnized either in private household or in public arena. They also worshipped the good spirits to invoke abundant blessings for sound health and for success in their agricultural harvest. But generally such occasion along with ancestors worship was limited to a family domain with the thiempu performing the sacred rituals. The Hmars had a kind of family devotion called Sungbing Inthawina or Inronei hosted by a family. This occasion is related with ancestor worship where the souls of the dead ancestors were invoked to bless the family. Incantation of mantra and killing of the offered animal were done either by the family thiempu or the male-head of the family (Bapui 2007, 77-79).

The good spirits were believed to be under the direct control of pathien (creator). As regard the belief in the existence of evil spirits called ramhwoi, the tribe identified and called them by different names. They firmly believed that evil spirits were the source of all illnesses, calamities and deaths. As such, sacrificial offerings called inthawina were considered mandatory. The tribe therefore offered propitiatory sacrifices to evil spirits to propitiate them as they feared that they might displease the evil spirits unknowingly and unintentionally. “The belief in different kinds of spirits who are mostly malignant is prevalent. Most of the spirits are believed to be at the root of all kinds of illnesses, misfortunes and afflictions. So, at all times they try to appease the different spirits through sacrifices” (Bapui 2011, 12). Being deeply religious, much of their act was accompanied by divination. Starting with settling of a new village site to a post-harvesting occasion, divination known as Aisán is performed. They also had elaborate forms of worship, thanks-giving related ceremonies and animal sacrifices. What is noteworthy in this context is, most of the sacrificial and religious related activities are performed by the thiempu with the assistance of his maleberva leaving
little performance opportunity to the ordinary men and women. “There was a common priest for the whole village. Some clans and even some families had their own priests. The tribe also had a thiempi (priestess) who, however, could not perform all the religious rites the male priest was entitled to perform” (Lienchawngtho).

The tribe had a good many complicate forms of worship and animal sacrifice. In almost all these rituals and divinations, the women folk, who otherwise take active part in other non-religious activities, render little participation. Rather than a signifier of deep religious participation, this culturally-determined silence is motivated by the tribe’s ideological dogma; a proof that human’s behaviour is subject to cultural ideology. Women are not to take active part in all the religious and sacramental matters. This being how women have been oriented into the tribe’s religious sphere, silence becomes a very important and significant aspect of the women in religious domain. In all the occasions of thanksgiving and inthawina, thiempu and the seven or more male berva (priest’s male assistants) carry the whole lot of work to and in the bawlhum- carrying and slaughtering the offered animal, carrying rice, wood, water, cauldron, burning fire and other necessary ingredients for the sacrifice, preparing the altar, placing god’s portion called sa ser on the altar or any other major or minor work required for sacrificial ceremonies. (Siemmat Bible College 2010, 45) The thiempu does the incantations. “Their womenfolk are never given role to play in the sacred ceremonies except in some religious occasions which are considered the prerogative of the women folks. They can simply take the sacrificial meat as and when thanks-giving ceremonies or sacrifices are solemnized inside or nearby individual’s hut as their going and taking part in the bawlhum is unbecoming” (Lienchawngtho).

3.4.1. Traditional Holy Dreads:

Taboo, also known as 'holy dread' (thurosie in Hmar) is “an objectified fear of the demoniac power thought to be concealed in the tabooed object.” Preservation of taboo may be taken as “safeguard ritual operations to protect religious persons and places of worship and prevent irreligion from spreading” (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976,
243). Bapui (Bapui 2011, 12) comments, “The Hmars are very superstitious and their lives are often controlled by such superstitions and beliefs.” Superstition is a term for belief in supernatural causality. People who believe it tend to restrain their physical behaviours and even perform rituals and sacrifices to ward off future undesirable events that the present event can cause its occurrences. Due to superstitions, there are great many an occasion when the Hmars restrain their physical behaviours and even perform a good number of ritualistic sacrifices to ward-off future undesirable incidents. Though there is no history that records practices of human sacrifice in connection with superstitious beliefs, the tribe practices animal sacrifices on and for different occasions. As there are a good number of superstitions prevailing among the tribe, many kinds of physical behaviours or expressive movements are considered inappropriate and taboo by the tribe. Below are some of the taboos the Hmar men and women internalise and for fear of which they regulate and restrain their life. Most of the taboos centre round the womenfolk, mostly pregnant mothers. Those are;

One’s name should not be pronounced in front of a python; the named person will die soon.

Crabs must not be burnt in the forest; a tiger will appear.

Members of the same family should not travel to opposite directions on the same day; accident will occur.

A pregnant woman must not consume fruits or vegetables wedges in between stones or twigs; it will render child delivery difficult.

A pregnant woman should not uncover her abdomen; otherwise, the evil spirits will see the fetus inside the womb and destroy it out of jealousy.

A pregnant woman should not clip the nails of any living creature; that will result in the birth of a deformed child. (J. Batlien 2007, 126).

Husband of a pregnant wife should not kill a snake; that will result in birth of a deformed child. (J. Batlien 2007, 126).

A pregnant woman must not cross a river; that will cause miscarriage.
The tribe believes that the moon can bless the children. In the evening, mothers often invoke the moon to bless her children.

A plump baby should never be described as heavy. A jealous evil spirit will cause harm to it.

A woman should not weave for the whole night; it will result in sudden death in the family.

Besides this selected list of few one-liner thurosie, there are many other traditional beliefs which regulate the mindset of the tribesmen. They consider certain sights as dreadful and signalling some mishaps. Though devoid of any logical relatedness, the tribe firmly relies its conviction on a massive set of beliefs. Hmar Pipu Sakhuo Le Inthawi Dôn offers an exhaustive detail of those superstitious beliefs which serve as a traditional medium of future prediction;

While choosing a jhum site in the jungle, if tuivamit or khursie is found on the earth surface, that site is deemed unsuitable for jhumming cultivation as that spot is believed to be guarded by an evil spirit. If someone persistently engages that spot of land for jhumming purposes, the guardian will be angered and the concerned person will die soon.

While clearing a land for jhumming purposes if one finds a zawng lukawrawk (skull of a monkey) that place is believed to be the habitat of evil spirits. If one persistently engages that spot of land, he will definitely die.

Thlangfaawi is one of the common birds. But the Hmars give its warbling a different symbolic connotation. If the bird warbles ‘thlangfaawi awilek, awilek’, and a person hears it, it is considered a bad omen. It is firmly believed the hearer will surely die. Be it a jungle or a jhum, the person who has heard it will head straight towards home.

