CHAPTER-III

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE
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Before the coming of the British and the dawn of Christianisation, the various Naga tribes of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Assam and Myanmar lived in complete isolation from the rest of the world. The practice of head hunting further isolated them from other neighbouring villages. Like all other Naga tribes, the Tangkhul Naga tribe lived in villages. The villages are mostly located on the summit of the hilltop or on the ridge of some spur running down from a high range. The selection of their village sites on such location was for strategic importance. Regarding the selection of Tangkhul village site, E.W. Dun has expressed in the Gazetteer of Manipur that “they always build their village just above the spot where the spur of the hill commences its last and steepest descent where the sides of the spur are as precipitous as possible so that it is usually only to enter the village without climbing by the upper and lower end. Generally, they make a ditch across the spur at the upper entrance and a fence of sticks at both ends in places of a stockade. Unlike most of the hill tribes, the sites of their villages are permanent. They are small in the south and increases in size further north.”

The entire village was trenched and fortified. The village gates were strongly put up and alternately guarded by the village male members. Their gates were usually shut at night.

Among the Tangkhuls "each clan or shang had a clear cut boundaries within the village which is divided into a number of 'Khels' or units, one clan constituting one 'Khel'. The boundary of a khel is clearly earmarked."

Nowadays in almost all the villages, we don’t have such clanwise demarcation. Anyone can reside anywhere according to one’s choice and convenience.

**Village Houses:**

Broadly there are three types of houses – (1) Lengchengshim, (2) Mahaishim and (3) Ngashishim.

**Lengchengshim:**

It was mainly built by the village chief and rich men. If such a building was to be constructed by the Chief all the villagers would work voluntarily until the completion of the building. The owners would kill animals and brew special rice beer and feed the builders till the construction work was completed. "Lengchengshim was of kutcha floor, plank walls and single roofed with extra ordinary long eaves (Lengcheng kui) in front . . . The main five pillars on the front side would bear marks of animal heads, foot prints, etc., supposed to be that of animals killed at the time of building this house. Also symbols of human heads (supposed to be the heads taken by the owner) were displayed on these pillars.”

The village headman was permitted the use of specific mark called 'Fachon Kharuk' with the colour of Leishi – Leishai over the Lengchengkui. Such a building was known as

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lengchengshim. Nails were unknown to them and in the indigenous house construction people used cane ropes and creeper plants for binding and holding together.

**Mahaishim:**

Mahaishim was also a similar model of Lengchengshim. It was mainly built by the rich people. The only difference between Mahaishim and Lengchengshim was that in building Mahaishim, the house builder was not allowed to use the colour or design of Leishi – Leishai. He could only use ‘Mahai’ colour. Such building was known as Mahaishim.

**Ngashishim:**

Ngashishim was a thatched house and the model and structure of the building was the same as the two above mentioned models. The only difference was that it was without the "two long eave boards." This kind of house was built by the commoners and the poor people. Such a building was constructed by the relatives and the locals. There was no hard and fast rules that they should be provided with food and drinks during the construction period. It was purely a voluntary one.

In a traditional Tangkhul house, there were mainly two compartments and a porch was also attached. The first compartment served as a place for pounding rice, weaving, storing agricultural tools and some other household articles. It was the main entrance. The porch served for various purposes like storage for animal feeds, trough were kept for feeding pigs, poultry nests

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4. Ibid., P. 7.
were also suspended on the walls of the porch and were sheltered at night. Firewood was also kept for use during rainy seasons. "The inner room behind is a family hall serving a multifarious purpose as a fireplace, kitchen, a bedroom and a store room, congested with foodstuffs, utensils, earthenware, bowls, sourcers, gourd bottles, etc. Over the hearth, racks are suspended from the roof by which meat is dried by exposing it on the smoke. There is no chimney which makes the house smoke-stained." A huge long giant bed called sumkok was placed on the side of the main room which is about 25-27 ft. long, and 8-10 feet wide. This indigenous bed was hewed out of a big giant log. A great number of labourers were needed to bring it home from the jungle. Many carpenters were also employed to make the huge bed. Animals were killed and drink was lavishly distributed during this period. Possession of such type of bed was called "Sumkok Khangkan". The one who has A class (Lengchengshim), building and possessed one or two Sumkokks could become a guardian of a dormitory. In the main room of every house, there was a darker place on the extreme corner known as rumui. In this corner, rice beer was brewed and all the vats were kept.

**Village Life in the Early Period:**

The Tangkhuls were by nature hard working and their daily round of work in those early days were full of activities from morning till evening. After taking morning meal if no enemy was found loitering or lurking around, the villager from young to old walked down to their paddy fields or

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walked up to their jhum-fields or vegetable farms. The men would carry indigenous daos, spear, axe, spade, etc. for work and defence purposes. They also carried small baskets on their back called ‘Sochui’ (Talui dialect) to carry small instruments, dresses, drinks, filled in small bottle rangkheo (guard bottle) and zatrom (lunch pack), etc. The women’s basket was of a different size and shape, quite different from men’s basket. Like men, women put all their agricultural tools along with their lunch packs and drinks. The older women carried their metal staff called ‘zeithing’ in Tangkhul. It was carried mainly to defend themselves from the attack of animals and men. Usually villagers moved out in groups and worked together alternately. People seldom worked alone due to fear of enemy’s attack. Moving and straggling alone was very dangerous and especially women would have to be watched constantly as many women’s heads were taken due to their inability to defend themselves. Moreover a woman’s head with a beautiful stature was valued very high. A.W. Davies said that “the women who in old days, when the manly custom of head hunting was in full swing, always got the worst of it, being unarmed and unable to run as fast as the men.”

As the women were unarmed to defend themselves, many women fell victims of the head hunters. “As common a method as any was for a man to lurk about the waterghat of a hostile village and kill the first woman or child who came to draw water. Sometimes expeditions on large scale were made, several villages combining for the purpose of making a large bag.”


8. Ibid., P. 546.
The whole Naga tribes were head hunters and every male member had a thirst for getting heads.

Head hunting has been practised worldwide and may go back to Paleolithic times. In Europe, the practice survived until the early 20th century in the Balkan Peninsula. In Africa, head hunting was known in Nigeria.

In Kafiristan, (Now Nuristan) Eastern Afghanistan, head hunting was practised till about the end of the 19th century. In the North-East of India, people living south of the Brahmaputra River i.e. Garos, Khasis, Nagas and Kukis were formerly head hunters. In Myanmar several groups followed customs similar to those head hunting tribes of India . . . In Borneo, most of Indonesia, the Phillipines and Taiwan, similar methods of head hunting were practised. Hutchingson Walter wrote in the Custom of the World, Volume I that “in Malay, the barbarous practice of head hunting is a time honoured custom of all the Malays . . . All Malays appear to worship skulls, or to regard them as sacred.”

The Tangkhuls like all other Naga tribes were head hunters. They would never stop or surrender till they take any revenge head. It was also aptly remarked by Butler that “the simplest and most obvious form of head hunting is associated with blood feud, where the duty of vengeance remains unstated till the tally of head is numerically equal.” All the heads taken were prized and taken equally whether man or woman or children provided the child had cut his teeth.

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There were many stories of head hunting. Let me cite one example of a woman’s head taking which was not very long ago. The author’s great grand mother’s head was taken away by a neighbouring village called Huimi while she was working alone in the jhum field. The old lady knowing the enemies advancing towards her, began to run for safety but due to ill fate her right leg got struck in between two logs and she could not proceed further. The enemies quickly advanced towards her and caught hold of her. The old lady knew that it was time for her to bid farewell to this world and die. So, she made her last request i.e. “raikui mathada ranglu” means cut the war head nicely and properly. She then cursed them in heaven’s name and spat on them as a sign of contempt and ill fortune in the days to come. The enemies in a rage instantly killed her and brought the victory war head with shout and yells to their village Huimi. The old lady’s family and Rungsung shang (clan) was so furious and enraged for taking away one of their clan’s head that they started preparation to avenge for the lost head. The war party of Rungsung clan proceeded stealthily towards Huimi village and hid themselves behind the thick bushes of Huimi’s biggest water pond to watch the best lady for a revenge trophy. They waited and waited for the best and at last a beautiful lady with a long hair attired in full Tangkhul costume came down to fetch water. They considered her fit for revenge trophy. The war party in a flash moved out from their hiding places and killed the lady without a word of interrogation. The war party cut the head and joyously brought the victory trophy with shout and yells and by uttering hao – hao till they reached their village Tolloi. The whole night the family clan and villagers sang – danced and drank to their fullest for having recovered their
prestige of losing heads. The same practice is found in Formosa, James, W. Davidson, wrote in the Custom of the World that "in Formosa the event of brave returning unharmed and bearing the much prized head of his victim is an occasion for a great rejoicing, during which dancing and drinking wine are freely indulged."  

The Tangkhuls had their own belief about the value of human heads. They believed that the heads of those belonging to other villages other than their own would add to the fertility of the soil. To quote Hodson on the fertility of human head, he said that "it must also be borne in mind that the successful issue of a raid at the beginning of the cultivating season brings prosperity for the crops."  

Another important step for gaining social recognition in the Naga society was "the number of heads one could capture and the feast of merit one could arrange. These ushered a man to the social ladder of honour and dignity. After bringing a few heads, one was entitled to wear a special type of shawl which the commoner were not permitted to wear. He was then given a special function." Anybody's skull was highly valued and preserved after the performance of certain head taking rites and rituals. The head hunters when they had brought such skulls became elevated in status and became a fascinated figure especially to girls for their acts of valour. The head hunters were awaited at their own village gate and received.

10. Story narrated by Luiyo Rungsung, Road Mahorer on 15/7/1998.
Village people sang folk songs and raised incantations and the head hunters became a magic name, they received a new set of attire and ornaments.\textsuperscript{13}

Inter village wars could be started for various reasons like disputes between the two villages which could not be settled amicably. Land disputes very often caused wars between villages and at times dragged on for some generations. A war could also be originated when its colony failed to pay the customary tributes or the heroes of one village challenging the heroes of another village. "In the days when head-hunting and war were the rule and peace was an exception the villages were in perpetual state of war with each other . . . \textsuperscript{14} There were many stories of inter-village wars. For example, there was an event of inter village wars between Tallui (Tolloi) and Khampha (Sirarakhong) village. The year and date could not be located but according to the story, it is not very long ago, may be just before the coming of the British. During the war, Tallui attacked one ‘Longshim’ (dormitory) of Khampha in the dead of the night when the whole Longshim members and the villagers were fallen fast asleep. They cut-off their heads treacherously and brought the warheads back home joyously with shouts and yells and by saying hao-hao till they reached their village Tallui. It is said that blood ran like a river in Longshim and the tragic scene of blood stained headless bodies lying around the dormitory could not be expressed in words. The song of killing at Khampha Longshim is still sung to-day. The song runs as –

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Oh! Khampa Ramhonda

(Oh! To khampa Ramhon (village name)

Talluina, Talluina, Thinghao Sataye

(Felled down like trees (referred to killing)

Talluina Talluina (by Tolloi Tolloi)

The Khampa villagers were so infuriated with the ghastly scene of killing that they made a vow to take revenge for the lost heads. They started preparing to launch war against Talui (Tolloi) and waited for the best opportune time to avenge. One day, it so happened that a group of Tolloi youths were transplanting rice in a big water field. Tallui youths were also aware of the dangers and took extreme care and precautions. They always came out of their village with full war dress and equipments while going down to their terrace water field or up to their jhum land. While the group worked, the war sentries would guard them around carefully and cautiously. But that day, fortune was not in their favour. Unconsciously, all the sentries put down their spears, doas, shield and warrior dresses around the field and started planting rice along with their group members. Khampa war party watched the scene from another hilltop and took it as an opportune time to march forward and attack them. The war party quickly got ready and advanced stealthily towards the rice planting group. The Tolloi youths were so engrossed in their rice plantation that they could not sense the danger around them. Like the flash of lightning, Khampa people attacked the youths and killed all the youths on the spot. The ghastly killing scene could not be expressed in words. The Tolloi youths had no time to arm themselves and ran for life and fell victim into the hands of their enemies. Water field turned
into bloody field and on the stretch of the field lied the headless bodies. In this way Khampha people took revenge. Khampha songs of taking revenge runs as –