If the tribesmen find leiruongtuom which is a grave like hollow earth in the forest, that spot is believed to be inhabited by evil spirit. People generally avoid even looking at such uncanny site. If a person who has come back from a day’s forest or jhum visit feels slightly uneasy in the evening, immediately a thiempu is consulted to perform sacrifice.
A tiger is believed to have the ability to recognize an adulterous man. If an adulterous man goes to a forest and encounters a tiger, the latter never fails to attack him. As such, during community hunting of a ferocious tiger, an adulterous man stays back at home on the pretext of illness.

The colour of jhum huts remains the same all through the year. If one’s jhum hut changes its colour and transforms into somewhat whitish, that is considered an ill women. The hut would then be burnt into ashes and a new one would be constructed. If someone persists in occupying the hut, it is believed some calamities will befall the family that owns the hut.

There is an owl-like bird called *thizul* which chirps like its name. If a person or the community hears the chirping of the bird, it is considered an ill omen heralding serious calamity, even death.

There exists a strange snake called *khangchawm* measuring same length and breadth. Seeing of any living creature with same length and breadth predicts sudden death. Any person who has seen such a creature sadly broods day and night inside his dark house.

“The gargling sound heard in the atmosphere or sky before rain during the rainy season is called *Fânfa-Tui-Inchu*. The belief is that the souls of the dead infants scramble for water and the *Fânfa-Tui-Inchu* is the noise made by them. So, mothers whose infants have died recently do not rinse their wet clothes on such a day” (Thieck 2013, 288).

The Hmars believe in the existence of three types of *thlarau* (soul): *Thlarau Innghâk* (a living person’s soul that always guards the house), *Thlarau Ramlêng* (a living person’s soul that loiters hither and thither) and *Hmutheilo Thlarau* (aperson’s soul that leaves the body when the person dies) The tribe believes in the existence of *thlaṭap*. *Thlaṭap* is weeping sound heard inside a deep forest. It is believed that the soul of the person (*Thlarau Ramlêng*) who has visited that area of the forest remains there and tarries alone and is now crying as it loses its way. Whenthey come across such sound, they try to recognize the owner of the *Thlarau Ramlêng* by its voice. If it happens to be a certain child’s voice, the mother or the father of the child will
immediately go to that area with a baby-holding cloth and call, "O my babe, do not cry. Come back home with me. I will carry you on my back" (Sielmat Bible College 2010, 66) and they would lower down their back.

Under such superstitious beliefs, the whole tribesmen including the women folk restrain their physical movements and regulate their mindset according to the tune of the beliefs. In addition to this, the tribe performs certain ritualistic divination and sacrifices in order to propitiate and pacify the evil spirits which, they believe, have been displeased knowingly or unknowingly and, to ensure future security. Generally, they "offer domestic animals like fowls (hens or cocks), dogs, pigs, goats or mithuns as demanded by the displeased spirits or demons. This is the reason why the Hmars with their priests readily accepted the Christian Faith when the Gospel of love and salvation was preached for the first time in 1910" (Thiek 2013, 292-293). *Hmar Pipu Sakhuo le Inthawi Dân*, Chapter 8 records as many as seventeen propitiatory sacrifices to different evil spirits.

3.4.2. Traditional Female Deities/Spirits:
The tribe believes in the existence of a Supreme Being, subordinate gods or good spirits and evil spirits. There are about eleven female spirits- most of them are believed to possess the position of a powerful goddess, while some are beautiful and harmless and few are malignantly harmful with dreadful horrific appearances.

**Chawngtinler:**
The tribe believes that all wild animals have a custodian who is called Chawngtinler. On behalf of hunters to wish and ensure successful traps, the priest or priestess performs divination by cutting an egg length-wise. This ritual called *Sapi Bieknais* propitiatory in the sense it is an attempt to appease the custodian to allow the hunter bag animals of great value. The mantra chanted during this divination, perhaps, is addressed to Chawngtinler.

**Fapite:**
She is a goddess, an old woman with a godly power to bless mankind with abundant agricultural harvest. Her name is invoked during thanks-giving related ceremony called *Bu In-Ei Na*.
Hmuithla:
Hmuithla is believed to be a spirit who manifests like a female; more like a mother. Categorically, she belongs to the evil spirits. But she is essentially harmless but she possesses a dreadful and horrific appearance. Generally, she is believed to appear during sun-set.

Kawlpuinu also known as Tapuinu: “is a goddess of weaving” (Lienchawngtho).

Khawchawm:
Categorically, the sex of this spirit is not fixed. At times, it manifests like a dark gigantic woman. For her she-manifestation, the tribe gives her a female nomenclature as Chawmnu. She dwells and resides in dark valleys and sunken areas. She is dreadfully harmful as she feeds on blood of human beings and chickens.

Kulsamnu:
She is a caretaker of the souls of the dead. She is the doorkeeper of this land. She does not easily allow the souls to bypass the land without harassing them by engaging them to do certain manual works. She does not spare even the souls of infants. But over the souls of thangsuo, she has no power.

Lasi:
*Lasi* is a beautiful pretty female spirit who dwells in cliffs and precipices. Her beauty often mesmerizes male hunters and they often fall in love. She is also believed to have power over wild animals. She can vanish at will.

Sihai:
Sihai is a group of harmless spirits. They manifest in different forms-men, women and children. They are believed to be lenient and soft-hearted. If abused or treated with contempt, they together attack the culprit in a mild way.

Simbak:
She is a goddess of harvest. She is believed to have monopoly power over agricultural products. During harvest, a harvest rite called *TharlâkInthawi* is performed and the sacrifice is made to Simbak.
Vanchunglaizuoř:  
She is a harmless heavenly goddess and a very beautiful maiden. She is believed to be imbued with a power to bless mankind with rain. She is a goddess of rain.

Vahri:  
Vahrit is believed to be a good spirit who manifests like an old woman. She is the goddess of knowledge of wisdom. The Hmars make a sacrifice to her, invoking her name for granting wisdom and intelligence to the fool and obtuse.

Zasam:  
Zasam is an evil spirit who manifests like a ragged lactating mother. She carries uncombed hair, an appearance that makes her look dreadful and scary. She carries human beings away.

3.4.3. Women in Religious Rituals:  
In the traditional form of religious observances and sacrifices including indigenous modes of worship, hunting and agricultural-related ceremonies, it is mainly the male priest and his male assistants who carry out the work. However, Ngulkhumchawng maintained that there are some occasions where thiempu can take the place of thiempu. According to her (the claim supported also by Lienchawngtho), there are two religious occasions which thiempu and other women folk alone perform.

Like a male priest, thiempu held certain religious privileges to perform for, and, on behalf of the community. In the first place, she was expected to be holy both in physical appearances and in eating habits. It was considered unholy of a thiempu to participate in the community condolence of a dead or to join a wake. She was understood not to take impure meat. By ‘impure meats’ the tribe means dog meat and meat of wild animals of unidentified killer known as satlaw in Hmar. She was to consume zu within limit so as not to appear drunk before the public. She should not drink impure water and should not trim hair. She too learnt some mantras which she chanted as she performed the rituals as privileged by the cultural norms. There were certain religious observances where she could replace the male priest and, in some religious occasions, she alone was privileged to perform. During child birth, a thiempu
(thiempu also can) could cut an egg and recite a mantra for the long life of the baby. During Child Naming occasion, thiempi (or thiempu) could perform a rite called TuiPei, symbolizing propitiation of evil spirits and wish for the baby's sound health. Tui Pei, also known as Zu Sëwr Pei, is spraying of zu (traditionally believed to be the share of an evil spirit who would otherwise may get displeased) across the room. She would then recite,

"Khuo lo tlai,
Khuonu lo tlai,
Pansaka nu lo tlai,
Panthlanga nu lo tlai."

(Be pleased god. Be pleased goddess. Be pleased thou, up there. Be pleased thou, down there).

"During settlement of a village site, the community used to perform a divination. In the absence of a thiempu, a thiempi could perform the divination called artui suongaisân (divination by boiling an egg). She would first make a miniature fireplace where she could place the egg. She would then make a small hole in the egg and boil it. If on boiled the albumen and yolk overflow the eggshell, she announces the site suitably healthy and good for a village" (Lienchawngtho).

The Hmars believe that wild animals have a custodian, a female spirit named Lasi. The head of Lasi is Chawngtinler (Louis L. Keivom 1990, 18). A thiempi or a thiempu performs divination for and on behalf of hunters to ensure successful traps by performing egg-cutting ritual amidst chanting of mantras. In the footprints of the hunted animal, thiempi would keep a leaf upside down, few morsel of rice and a thread and then she would cut divided an egg length-wise with her sword and incant mantras,

"Heidur! (3)
Nang Sapimu, Nang a Kungnu,
Nang lo tlai, ka artuiin lo tlai,
I sahrang lu ka dit. Chai!" (Lienchawngtho)
(Heidur! Thou, female custodian of beasts, be pleased with my egg. I need heads of thine beasts. Chai!).

This divination is propitiatory by nature in the sense it is an attempt to appease the female custodian to grant the hunter animals of value. The tribe does not consider animals like monkeys and barking dears as animals of value. It holds in high esteem hunting that brings home wild ferocious animals like tiger, bear and swine. While incantation, the thiempi would not breathe. She loosens her hair and carries it open.

There are two occasions where thiempu cannot substitute a thiempi and where men folk do not attend. Those are women-related occasions and thiempi alone in the presence of other women folks performs the religious rites. Those are Bu In-Ei Na and Puonri Pui Khawng. Bu In-Ei Na is a thanksgiving-related ceremony offered to goddess called Fapite. This exceptional right is given to them as it is traditionally believed that the owner of rice, Fapite, is an old woman. This kind of ceremonies is solemnized in a family the year when that family is abundantly blessed in its agricultural harvest. In other thanksgiving occasions, thiempu does all the incantations invoking the names of the family’s forefathers and other male gods. In this Bu In-Ei worship programme, incantation is performed either by a female priest or the female head of the family invoking the names of their female ancestors and the goddess Fapite.

"There is another occasion where women alone participate. This occasion is called Puonripi Khawng (weaving heavy mattress)” (Lienchawngtho). When a woman starts stretching the warp of her weaving, thiempi worships and invokes a female weaving goddess called Kawlpuinu also known as Tapuim. She then performs TuiPei round the room three times and invokes,

"Nang Puonpuinu,
Kawtpui khawng ngai,
Kawtte khawng ngai,
Lo tlai rawh.
Ka tuidam, ka patdam, ka zupui lo chang hmasa rawh.
Kawlpui ka khawng mi khawng pui rawh."
Nuruol, paruol zaina ding.
Dam min hlaw rawh. Chai!!” (Lienchangtho).
(Thou goddess Puonpuinu, be pleased with my wine. I weave a rug for a large family. Guide me throughout).

The same is repeated when the weaving process is accomplished. Kawlpunu is a goddess of weaving. This is a ceremony where male members never take part. This divination is performed because the Hmars believe that Puonripui Khawng is a fatal process as the work is heavy and taxing.

3.5. Hunting Customs:

Hunting is called ramvāk in Hmar. The Hmar man hunts animals, birds and fish for supplementing his diet. Most of Hmar men are Ramvachal (successful hunters) and Pasaltha (a heroic man who had bagged ferocious wild animals). The return of every successful hunting expedition is well publicized by the hunter chanting a hlado (triumphant, victory song). Hlado is sung out loud from a pinnacle nearest to the village. The tribe has a different hlado for different kinds of animals. On hearing the rhythmical sound of the victory song, it is customary for the sisters of the hunter or the village damsels, keeping aside all their domestic works, to rush to the tinhmun (a village outskirt where tired villagers-travelers, hunters or jhum-goers used to relax) with local-made beer called zu to welcome and entertain the successful hunter. “Along with zu, it is customary that the young ladies take tawnlairång (an ornament head-dress worn by heroes and successful persons) with them and greet the successful hunters by donning them in tinhmun” (H. Thangzo).

In connection with animal killing and hunting customs, we get to know how the tribe ascribes value to its women folks. In every event of successful animal hunting, the hunter’s sisters have a share of the killed called Farnu Sa (a sister’s share of a meat). In case of the hunter having more than a single sister, this share is distributed among the sisters in a rotation system. Generally, the bagged animal’s front rib cage is considered the sister’s share. On receiving her share, she is customarily expected to carry a zu bēl (wine pot) to her hunter-brother’s house. On the event of the death of
the hunter-brother, the sister must cover him with a cloth. Even during Sungbing Inthawi (family worship) which is mainly ancestor worship, one prized boar is generally pierced for family and relative consumption. On such occasions, it is customary for the host performing the sacrifice, to give one forelimb each to his sisters. And such sisters are expected to contribute one pot of zu each for the brother’s family members.

Besides Farnu Sa, the tribe has another custom which marks the tribe’s valorization of their women folks. That custom is called Farnu Vawk. Farnu Vawk is a nomenclature given to a sister’s share of a portion of meat when a brother kills a pig. When a man kills a pig, he gives the fleshy thigh or the shoulder of the killed to his sister.

In Hmar tribe, men catch fish with ngakuoi (angling), lën deng (throwing nets) or ngawi dawn (traditional fish trap made of bamboo splits). The women folks smoke the fish caught and putrefy it for use as seasoning agent at later time. This putrefied fish is called ngathu (nga-fish, thu-smelly). In case of big wild animals killed by a male member of a family, the family would distribute the larger part of the meat to the whole village community. The remaining slices of meat which the concerned family can not finish up in a single or couple of meals are smoked and preserved on the rap by the family women members. The smoked pieces of meat hanging in the rap are called satawl and they can be consumed any time in future.