_Oh! Thinghao sataya maniva_

_(Oh! Felled down like trees (killed) both of us)_

_Maniva – yathu ngalunna, Maniva._

_Both of us same match – both of us._

The above song means that men and women of both Tolloi and Khampha were killed like felling of trees one after another by taking revenge alternately. So both agreed that they were of the same match. Neither of them won or lost but alternately they lost and recovered. The spirit of hatred and prejudices lingered on between the two villages even after the early period of Christianisation. It is said that Khampha would never open house if the guests happened to be from Tolloi. However, with the teaching of Christ to forgive and forget, such deep-rooted ill feelings and grudges were completely wiped out and are now in good terms in all aspects of life.¹⁵

Once a warrior decides to go for head hunting or any war, he should not sleep the preceding night with his wife. Women must also observe certain rituals when their husbands were out for war. They should remain chaste, should not borrow fire from neighbours and should not spin nor

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weave. The warriors listened to dreams. If the dreams happened to be of good indications then he would listen to bamboo divination called ‘kapa khayang’ or ‘harkho khayang’ (prediction of events through the position of a killed cock). If the bamboo or the cock’s predictions were good, then the warrior announced his decision to all the inhabitants who were fit to go for war. In case, the prediction was declared unfavourable or gave negative sign the war had to be postponed or cancelled. Slained enemies’ head taken from battle field shall be honoured by celebrating a ritual ceremony called ‘Raisa Khangarung’ (Feast of victory). A pig is killed and the village priest performed the rites under the auspicious of the village council and all the men folk of the village. After the ritual celebration is over, the enemy’s head is imersed in water; a water pond exclusively made for the purpose, and left it there until all the particles fell off from the skull by the process of mutation. Afterwards the skull is brought back to the village and a final rite is performed for preservation of the skull in their village sanctuary called ‘Raikuirar’.

The warrior bringing heads to the village were given a grand reception at the village gate. It was celebrated with dance and songs and with the liveliest demonstration of joy. Domestic animals were killed for the feast and rice beer consumed to the fullest. However, women were restricted in attending such celebrations or ceremonies but were allowed to watch from a distance. Such was the situation and condition of life in the Tangkhul villages during the head hunting period.
Youth Dormitory (Longshim):

All the Naga tribes have a dormitory system generally called Morung in Nagaland. In Tangkhul it is called Longshim. The institutions of youth dormitory is known by different names in different tribal societies. It is Dhumkuria in Oraon, Zawlbuk in Lushai, Citiora in Munda and Ho, Dhangarbas in Bhuinya, Arichu in Ao Naga, Kichuki in Muria.¹⁶

Longshim or dormitory plays the most vital role in shaping a young man’s and a girl’s life. Every khel or locality has its own Longshim both for male and female separately. It is an important institution as it disciplines and educates the young boys and girls. “I have known and employed men trained by both method, the morung and the home and where choice existed, I would choose the marung graduates many times.”¹⁷ The institution of dormitory has made immense impact on the Naga life. In the Longshim (dormitory) they learn the basic principles of community living, mutual understanding and necessity of helping each other.

Varrier Elwin wrote in “A new Deal For Tribal India,” 1963 that the existence of dormitories have contributed to the growth of youth leadership and community development. These institutions have inculcated a sense of discipline and cooperative endeavour among their members and social education through the narration of stories about the traditional tribal heroes,

the teaching of various arts, education in singing and dancing and the practice of religious rites have been among the principal functions.

Both boys and girls after attaining puberty leave their home and go to Longshim. At that age either boy or girl felt ashamed to sleep in their parents house as they would all be sleeping together at the long and huge bed called bedkhok. Once a girl joins the Ngalalong (ladies dormitory) she would continue to sleep there till she is married or betrothed or lost her virginity. Usually in every village there used to be 4 to 10 Longshims for both boys and girls separately according to the number of the youths of the village. The Tangkhuls used the house of a rich man for Ngalalong and the owner of the house would be the guardian of the Longshim’s goers. The Longshim owner should be the one who possesses the huge gigantic wooden bed called ‘Bedkhok’ in Tangkhul which was made of a single wood without using a nail. Generally 5 to 6 persons slept in a row and 4 to 5 such rows, the bedkhok could accommodate about 25 persons. Longshim is like any other institution, which has its own set of rules, and regulations and no outsider can interfere in its administration. The one who breaks the rules of the Longshim is liable to punishment like other villagers for breaking any traditional or customary laws. “The morung is thus not a rival or parallel administrative unit of a village but an institution within the village unit. A marung may aptly be called a microcosm of the village and like the village it has its own council.”18 There are office bearers who look after the proper maintenance of longshim.

"The dormitory is the institution around which the social, political, religious right and military life of the tribes revolve."\(^\text{19}\) It controls the growth of a boy or girl to manhood/womanhood and regulates the daily life of the community. In the Longshim, no favouritism and discrimination is permitted. Every person rich or poor, high or low is treated equally. Differentiation on the basis of wealth and family position is frowned upon and formation of faction or group is not allowed. "The primary aim of all such organisation is to form a classless society having unity and brotherhood."\(^\text{20}\) In the Longshim, they learn the art of weaving, wood curving, net making, cane and bamboo works, etc.

Usually, the long goers get up early in the morning and go to their respective homes to help their parents. Girls help their parents in pounding rice, collecting fire wood from the nearby jungles, fetching water, feeding the domestic animals, gardening, etc. When they are a little free, they will again sit down for weaving and by 8.30 a.m, they will finish their morning meal and get ready for field work. After returning from the field, both boys and girls take their dinner and go back to their respective Longshims. For them, this is the centre of training, merry making, singing feasting and romancing. Boys of other localities or khels would visit girls’ dormitories as it is the time of courting and choice making for partnership.

The boys like the modern guys will put on their finest attire and head dress called Pasi (a kind of head decoration which is made of stripe bamboo


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
and decorated like flower on the top). In the Longshim, they will sing, exchange stories, cut jokes, banter and revel in merry making. However, we should bear in mind that in the Longshim, they do not sit idly by singing or merry making alone. The girls would spin cotton thread with the help of ‘Muirang’ (wooden instrument for spinning thread) or tareng and the men would be busy making bamboo or cane mats, baskets of various designs, wooden bowls, cups, spoons, etc. They also exchange views and ideas through songs. While singing both boys and girls put questions and answers in songs alternately. Some men played ‘tingteila’ (an indigenous Tangkhul musical instrument). The music harmonised the song and the girls spinning of yarn also blend with the rhythm of the songs. In fact, once spirit is lifted up and the joys one enjoyed could not be measured. In the longshim, they forget everything of household chores, the days of hard works and any hardships of life. As they sing, their worries are swept away like the breeze on the seashore and a feeling of joy enthrone their hearts. To quote Dr. M. Horam’s views on the importance of singing among the Tangkhul Nagas, he says that “of all the activities, singing is most popular as it were, for with the Tangkhuls, as indeed with most Naga, singing comes as naturally as breathing”

In fact, the people of those days were very simple, honest and possessed high moral character. Though they were always together at the dormitory and the loving sighs and scenes enveloped the whole atmosphere, they were never indulged in promiscuity as it is now with the modern

youths. Had the system of Longshim continues to-day, the sanctity of the institution might have been spoilt by the cheap behaviour of the modern youth.

Some folk songs sung in the Ngalalong (girls dormitory) runs as under:

*Woman* - *Oh! Pasina Kashintenga*

*Malao Pheikhuk tenga,*

*Nathum khi pharalo!*

*Men* - *Oh! Khipharano*

*Nathum himkhalao*

*Rayangna*

**English version:**

*Women* - *Oh! ‘Pasi’²² hangs down upto waist*

*Malao²³ reaches upto knee,*

*Oh! What for you come?*

*Men* - *Oh! Coming to join your merry making*

*And court you.*

2nd Song:

*Men* - *Naomako, kazing yanghorra.*

*Yamthuivana Wunreila meisumrei,*

*Maruisuila namak yikheosa.*

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²² *Pasi* – Decorated male headdress made of bamboo.

²³ *Malao* – Cloth worn by men around their waist which is knotted in front and the fringe hangs down up to the knees.
English version:

Hellow comrades, the dusk set in
Let's go to Wunreila's fire place
(referred to Longshim's fire place)
Let me just go and see her sparkling eyes
Though can't win her heart.

Women - Oh! Namak yikheolaka
I lung petkhuk yaryo ningyuila Sanna.

English version:

Oh! gazing the sparkling eyes
Sitting on the Longshims' giant bed
Frustrated youth looks misery and planks.24

The above song sung by women is a song of unsuccessful and unconquerable love.

The proper functioning of the Longshim has gone but we cannot out-rightly conclude that the system has been totally extinct from the present Tangkhul society. Its practice is still revived during the festival of 'Mangkhap' Luira, Yarra, etc. During these festivals, young boys and girls of the same village according to age-wise grouped together in one house till the festival is over in the form of Longshim. The only difference is that they sleep in their respective houses.

24. Interviewed with Mrs. Somila Shangzam, Cultivator, Tolloi, 12/6/1999
Marriage:

Marriage is a sacred institution which had been ordained by God since the beginning of life. According to Webster English Dictionary, "marriage is an institution whereby men and women are joined in a special and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family".

In Tangkhul society marriage within the clan is strictly forbidden by the law of exogamy. The Tangkhuls also knew the evils of consanguineous marriage and if any one marries against the customary law, they are even chased out from the village and sometimes they are excommunicated by the society and no one works nor will anyone associate with them. However, the customary law allows cross cousin marriage, i.e. sister's son can marry brother's daughter but vice-versa marriage is strictly forbidden by the law and considered as the worst form of marriage.

There are broadly two types of marriage – love marriage and arrange marriage. There are only a few instances of arranged marriage. The establishment of Longshim can be considered as one of the main causes of love marriage. Other communities like Hindus and Muslims whose women are strictly confined at home may find it strange. In fact, one should understand the sanctity of Longshim and should not merely misinterpret the sleeping of the youth in the Longshim. The Tangkhuls have maintained high moral standard since time immemorial. They considered morality as their highest code of ethics. Anyone who indulges in any immoral action is looked down and frowned upon by the society and they will not have any public respect or position in the society. They would be considered as second-class citizens. There is a saying in Tangkhul that 'a girl's life is just
like an egg. Once it breaks, it is lost and gone forever. Therefore, a woman who loses her virginity in her youth does not have any bright future in her life. The stain of moral indecency will linger on as long as she lives and the story is even passed down to the next generation. Still in the present society, such moral ethic is strictly upheld by every Tangkhul. Parents take extreme precautions to educate their children on good moral foundation.

In Tangkhul, wooing and courting may be considered as the first step of love. In a society where there is free mixing of boys and girls, wooing and courting is quite natural. R.R. Shimray gives his views on this point and says that “whatever the forms of marriage, wooing and courting is a very important stage in a Naga’s life. Once he attains, a marriageable age, he starts the journey of love making which may be sweet or bitter.”25