The Hmars perform divination for all actions of life including hunting expeditions. A thiempu performs divination for hunting and traps and blesses it with mantras and some ritualistic observances to ascertain successful hunting or trapping. During such divinations, the female spirit-guardian of all wild animals called Chawngtinler is invoked and offered mantras to. This customary practice is called Sapi Biekna. Lienchawngtho informed that a thiemp could also perform this rite.

Successful hunting expeditions – slaying of enemies or wild ferocious animals- are celebrated by the community. They observe umni inkhâm (no work day), sing and dance victory songs (given in Chapter 2) for a whole night and a day amidst drinking zu. Keeping a wake over slain enemies’ head is called rallu meng, over slain
animals’ head is called salu meng. While they sing and dance hranglam in a village open space, the hunter/hunters trigger a number of shots from their muzzle loading guns an act that symbolizes their pride in successful expeditions. Though women do not dance, they take active part in such ceremonies in singing the songs and serving the audience with zu.

3.6. Agricultural Customs:

The Hmars are agriculturists. The striking characteristic of their food-production activity is lawm (community labour and mutual assistance; Fig.3.1.i and ii) and lo hla (jhum-work songs given in Chapter 2). There are various stages of food-production which involve community labour and mutual assistance. Those are lovát (clearing of forest or jungle tracts for cultivation), lo raw (burning of the fell trees and bamboos), thlaichi thlák (vegetable seeds sowing), butukhuonglawm (paddy seeds sowing by community labour), hlo thlo (weeding), bu sik (paddyharvesting), buchil (threshing rice paddy), bu thak (storing) and bu suk (pounding of grain). In all these stages, women folks play a very important role.

Lo Vât (clearing of forest or jungle tracts for cultivation):

During every year end, a village council selects a certain part of a forest for jhumming purpose for the whole village community. The first agricultural act that follows is lo vár which generally takes place in the month of January. Jhum means lo. Women folks are generally exempted from this agricultural phase as the process requires utter physical strength and prowess. After cutting down trees, bamboos and bushes, it is time for the community to relax allowing the fell trees to get dried. This period, generally February- March, is called Chapchar Awllên. This lay-off season is verycrucial for both the village men folks and womenfolks. As this period is regarded as ‘leisure’, women laboriously toil in their loin-loom trying to weave as many cloths as possible. During this leisure period, in every village, there is a kind of competition among the womenfolks as to who can produce more rel puons (rel puons are those fabrics thicker than ordinary cloth that can be used both as mattress and quilt). These cloths are woven both for domestic use as well as for their marriage dowry. Hmar brides who carry a good number of their self-produced rel puonsto their
groom's house is used as an indicator of their essence as conventional Hmar woman. Mothers would also weave puonri (heavy mattress) for their daughter's dowry. On the other hand, besides collecting and hoarding house building materials, the men folks utilize this lay-off season for hunting and begging as many wild animals as possible. The number of wild ferocious animals bagged by a man sets itself as a kind of yardstick to measure the weight of a traditional Hmar man.

**Lo raw (burning of the fell trees and bamboos):**

Chapchar Awllên is soon followed by lo raw and hmang fawm. Lo raw takes place mostly in the months of March-April and hmang fawm is clearing of the unconsumed timbers. A senior priest then performs a divination near the jhum “to cool it down and to ensure availability of water nearby all the year round” (Bapui 2011, 19).

**Thlaichi thlâk (vegetable seeds sowing):**

The day following this, women folks would take out their dried vegetable seeds from ămte (dried hollow gourd used for storing vegetable seeds) or rawthei (dried bamboo with a single node) which they have been drying in the rap (it is a bamboo construction of about 4 feet high above the hearth to dry crop seeds, firewood, paddy, corn and meat) since long. Carrying the seeds in paikawng (carrying basket), they proceed towards the jhum field to sow them. Batlien (J. Batlien 2007, 96) records that the women folks are followed by their husbands who are also burdened with hnâng (a traditional cord made of immature bamboo), mansapui (haversack) and dumbêl (smoking pipe). In the field while the husbands get engaged in constructing a Ȟu (jhum hut), the wives meticulously decide and select the most fertile and conducive spot where they sow the vegetable seeds.

**Butukhuonglåwm (paddy seeds sowing by community labour):**

As mentioned above, community labour or mutual assistance is the striking feature of the Hmar economic activity. The community practices a kind of corporate labour known as lăwm and mutual assistance. Community labour is designed and planned by the village council. As paddy seed sowing is a taxing and an energy-consuming process, it is generally carried out by way of community labour. The village authority fixes a date for a one day lăwm for the commoners. This sowing of paddy seed by
community labour is called *butukhuonglawn*. Paddy seed sowing takes place mostly in the months of April-May. "Lawn is consisted of three layers of lawn grouped on the basis of seniority: lawn bél, lawn lai and lawn neu" (Mawia Pudaite). Lawn bél comprises senior and most experienced men and women, lawn lai; young men and women, lawn neu; young inexperienced boys and girls of the village. Male work partners are called lawnpa and, female work partners are called lawnnu. Lawn generally starts the sowing work early in the morning. The community workers would start sowing from the furthest field and move on to other fields one after another. This way, in a single day, the corporate labour easily finishes paddy seed sowing activity for each and every family of the entire village amidst singing *butukhuonglawn* songs (given in Chapter 2). The Hmars have a number of Paddy Seed Sowing Songs that would last for a one whole day. There is a traditional male drummer called khuongpu. He beats the drum and the working community, following the rhythm, joyously sings the songs as it sows the seed. Thus, the community makes a festival out of it.

**Hlo thlo (weeding):**

Like a community labour engaged in *butukhuonglawn*, lawn is arranged for a weeding activity as well. As in *butukhuonglawn*, the Hmars have a good number of weeding songs (given in Chapter 2) that would last a full one day. The working community starts the work early in the morning; it continues throughout the day till it ploughs homeward in the eventide. Like in *butukhuonglawn*, the community starts the weeding from the furthest field and moves on to other fields one after another.

On days of seed sowing and weeding by community labour, it is the responsibility of the lawnus (female work partners) to carry the jhum instruments and tiffin of their lawmpas (male work partners) from tinhmun. Jhum instruments are generally hand hoes. In the evening, they are to carry home in their paikawng their lawmpas' smeared dresses. If the dresses are wet, the lawmnu would carry them straight to her home; dry them at night near the fireplace. She does not retire at night until and unless she thoroughly dries them. It is the responsibility of the young women to see that the jhum dresses of their lawmpas get ready for the next-day wear.
The later phases of agricultural activity are *bu sik* (paddy harvesting), *buchil* (threshing rice paddy), *bu thak* (storing) and *bu suk* (pounding of grain). The first jhum harvest is made in August/September and the second and the major harvest in November/December. There is another lay-off season called *Favang Awllèn* between these two harvests. During this season, the *lâwmpas* together in a group would go out hunting in the forest. Their successful expedition is heralded by their *hlado*. On hearing such signals, *lâwmmus* would hurry towards *tinhmun* with *zu* and *tawnlairâng*. At night, *lâwmpas* and *lâwmmus* together sing *Victory Songs*, dance *Victory Dances* and drink the whole night celebrating the successful hunt. The night is called *Salu Mèng* (keeping wake with the head of the bagged animal).