When the lovers decide to marry, they know that it is time for them to approach their parents for approval. If the parents accept then they are engaged. For some the proposals may be flatly rejected. An example of such rejected proposals on the question of family status is Maitonphy Lungleng and Shimreishang Zimik’s love story. There is a saying in Tangkhul that “Thingreirali Paisara mangareipaimana – means a small money plant cannot creep over a big Thingreira” (jungle robe). It is a comparison of the poor family and the wealthy noble family. Phungcham Ashang’s Zimik marriage proposal was flatly rejected on the ground that the young girl Maitonphy was no match for him due to her family status. Maitonphy was the beauty  

queen of her time. Their love story is being compared with that of the romance of Romeo and Juliet by the Tangkhuls. After the rejection, the girl was forced to get married to another villager of a noble family arranged by Maitonphy’s family in spite of her strong resistance. Aton could no more wait for Ashang as the latter could not convince his parents and did not have any courage to take her by any other means. So she later agreed to her parents’ proposals as she came to understand the futility of waiting for Ashang. She did give a hint of the decision to Ashang and kept it secret but Ashang could not understand and was not aware of her wedding preparation and on the day of her send off, Aton with heavy heart proceeded towards her fiance’s village. Ashang followed the wedding party and gave his signals by blowing a trumpet. Aton knew that it was signaled by Ashang to wait for him. She started making many excuses that she could not walk very fast as she was tired and requested the wedding party to take rest but the party were aware of the consequences if Ashang got over the party and refused to comply with the request of Aton. By the time Ashang reached Aton’s new village, the village gate was already closed and Ashang could not enter the village. With heavy heart and remorse, he returned to his village.

Ever since her departure from the village, Ashang became very depressed and for him life was not worth living. He only longed for death but death stood miles and miles away. For him life without Aton was not worth living. One day as he was dreaming about his beloved Aton, a bee came buzzing around him. He removed a hair from his head and tied it on the bee and wished that the bee would fly over the mountains and rivers and take it to his beloved Aton, symbolising his undying love for her.
Mysteriously, the bee understood his feelings. As the bee hummed around him, Ashang sang thus:

“Oh leishi Maiton, samha chiphun
Rashunglo, marashunglo sam
Kaha khanga yei, kaha khangayee”

“My beloved Aton
Herewith I send you a hair
Through this mystic honey bee,
Will you ever receive it”

The bee flew past over the mountains, dales, rivers etc. and came humming around Aton as she was basking in the sun outside her husband’s house. As Aton swung her hand to drive away the bee, accidentally her ring finger got entangled with a hair which was being tied on the bee. Aton instinctively knew that it was sent by her beloved Ashang and she immediately removed a tiny bead from her necklace and hooked it to the same hair of the mystic messenger requesting it to take it back to her beloved Ashang.

Aton sang as the bee circled around her—

*Khangayei kaha, isungli rayiya,*

*Kongsang shatmi, kaphung khani kanuwa,*

*Phao yazak matheiya*

English:

*The mystic bee comes humming round my bosom,*

*Herewith I send a bead in return;*

*It flew past two hills, to my love*

*I could not see.*

The bee did take it back to Ashang. He understood that it was from Aton and he holds the bead in his palm with deep emotion.

Ashang was seriously sick and was about to die but even on his dead bed he continued calling Aton as “Oh Aton, can I have a glimpse of your angelic face before I die!” So Aton was called out from her village on some pretext. The moment Aton came in, his strength miraculously returned and he sat up on his bed. Aton fed him with good wine and food with the most tender and loving manner. Aton’s heart was broken as the one handsome and healthy young man had become just like a skeleton. Both looked at each other with deepest unbearable emotions with tears running down on their cheeks. As Ashang could no more linger on, he made his last request to put her right thumb inside his mouth. He bit her finger very hard and breathed

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27. Ibid., P. 91.
his last. It is said that due to severe biting and shock, Aton also died along with him. Both of them died without fulfilling their love on the ground of family obstruction. After their death, their parents conducted ‘Khong Theng Khayang’ ‘magical device to see lives of dead people through a priest and could see both of them being united in the land of the dead.

**Engagement:**

When the proposal is agreed by both the parents, then immediately engagement for marriage is done. The boy’s father along with some elders of the clan usually go at night to the residence of the girl where the elders or delegates of both the clans finalise the decision for marriage ceremony. For the occasion, the girl’s family has to arrange everything and kill an animal. If the boy happens to be the eldest son of the parents, the greater share of the family property should be given to him. On that night, the boy’s family declares the property ‘movable or immovable’ to be given to the boy as his share by the parents in the presence of elders belonging to both the clans.

In between the engagement and marriage, the girl is engaged in weaving the best shawl for her fiancé. She will give special attention in all the designs and patterns she is going to put in her shawl. The reason is that the community will talk and judge of her handiwork when her fiancé wears the shawl at any village function and festivals.

When the weaving is completed, the girls’ family fixes a date and inform to the boy’s family. Her fiancé along with some of his close friends and family members will come for the Kachon Khami shawl presentation function. The girl’s family would kill one pig for the occasion. After
roasting the pig, the head of the pig is cut off and only the inner portion of the animal is cooked on the day of ‘Kachon’ khemi night. The rest is given to the groom’s family.

**Traditional wedding:**

On the eve of the marriage, the girl’s friends, relatives and the villagers feast the whole night at the bride’s house. They will sing, dance take up some entertainment programmes and drink the best-brewed rice beer. The girl and her family will be busy preparing and arranging for the next day wedding dress, ornaments and the things that are to be carried to her would be husband’s house. Besides, dress and ornaments, the parents also presented the most neatly woven basket called ‘supthim’ and other household articles that will be useful for her new home. Besides that a bowl full of specially cooked meat and the best rice beer of two guards containers are also presented to her. Her parents presented costly Tangkhul jwelleries and some other articles.

**Dress:**

The bride and groom will wear traditional marriage costume on their wedding day. The bride will put on ‘Phangyai Kashan’ (Tangkhulskirt), which is considered the best in the olden days and adorns herself with beautiful ornaments, armlets, leggings, headdress and a huge costly necklace called ‘kongsang’ in Tangkhul. This ‘kongsang’ is made of different colour of beads “*a set of beads (Kongsang) similar to ruby and emerald are arranged immaculately on the heads and also one set to cover the breast. To bring the adornment to perfection, of gold like earring is worn dangling the*
A waist belt comprising of four to five chains are also fastened on the waist. The last ornament to put on is ‘huishon’ which is fastened on the head which is similar to a big chain and with two bells at each end. Before the introduction of blouse and tops which are used today “a broad cloth is used whose opposite are taken up and knotted over the shoulders, covering the back and bosom, another large cloth being worn shawl wise.” She then takes her ‘zeithing’ (women’s metal staff). The use of staff by every woman is for the purpose of self-defence from both men and animal. After finishing all the arrangements, she is escorted to the groom’s house by her friends and relatives which is usually done at night.

**Women mediator or Ngala Kazat:**

‘Ngala Kazat’ means woman mediator. She takes the message of the boy’s marriage proposal to his parents. In those days, some boys did not have the courage to convey such message to their parents, so a woman mediator is employed to give the massege to the girl’s parents. As she plays an initial role in uniting the two, she is given an important role on their wedding day. The bride and groom presented one ‘kashan’ (skirt) as a sign of their gratitude. The woman mediator leads the bride to her groom’s house. The girl’s family presented two big pieces of pork and a special cooked rice called ‘muilazat’. It is called ‘manui zat’ in Tangkhul and in English it may be termed as sticky rice. It is a special kind of rice for making rice cake, rice beer, etc., a guard full of best wine and a bowl of salt is also put in the lady’s

28. L. Ragni — *Tangkhul Wung Naga Festival : Naga Seed Sowing Festival, ANSUM (1980), Imphal,*
mediator basket and she walks a little ahead of the bride and her party. The lady mediator lights the pine torch and leads the bride to her groom’s house. The groom’s family seeing the rarrival of the bride’s party, come out of the house by lighting pine torches to welcome the new bride and her party. As the party reaches the groom’s house, the lady mediator goes behind the bride and lets her stand in front to meet her groom’s family. As she approaches the maindoor, she will find one ‘hao tin’ (Tangkhul indigeneous spade) right in front of the doorstep. She will set aside the spade with her ‘zeithing’. It is also a customary practice to give her first step into the house with her right foot. She then enters the main room of the house and after having been seated, takes out what she has brought from her parent’s house and she distributes drinks and meat to all gathered in the house. The special drinks and meat are given to her husband. The ‘muila zat’ or sticky rice is given to the clan’s women. There is plenty of meat and drink and singing, dancing dominates the hour. There is a folk song competition between the two parties. There are also wrestling competition between the two families without which it is believed that the couple do not prosper. The bride then gives away clothes to her in-laws as a sign of love and respect to her husband’s family. She also presents a skirt (kashan) to the woman mediator without whom the marriage would not have been possible. She then shows ornaments, utensils and other things which her family presented to her. If the bride happens to be from different village, one dog is usually killed for the gate-keeper for opening the village gate. However, with the coming of Christianity, most of the life style including marriage has changed. ‘Harkhokhayang’ before engagement and some other practice have been
opped. In fact, conversion to Christianity has altogether changed the marriage system in the Tangkhul Naga society.

**Position of women:**

The Tangkhuls, like all other Naga tribes has patriarchal system and vice father is the head of the family. Headship of the father does not signify that mother's role in the family and society is very little and inferior that of a man. She enjoys great freedom both in her marital life and in the price of her husband. A girl is never married against her will, and in the husband's home, the wife occupies a high position and her children are treated well. The Tangkhul housewives are not a drudge or a beast of burden exercise a firm hand in family affairs. She is the heart and centre of the family. She is unlike the women of Kirgiz and Altain of central Asia where th assign to woman "a position of distinct inferiority. The Kirgiz, . . . under the influence of Islam, treat their wives with much severity than the ain Turks."30 In the Tangkhul society we do not find such instances of using women at the lowest level of the society, depriving many rights and abilities. She enjoys ample freedom and rights when young and married. om childhood until her marriage, her life is a period of training. She is ver made to feel that she belongs to the weaker section.

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During any festival both men and women dance together in groups. In certain dances like war dance and Thisam dance (dance for the death) women are restricted to participate. In dancing though both men and women dance together in a vigorous rhythmic serpentine circle moving forward and backward, the male and female dancers never touched each other. Even in dancing, Tangkhuls followed strict rules regarding chastity. Traditionally a girl is not to be touched by any male member before her marriage. “A casual glance may seem that Tangkhul girls are very liberal in their approach to sex. In fact, they suffered under many constraints. They were always haunted by the idea of getting pregnant and consequential action that the society she belonged might take. If a girl loses her virginity before marriage, her value on the marriage market slumps and her status in the society stands low.”

A girl started helping her mother since her childhood days. She is to wake up at dawn and collect firewood, fetch water and help her mother in household chores. She helps her parents in looking after her younger brothers and sisters when they are away. Besides these, they help their parents in their field works. In fact, she is trained in all the activities at home and when she runs a home of her own, she tackles it very easily and shoulders the workload of a mother.

After her marriage, most of the domestic affairs of the family falls under her supervision. Husband is the head of the family but wife is the queen of her home. Both husband and wife share their works. They work

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together like a good bullock cart in rain or in sunshine. However, the greater lot of household works falls upon the woman. Tangkhul women can be praised and be proud of their activeness in any kind of work. From dawn till late night, she works and toils with a cheerful heart without a word of complaint. She often carries her baby and perform household chores. Time is very precious for her at home and in the field. At night she will flicks the cotton or rolls the yarn for weaving.

Rest was a luxury for the mother. She is the busiest member of the family and society, Verrier Elwin extracts from H.B. Brawny, "The wild tribes of India,(1882) on the activeness of Naga women in general that as a rule the Naga women is a model labour and industry and is mainly valued on that account."32 John Butler speaks of Angami women that they are chaste, faithful, merry and unlike their brothers never to be seen idle. Their duty is to fetch the wood, cook the food and brew the liquor besides working in the fields and weaving clothes at home. This is true for Tangkhul women too.

When everybody in the house are falling fast asleep, the lady of the house will wake up while it is still dark and begins her daily round of works. She will make fire and finish all her routine works of cooking, fetching water, pounding rice and collecting firewood from the nearby jungles. All these activities are finished before the daybreak. In case, in between the meals if she finds any time she will be on the loom or in the vegetable

garden. Then she feeds her children, husband and the family. Having done all these activities, she goes to the pady field or jhum field and return home with vegetables or a bundle of fire wood in her basket. As soon as she reaches home, she will again quickly prepare food, feed the domestic animals and then give food to her family members. After having done all these activities, she will again prepare rice for brewing rice beer, flicks cotton, spins thread for weaving and sometimes made sticky rice cake for her children. She is the last to retire at night and the first to wake up. However the utmost duty is giving moral instructions to her children, disciplining and giving training in various works or activities like field works, hand work, weaving and any training that her children should know according to the trend of the existing society.