During major harvest, harvesters consisted of men and women go out in a group carrying *paikâwng* and use *kâwite* (sickle) to cut off the ears of grain. Threshing too, is done by community labour. Threshing of rice paddy is done mostly in *suorthlâk* (a raised platform) and *hrizawl* (a threshing ground) in front of or nearby the jhum-hut. It is mostly the young men who tread upon the paddy to separate the corn from the chaff, while young women make balls of chicken coop size out of the ears of paddy and pass them to the working men. The community often makes a festival out of threshing of rice paddy by giving melodious rhythm to the work in the form of singing Paddy Threshing Songs. While threshing, the working community sings *Hau Hla*. *Hau Hla* may be classified into different sub-categories like: *Laltuoi A Hla*, *Keiler A Hla*, *Haktuoi A Hla*, *Lâmsier Pa Hla*, *Neingo A Hla*, *Dawnpa Hla*, *Thildem A Hla*, *Chawndem A Hla*, *Dârdem A Hla*, *Kienlai Hla* and *Khuongngovi Hla*. (L. Chongtho Hmar 1987,132-139). Before the grain is taken inside the *tu* for storage till final transportation to the family granary in the village, it is customary for the owner/host to give “basketful of rice paddy to his sisters and to other relatives” (Bapui 2011, 115).

Final transportation of the grain to respective family is done by both men and women. The last phase of this categorical activity, that is, *bu suk* (pounding of grain) is considered the sole responsibility of the women folks.
The Hmars have a different social customs incorporating the different sets of their rituals relating to their agricultural activities. Every year, the Hmar ancestors create a water-hole at the bottom of their jhum-field. It is the village priest accompanied by one obedient lad of the village who performs the ritual pertaining to creation of the water-hole called tuikhur siem. This is one of the most important rites performed in the first phase of cultivation. It is a part of magical practices.

On days of community labour in jhum-field, the tribesmen carry a bufûn (tiffin). Just before eating the lunch, it is customary for the priest to recite propitiatory dawihla (mantra) and throw asunder small portion of morsel or rice around to please the evil spirits loitering in and around the jhum. This practice is called khuotlai. (Louise L. Keivom 1990, 18) No men or women present around the priest stuff morsel of rice inside their mouth unless the mantra is chanted. This ritualistic observance is maintained with a traditional belief that if not propitiated with their share, the evil spirits may get displeased and take revenge on them or on their crops.

Suggestion for arranging community labour, both butukhuongläwm and hlo thlo is initiated and given by the village young men and women called lâwm tlangval and lâwm nunghak. Lawmlaisa (consisted of four members, two pairs of one male and female each) has a very important role to play. It is lawmlaisa's duty to get up early in the working mornings, to invite and remind other members of the Community including the zaipu cum khuongpu, beating a drum in tinhmun and inform the host of the day's corporate work. Lawmlaisa is entrusted with this responsibility and it carries out until and unless community labour finishes working for all houses of the village. In the jhum-field, a pair of young man and woman is made responsible to attend the need of zaipu and zaipanghak and to forage piles of firewood for all members to carry for the day's host in the evening. This foraging of firewood is called Fapár Thing Lâk.

In the evenings of corporate work days, lawmmus and lawmpas, each carries a load of Fapár Thing. While lawmmus carry them in their paikâwng, lawmpas generally carry a long single log of timber on their shoulder. Together, they walk back amidst singing and dancing and, proceed toward the house of the host. In front of the host's house,
they unload themselves and sit together on the ground forming a circle. Then they sing *Tuol Lâm Hla* (also called *Fapar Lâm Hla*). In the middle of the circled chain, one lawmnu dances *Tuol Lâm* (*Fapâr Lâm*). This is a beautiful entertaining sight to watch. Every night of the corporate work days is a night of mini-celebration. Lawmpas and lawmnus celebrate a drinking feast dancing *Liendâng Lâm*, *Zawntui Lâm* and *Khiengthar Lâm* (Hmar 1987, 25).

In both paddy seed sowing and weeding activities that involve community labour, the night of accomplishment is joyously marked with great enthusiasm in the form of singing, dancing and drinking in the house of *lawm upa*. This is called *lawm inhruoi tuolsuok Lâm*. (Hmar 1987, f).

**Thuite Ko:**

The Hmars believe in the existence of three types of *thlarau* (soul): *Thlarau Innghâk* (a living person’s soul that always guards the house), *Thlarau Ramlêng* (a living person’s soul that loiters hither and thither) and *Hmutheilo Thlarau* (a person’s soul that leaves the body when the person dies). It is believed that the soul of a living person (*Thlarau Ramlêng*) who has visited a jhum can remain there and tarry alone. So, after every annual major harvest, the male head of a family performs *Thuite Ko Inthawii* (*Thuite Call Offerings*) by calling out the names of every family member—male and female—, incanting mantras and performing other necessary sacrifices, generally a cock. *Thuite* means a living person’s soul that loiters hither and thither. This custom is an important engagement which is performed every year without fail. It is believed that if this rite is not performed, the loitering soul will tarry alone and cry until death due to loss of way to home. (Sielmat Bible College 2010, 65-66). Unless this rite is performed, no one is allowed to pee or pass stool in or near the water-hole of the jhum-field.

On the first harvest of paddy, even before any member of the family chews a single morsel, a family performs a harvest rite cum thanks-giving ceremony called *Tharlâk Inthawi* to goddess *Fapite*. On the first day of paddy threshing, the tribe, besides singing Paddy Threshing Songs as given in Chapter 2, performs propitiatory rituals called *Fângko Inthawi* to goddess *Fapite* (Sielmat Bible College 2010, 61 & 68).
3.7. Festival:

Datta et.al (Birendranath Datta et. all 1994, 151) explains, “Festivals are the external expression of social behaviour.” And most, if not all, of the societies of the world periodically set aside portions of time for celebration. (Dorson 1972, 159) Like other living societies of the world, the Hmars too, find time to escape from work and celebrate a number of festivals where men and women, young and old joyously take part. There are two types of festival- individual and community hosted-festivals. Not to be misguided by the nomenclature of ‘individual festival’, celebration-participation is not limited to only genetic kinship groups, but the whole community- males and females. These two kinds of festivals are religious by nature as they are organized in the form of family worship. All the individual festivals hosted mainly by the rich or thangsuo involve great expenditure and they are set generally to commemorate and honour special occasions connected with the personal extraordinary achievement of the host. This kind of celebrations marks their social movement from one social status to a higher one. And the celebration moments are generally enlivened by lavish feasting, drinking and dance.