When the women are a little free from their work, say after the harvest, she will be busy weaving clothes for the ensuing winter season and for the whole family. She also takes special care of the family granery and try to store food for the whole year. Shortage of food grain is a shame as people consider that family unwise and lazy. "The Naga characteristics of feeling great shame is begging or living as a parasite may be attributed to the training he received in his home as a child. Self-help is always encouraged and dependence of any form is frowned upon."33

The husband expects absolute fidelity from his wife and vice-versa. It is not an exaggeration that once a girl marries, she is very loyal and faithful

to her husband till they are separated by death. In the modern times many Tangkhul girls have married to another communities and one will notice that she absorbs quickly to her husband's community and remain loyal to her husband.

Another way of showing virginity sign is that the girls keep their heads shaven till betrothal or marriage. However, after marriage the women keep their hair long and cutting of hair is regarded as disrespect to her husband.

Some of the important functions entrusted to women are during 'Chumphu phanit' i.e. granary festival. The opening rites of taking out the first basketful of new paddy from the granary after the harvest is traditionally performed at night when all the male members are out in the field. On this auspicious day, it is a customary duty for the male members of the family to go out and sleep in their respective paddy fields huts. It is done due to their belief that if any male member by chance happens to see her performance of conducting rites and rituals of taking out her first basket full of paddy, it is premonitioned that any ill luck may come to him or family. In order to evade all such unpredictable misfortunes, such performance of puja is usually done in the absence of her husband and any male members of the family.

Women also acted as peacemakers during inter-village war. For instance, Pukreila is a woman who is married to a man of another villager. Whenever a war broke out between her old village and husband's village, she is granted special prerogative to stop the war. She can move freely between her former village and husband's village. For her security, a special
act is enacted as ‘Pukreila’ pang kashara means no man can lay a hand on Pukreila. During the war, she would negotiate the two villages and through her wise diplomatic policies, she could settle any inter-village fueds between the two villages without any bloodshed. There are also instances of becoming deep rooted enemies due to unwise ceilings of Pukreila. There is a saying that “Shanao eina phila wungnao akui tai, shanao eina sapher khama har, zamshei khamaying ngathay” which means “because of a woman princes lost their heads, because of a woman, the best food, the best wine are exchanged.” There are also instances where Pukreila along with the village councillors could not settle inter village rivalry. In such cases the two villages would fix a day and place where they would decide the case by physical trial. All the surrounding villages are informed to witness and the villagers are allowed to stand around the war zone and watch the fighting. A special law is enforced and the fighters are strictly warned to follow the rules and regulations of the war. In such kind of battle called ‘Ngashung rai’, face-to-face war, throwing spears against the enemies is not permitted. If one acted against the rules, the villagers who are watching the scene around will punish him under the Tangkhul customary laws of war.

In case the fighting continues for hours and no party wins or surrenders, Pukreila would step in and stand amidst the two warring parties (her former village and husband’s village) and intervene in the fighting. Even the severest fighting can be intervened by her. She then would hold her zeithing (metal walking staff) and stand in between the two warring parties.

34. Y.K., Shimray, Pukreila, unpublished manuscripts.
The moment she lifts up her zeithing and announces for peace, all the fightings should be stopped immediately. Both the parties will put down their spears and unarm themselves. As the fighters know the customary laws of empowering such women, the rights to stop war, no one dares to go against her words and strike a hand on her. Her word is the end of the fight and the case is to be compromised. That is the end of everything. She acted as an ambassador of peace. Harming Pukreila means violation of the inter-state laws which may cause a war by all the villagers combined against the breaker of the law of war. "Thus when two villages failed to decide a dispute, the last word is from a woman. A prerogative of such a high honour has never been given to a man."\(^{35}\) She enjoyed full diplomatic immunity. Nobody could lay hands on her. She was called a "Peace-maker", the bearer of the torch of peace and the 'Red Cross' bearer of Naga inter-village war.\(^{36}\)

In social and political activities women have little share. They were rather engaged in the production process and in the management of the house. In the village administration, women were not given representation and thus debarred them from joining the decision making process. She can only appear and have the right to say when her case was put up in the village court. She participates in the village administration through indirect process by influencing her husband, father, brother and any councillor. Many husbands who took active role in the village and regional politics were enlightened by their wife's diplomatic and wise counsels as the saying goes, "behind every great man there is a woman."

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
But we cannot outrightly conclude that women never joined in politics. There were exceptions like Harkhonla of Marem village. Her Story was never forgotten by the Tangkhuls. She was elected to the Village Council as well as in the Range Council. She led the warriors of her village in war as the commander-in-chief. So complete was her domination over her people that the villagers submitted themselves wholly to her leadership in politics and war. Besides Harkhonla of Marem, Kaireila of Tallui (Wife of Tolloi Chiefs’) was a good decision maker and a judge. All the important meetings of the Chief in councils are presided over by her to discuss the important issues of the village and inter-villages and in making the policies and programmes of the village. She usually crossed her legs and sat amidst the councillors and sip the zam from zamsham (filtered liguar prepared in liguor vats). Usually it is a taboo for a woman to cross legs before men and sip ligour together with men but since Kaireila was an extraordinary woman of high caliber and a dynamic leader, the councillors wholly supported and submitted to her leadership. Many difficult cases of the village and inter villages were decided and concluded under her dynamic leadership. After the death of her husband she took the rein of her husband. She led her councillors to the Long meetings and in the court. People of those days looked at her with awe and wonder as she was more dynamic and wiser than many of her contemporary village chiefs of the Tangkhuls.”