Festivals organized by individual have different names depending on the occasion commemorated. One of them is called inchawng (ceremony of a rich man (can be the chief) feeding his villagers and the villagers showing their gratitude by carrying him on a pall). It is usually connected with family worship. Inchawng festivals are of two types: Siel Sun and Khuongchawi. Some of the individual festivals are: Sah/ang Dawm (a festival organized by prominent hunters and warriors by entertaining the whole village with a big feast)and In-Ei (a triumphant festival hosted by an individual marking his successful bagging of a wild animal is called Sa In-Ei and a festival marking his bountiful harvest is called Bu In-Ei). Sielsun, the pompous entertainment hosted by the rich would last mainly for two to three days during which there is much drinking, dancing and eating. (Thiek 2013, 303) The main dances performed on such festive occasions, according to Mawia Pudaite are Chawnlâm, Dâr Lâm, Chawngchên Lâm and Hlakawi Lâm. And the songs sung are “Chawnlâm Hla, Dârlâm Hla, Budel Hla and Luopui Hla” (Lienchawngtho).
The community or general festival of the Hmars is Sikpui Lâm (Sikpui Dance) where every member of the community- men and women, young and old, the rich and the poor, boys and girls could participate. Sikpui Lâm is the most important and the grandest social festival of the Hmars. It is celebrated with a sole purpose of propitiating and placating a goddess called Fapitenu (a goddess with a power to bless mankind with abundant agricultural harvest. (Faihriem 2002, 6) Sikpui Lâm is organized and celebrated during autumnal lay off season called Āwllēn Lai, before major Winter Harvest. Considering the time of this festival celebration, some scholars call it a Winter Festival, while some call it a Harvest Festival, thereby endowing the festival with a characteristic of seasonal festival. The festival displays features of both agricultural festival and lay off season celebration. In modern days, it is celebrated on the 5th of Dec. It is a form of social merry-making celebrating the lay off season when all jhum works for the year were more or less completed. The festival is a marker of peace, harmony and the spirit of unity which used to be celebrated only in the years when there were bountiful harvest and peace. Sikpui Lâm was never celebrated if there was any death in the village within the year.

The preparation for this festival celebration involves a great expenditure of energy of the entire community. Each family of the village community prepared zu (country beer) in abundance and brought it to the village wide open space. This wide space is called Sikpui Zawl or Lâm Zawl (Sikpui Venue).

The festival lasts at least for a fortnight. If the atmosphere was congenial and festive enough, it could be prolonged for a month. (Bapui 2007, 112) However, the festival could hardly be organized every year: it was a festival of peace and harmony. If any death occurred among the community prior to the festival, the programme would stand cancelled. “The last Sikpui Festival in the traditional fashion was performed in 1959 at Khawhmunlien, Cachar district, Assam” records Ţiek (Ţiek 2013, 310).

Sikpui Lâm has its own song called, Sikpui Hla and dances called Sikpui Lâm. Sikpui Lâm has about eight types of dances and many songs. According to Dr. Ţiek, there are about one hundred and twelve Sikpui Songs. (Ţiek 2013, 309) Some of the main
Sikpui songs are *Durtelám Hla* or *Buonilaw Hla*, *Thlawrán Hla*, *Hla Pui*, *Anrán Hla*, *Hlatlång Hla*, *Saia Ke Tet Hla*, *Sim Sak Hla*, *Palsâwp Lâmna Hla* and *Tînna Hla*. While the first two songs are especially meant for children to sing and dance, the rest of the songs are for men and women- young and old. The names of the dances are given in Chapter 4 (4.4.1).

In both the two types of festivals, excluding the priestly lore- the divination and invocation of the gods and spirits, which is exclusively preserved for the *thiempu*, the participating audience- male and female- used to take part with great enthusiasm.

### 3.8. Folk Medicine:

There are two varieties of folk medicine (*ram damdawi*). “Of folk medicine there are essentially two varieties, two branches: (1) natural folk medicine, and (2) magico-religious folk medicine. The first of these represents one of man’s earliest reactions to his natural environment, and involves the seeking of cures for his ills in the herbs, plants, minerals, and animal substances of nature. …The second branch of folk medicine is the magico-religious variety, sometimes called “occult” folk medicine, which attempts to use charms, holy words, and holy actions to cure disease” (Dorson 1972, 192). Of these two forms of healing, the latter may require priest’s incantation and spells, but the former form of healing is basically domestic, household remedy, the kind mothers and grandmothers normally apply to their children especially in villages.

Dorson’s classification of forms of healing is applicable to the Hmars as well. The Hmars, since pre-scientific era, have been employing the form of herbal/rational treatment till today; whereas, the magico-religious form of healing has been discontinued since the tribe’s wholesale conversion to Christianity. The home remedies have been passed down from generation to generations. From the tribe’s lore of rational cures, we get to know many kinds of herbs, roots, barks, plants, insects, tobacco and even animal substance and organs that are endowed with special curative ability: some medicinal materials even take us to the point of wonder. In their family garden, most Hmar women plant herbs, fruits and plants for culinary purposes. Among the vegetables, we always find herbs and plants with curative
ability being planted and taken care of by them. I have shown the tribe’s two forms of healing – rational and magico-religious treatment, in two separate paragraphs.

**Rational Treatment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diseases</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bedwetting in older children.</td>
<td>The baby is made to eat the meat of roasted bat, or, It is made to carry a small hen coop and go round a house at least for three rounds saying as it revolves, “I shall not wet the bed again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastric</td>
<td>To chew <em>lambak</em> (centella asiatica) raw or drink the grinded juice. To boil the bark of <em>pasaltakaza</em> (heicia robusta) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh cuts/wounds</td>
<td>To apply one’s urine in the local area or, to grind <em>japan hlon</em>a and bandage it on the cut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loin cramp</td>
<td>To boil <em>matau hna</em> (leaf of elaeagnus latifolia) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toothache</td>
<td>To smash <em>hlo nuor</em> (mimosa pudica) and drop the extracted juice on the aching tooth, or, To poke the aching tooth with a hair of an elephant’s tail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysentery</td>
<td>To smash <em>hnakhat zung</em> (root of a wild plant) and drink the juice, or, To eat boiled egg, or, To chew <em>thingfanghma hna</em> (papaya leaf) and swallow the juice, or, To eat dog meat prepared with lots of pepper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worms</td>
<td>To smash <em>ngaidi zung</em> (root of glyceria maxima) and drink the extracted juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomachache</td>
<td>To chew <em>thingrai hna</em> (agar leaf) or <em>thingfanghna hna</em> (papaya leaf) and swallow the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney pain &amp; Jaundice</td>
<td>To smash <em>puolchangkawk zik</em> (tender leaves of a wild tree) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itches caused by insects</td>
<td>To smash <em>hlorimsie</em> (ageratum Conyzoides) and paste it on the area, or, To rub the area with raw rice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High BP</td>
<td>To eat cooked <em>anphui</em> (clerodendrum colebrokianum).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>To grind <em>hnathap</em> (cancer medicinal plant) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low BP and scanty milk in lactating mothers.</td>
<td>To eat cooked <em>dawlzik</em> or <em>dawlzung</em> (colocasia esculenta).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaundice</td>
<td>To smash <em>behlieng hna</em> (leaf of pigeon pea) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorn/tiny stick under skin</td>
<td>To smash <em>phawngphawdet</em> (antlion) and paste it on the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastric</td>
<td>To chew <em>kawlthei zik</em> (tender leaves of guave plant) and swallow the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye ache</td>
<td>To smash and drop the juice of <em>simbuthut</em> (wild plant), or, To drop milk of a lactating mother on the affected eye/s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>To eat roasted/cooked meat of <em>sawkkhe</em> (gecko to kay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migraine</td>
<td>To eat roasted/cooked pig’s testicle, or, To wrap an egg with a good number (seven to eight) of <em>anphui</em> (clerodendrum colebrokianum), to roast it on fire and eat the inner roasted leaves along with the egg, or, To slightly pull the victim’s forehead hair and slightly bite the forehead while pulling the hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby with excessive froth of mouth</td>
<td>To let the baby eat roasted <em>khauhlâng</em> (cockroach).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bee sting and ant bite</td>
<td>To apply <em>changal</em> or soda (curry tenderizing agent) or tobacco (golden) juice on the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freckle on cheek/face</td>
<td>To eat <em>thingthupui</em> (dysoxylum gobara) raw or boil it and have it. It is believed to have a curative ability for dysentery problem as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>To boil the leaf of <em>hmurkuong</em> (wild shrub) and drink the liquid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sakhihrik</em> (flea) bite</td>
<td>To apply grinded ginger on the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney stone problem</td>
<td>To boil <em>khuongbaihlo</em> (one type of a small plant) with its root, grind it and to drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive baby</td>
<td>To cook <em>zawng lutluok</em> (monkey cerebrum) and to let the baby have the cooked cerebrum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessively high fever temperature</td>
<td>To grind <em>hlumpuo</em> (maggot) raw and swallow it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snakebite</td>
<td>To drink the warm blood of the snake, or, To cut divided a tamarind seed length-wise and paste one half on the bitten spot. It sucks the poison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boils</td>
<td>To crush leaves of <em>hlonuor</em> (mimosa pudica) or leaves of <em>tawtawrawt</em> par (thorn apple) and paste it on the area. The boils burst fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>To swallow <em>khumfât</em> (bed bug), or, swallow raw <em>rultuha</em> (snake) bile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>To compress anal with warm oil, or, Taking stale chicken curry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin patches</td>
<td>To apply the white substance of <em>tumlawi</em> (cactus family) or <em>thumriethmai</em> (alstonia scholaris) on the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leech bite bleeding</td>
<td>To apply ashes of ignited matchsticks or burnt paper. It stops the bleed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonsil &amp; Ulcer</td>
<td>To grind the stem, leaf and fruit of <em>vaakpahrui</em> (lobelia angulata) and drink the juice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides traditional way of healing using herbs or insects/animals as medications, the tribe practices magico-religious treatments which are magical rites. Magico-religious forms of treatment used to be performed upon the suffering patient by the *thiempu* who examined and diagnosed the ailment and prescribed the animal/s to be sacrificed according to his understanding of the nature and cause of the ailment. Illnesses were believed to be caused by provocation of spirits. His prescription was never questioned and challenged by the tribesmen who readily handed over it to him. As much as forms of herbal medication, ways of magical treatment were many and large. It was an era when belief in superstitions was great and high in degree. Chapter: 8 of *Hmar Pipu Sakhuo Le Inthawi Dân* 2010 records about twelve (12) forms of magico-religious treatment operated upon an ailing individual or society. The tribal religious treatments were mainly concerned with the immediate ‘quick fix’ for everyday needs and not with ultimate issues of sin and salvation. Magical rites were performed mainly in two levels- *Khawtlâng Inthawi* (corporate sacrifice, for example *Khuothlai Inthawi* which is performed to cure the whole village of flu epidemic. A pig is killed on such
occasions) which is performed mainly “to ensure good health and all round abundance and welfare” (Bapui 2011, 17) and a good number of Mimal Inthawina (individual sacrifices). When an individual falls ill, he calls a thiempu (priest) who examines him and prescribes a sacrifice according to the ailment. The thiempu employs a variety of techniques: he mostly achieves his ends by making animal sacrifice. The Hmars perform many forms of propitiatory sacrifices to cure patients of their illnesses:

*Rampui Inthawi* is a worship of the forest. It is offered for cure of serious illnesses like typhoid and pneumonia. A cock is generally offered on such occasions. For patients suffering from TB-like disease, a sacrifice called *Inung Inthawi* is offered. A dog is offered on such occasions. To cure a person suffering from mental imbalance, *Vabuzêl Inthawi* is performed. A pig or a dog is offered on such occasions. For patients who could not be cured through *Inung Inthawi* and *Vabuzêl Inthawi*, *Irvêl Inthawi* is performed. This is an expensive sacrifice which commoners cannot afford. A good number of goats are offered. In case of insufficient goat, a pig or a dog can substitute. To cure a patient suffering from serious skin blisters or boils, *Puplût Inthawi* is offered. *Tuikhur Inthawi* is offered to propitiate the river spirit that can infect the water of the water-hole with disease and germs. A goat and a cock are offered on such occasions. A sacrifice for rheumatism called *Rutliek Inthawi* is offered. No animal sacrifice is done here. For a patient suffering from painful swollen skin (caused by insect-bite), *Invûng Inthawi* is offered. Only mantra incantation is performed and no animal sacrifice is done in this sacrifice. For any theft or robbery that takes place in the society where the guilty refuses to confess, a sacrifice called *Thingkhuondêng Inthawi* is performed pressurizing the culprit to confess. The mantra incanted during this sacrifice invokes evil spirits to punish the culprit/s with serious misfortune. *Thuite Ko Inthawi* is performed after every annual harvest by calling out the names of every family member- male and female-, incanting mantras and performing other necessary sacrifices, generally a cock. *Thuite* means a living person’s soul that loiters hither and thither. This custom is an important engagement which is performed every year without fail. It is believed that if this rite is not performed, the loitering soul will tarry alone and cry until death due to loss of way to
home. In order to cure a witch or a black magician who have been afflicted by evil spirit called *khawhring*, the tribe performs a sacrifice called *Khiengsunthlák Inthawi*. Another sacrifice called *Theibabul Inthawi* is meant exclusively for wives who often miscarry babies or cannot bring forth living children. On such occasions, in place of animals, fertile fruits are offered in the sacrificial altar. For children suffering from serious complicated illnesses, *Nauhri Inthawi* is offered. To cure stomach ailments including dysentery, cholera and gastro-enteritis, *Phingnat Inthawi* is offered.

3.9. Fruits and Vegetables Foraging:

Fruits and vegetables foraging is one of the subsidiary occupations of the Hmar women folks. Besides having a kitchen garden where essential vegetables needed for daily consumption are grown, the Hmars have a traditional convention of foraging wild fruits and vegetables called, *hmeruo zawng* in the ethnic term, from deep forest. The fact that Hmar women have a traditional norm of foraging fruits and vegetables from wild forest is clearly highlighted in some lines of their folk songs. In one of the categories of *Lenglai Hla* (Love Song) called *Liendang Hla*, there is a line,

"A ziek dawng chu la naw ro uo Thien,
Thangngo Liendanga mun a kha ting a tih." (L.Keivom 1980, 64)

(Friend, spare the tender shoots of the plants,
Lest, Thangngo, Liendang’s mother finds the plant bitter)

This line reflects work activity that is purely related with vegetable foraging. This particular line is sung by one of the young foraging ladies and the line is addressed to the other work-partners present beside her. The essence of this song is: the young lady falls in love with a certain young gentleman called Liendang. She imaginatively wants to bribe Liendang’s mother with her collected vegetables. As the uppermost part of a plant tastes bitter, she asks her work-partners not to collect that part of a plant lest, her lover’s mother finds it bitter.

About the tribe’s traditional norm of vegetables foraging, Bapui also records, “The Hmars depend, to a large extent, on supply of wild vegetables and fruits from the
forests. Many kinds of leafy and fleshy vegetables as well as fruits and food
supplements are collected and taken. Edible mushrooms, bamboo shoots, young
spikes of various palms and ferns, leaves, flowers, roots, stalks and stems, and buds
of different species of plants are collected and taken as vegetables. In fact, food
gathering from the forest is a part-time occupation with some members of the family’’
(Bapui 2011, 111).

Although women do not go out for animal hunting or trapping, they do get engaged in
foraging edible wild fruits and plants. They work in gardens, which the family
sections off, where they grow and harvest different items of edible plants, roots and
fruits. Varieties of roots of rare plants, leaves and stems collected from gardens,
\textit{jhums} and wild forests are the ingredients used for preparing delicious indigenous
Hmar dishes. This includes wild mushrooms and bamboo shoots. In regards to meat,
it is not an exaggeration to claim that the tribe cannot go without meat, especially,
pork.

The Hmar women collect varieties of \textit{thei} (fruits) and \textit{ram hmeruo} (wild vegetables)
from the forest. There are varieties of fruits and wild vegetables on which the tribe
hmorkawi}, \textit{thei-árbáwm}, \textit{thei-archal}, \textit{theiba}, \textit{theibufai}, \textit{theichang}, \textit{theicher-
\textit{uilwokthei}, \textit{vuokdhip} and \textit{zawlpái}. Names of some of the vegetables collected are-
\textit{changhrát}, \textit{hlephlawp}, \textit{hlingthufir}, \textit{hmawnglawr}, \textit{hnachang wűi},
Many of these wild fruits and vegetables have become unknown to the new generations, while few of them are still commonly available even today.

3.10. Institution of Courting (Nunghak Lêng):

A Hmar society is a free-mixing society where boys and girls have full freedom of mixing among themselves. This institution of courting is recognized by the tribe and is an institutionalized way of a boy approaching a girl of his choice. Dena (2010) records the fact that the Hmar society was an open society where there was free-mixing between young unmarried men and women. Inlêng or Nunghak-lêng was very common and it was rather the institutionalized way of approaching a girl. Soon after his evening meal, a boy would woo a girl. Boys in group would sit around a girl gossiping, cracking jokes and discussing topics of common interests till late at night. After she reaches marriageable age, a Hmar girl entertains her inlêng (suitors; wooers) till late at night while doing some domestic works like spinning or needlework. Types of Lenglai Hla (Love Song) are given in Chapter 2 (2.3.1) of this work.

The village boys in group, soon after their evening meals, would woo a girl of their fancy. They would sit around the girl gossiping, cracking jokes, and discussing topics of common interests and assisting the girl in her domestic works till late at night. A lover staying overnight at the house of the beloved is one of common traditional behaviours of Hmar young men as found in one of the oldest love songs called Semruk Hla, given in Chapter 2;

"Singkhuol palai zânin antlung a,
Dawtònga zãl chinmak zuong tho rawh." (H.V.Vara 1985, 8)
(Hark! A new suitor is coming from afar; Get up from the floor, my dear)

"Dawłużonga zāl chinmak zuong tho la,
'Ramlaileinin ka huolsa' ti rawh." (H.V. Vara 1985, 8)

(Getting up from the floor; tell them that we are engaged)

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, we find that the Hmar women had little space in matters of sacred ceremonies carried out either in family or in public domain. A woman could not become a member of berva. Though a female priest called thiempi existed, the number of such priestesses was less and she could not perform all kinds of religious rite and sacrificial offering. In the absence of modern forms of denominations, theological institutions or convent, a woman had no prospect of sanctifying herself for religious sake; rather it was beyond the thought of human mind. Had any woman desired to spend her life single either in the village or in jungle in communion with the gods or goddesses, she would have been under social disapproval and a cute criticism. A Hmar woman might have prayed for a happy marriage or for a male child, but she did not seek publicly nor even could she expect to find a personal relationship with a god or goddess. That was a period when practice of sanctification for religious matters was non-existent even for the men folks. This less participation of women in religious matters signifies that they were not considered an integral part of the fabric of religious world.

Thus we find that in traditional Hmar society, a woman enjoyed limited space in the sphere of religious matters. Rather, the Hmar's traditional customs barred women's free participation in religious practices. There was no religious ceremony that gave young women and girls exposure to the society at large. But in other social spheres, she actively participated with great zeal. In the economic life of the community, like food-producing activities for instance, she played a very important role with her tremendous contribution towards filling the family granary to the brim.

Endnotes:

1. *Tuivamit* is a small collection of water in a forest having no noticeable source or course and considered sacred or taboo.