37 Z.V Free Paoothing - Status of Tangkhul women, 1994- P. 68
38 Interviewed with Rosalind Lungleng, Tolloi, 21-7-2000.
in the modern times we find women taking active participation in the state and regional politics directly and indirectly. Since 1947, the political situation among the Tangkhuls is marked by voting pattern of electorate, particularly women and their right to even contest in the election. In 1947, Late, Mrs. Shiningla Keishing for the first time in the history of Tangkhul was nominated in the Manipur Territorial Legislative Assembly. Late Mrs. Hangmila Shaiza was the first popularly elected woman of Manipur in the Manipur Legislative Assembly on Janata Dal ticket from Ukhrul Constituency in 1990. Valley Rose Hungyo has been the President of Janata Dal from Ukhrul Constituency in 1990. 39

The Tangkhul women cannot be ill treated by her husband or inlaws. In case her husband mistreats, beats up or she faces any trouble, her brothers, clan and relatives would come to her rescue and save her. But in most cases many women silently suffer in her husband’s house in order to keep her husband’s and family prestige as it would become the talk of the village. In this respect, J.P. Mills speaks of Ao woman which is also similar with the Tangkhul women, “An Ao woman is very far from being a slave and a drudge. Her position is not much inferior to that of a man. She always has her clan behind her, and a bad tempered husband to bully his wife, he would soon have a swarm of angry inlaws buzzing around his ears, and his wife would promptly leave him. All her life, a woman enjoys considerable freedom”40 “The married woman is always consulted by her husband in all domestic and family affairs. She helps him in taking any decision and shares

in both domestic and field works. Von Furer Haimendorf wrote in his book "the Naked Nagas" about Naga women as "many women in more civilised parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages."

Naga women are well built, hard working and fairly good looking and never stay idle, instead do something all the time. "Naga women enjoy as much social rights as their men counterparts. One may be astonished to learn that on the question of social status and individual liberty, they are in a much better position than their sisters in other states of India who claim to be more advanced. They stand equal to men in every sphere of life and need not entirely depend on the earning of the male members. Often they compliment family earnings by their own which sometimes surpass the man's earnings. They being very painstaking and industrious never felt helpless even if the husband dies or divorce the wife. She steers clear the helm of competent hand."\(^{41}\)

**Tangkhul Festivals:**

The Tangkhuls like all other Naga tribes are sociable and hard working tribe. From the beginning of the year till December, they are engaged in various field works and festivals. Festivals are mostly agriculture oriented, usually before the beginning of cultivation and after finishing the

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field works, a festival always follows. These festivals are observed with dancing, singing, eating and drinking which are considered as the four main highlights of each festival. There are many festivals which are observed by the Tangkhuls. Let us examine some of the most important and remarkable festivals.

**Luirea Phanit (Festival):**

Luirea festival is observed in the month of February every year. It is the first and the biggest festival. This festival lasted for at least 11 to 12 days. It is a festival to commemorate the first seed sowing of crops, fruits and vegetables of a year and is celebrated with dancing, singing and feasting in their best colourful costumes. According to a Tagkhul tradition, the chief of the village should be the first person to sow seeds by performing certain sacrificial rites. It is considered a taboo to violate this traditional law. In case one breaks this law, it is believed that the crop production of the year would be very low and the village as a whole may face famine. (“From the first to the third day, travellers and traders are not allowed to enter the village for fear that they may bring in evil spirit and bad luck. This taboo is known as khasit.”) The villagers are also restricted to move out from their village. The village gates are locked and flagged with branches and twigs over the gate. The restriction of entering into the village is let known to the surrounding villages by burning around the fields and garden.

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The fourth day marks the real beginning of the festival which is initiated with the killing of animals like pigs, buffaloes etc. On this very day, the village headman goes to his paddy field with his wife and performs the first sowing sacrifice by killing a chicken. The offering is done to the goddess of wealth called ‘Phunghui Philava’. 43

The fifth day is the day for the public to offer sacrifice to the goddess of wealth. Generally the family sacrifice is done by the oldest members of the family. A handful of cleaned paddy is put in a leaf and blood is sprinkled over the paddy. It is then sown near the hut of the family paddy field alter. After sprinkling chicken’s blood over the sacrificial alter with prayers to the goddess Phunghui Philava, the feathers of the chicken are all planted around the alter and returned home.

Having done all these sacrificial rites to the goddess of wealth (Phunghui Philava), the people then start their real festive activities such as singing, dancing, eating, drinking, etc. It is from this day that the true pageantry of colourful festival is focussed by initiating the following games and sports.

a) Laa khanganui (Beauty contest)
b) Thingneira khangakhun (Tug of War)
c) Khangatuk (Wrestling)
d) Zeipa khangaphar (Zevelin throw)

43. Ibid.
Laa Khanganui (Beauty contest or virginity test):

One of the most outstanding features of Lüira Phanit is Laa Khanganui or virgin dance. In this particular dance, only virgins can only participate. On that auspicious day, women of different age groups, after taking a good bath, oiled their hair and body and finally dressed themselves with the best traditional dance costumes and ornaments. The girls put on Phangyei kashan (skirt) which is a combination of red and black with colourful designs, a pair of brass bangles, one set of kongsang over her breast and other set of kongsang over her head dangling at the ends over the ears. To bring the adornment to perfection, a long chain of golden in colour is fastened to the neck and at the end of the two extremes, dangled two bells. The bells tinkle as they move in circular motion turning their backs on the spectators. “Moving like the rock bees (SHIRENG) over beehives when disturbed, the girls in the most graceful movements beaconed the spectators- young and old who surround the place much before the competitionon started. Like PAHUWON (type of flower found along the river bank), the girls in uniform moved the hands, legs and figures gracefully according to the tune of the music sung by themselves and the young people started judging the figures, the cuttings the blossoms . . .”

If a virgin refuses to join the dance, her character is questioned and suspected. She is no more considered as virgin and without any further investigation a fine of one pig is imposed on her. On the other hand, if she

44. One of the costliest Tangkhul necklaces worn only on important occasions.
joins the dance for fear of punishment and to conceal her immorality from the public, it is believed that some insects would disturb her while dancing. Such an unfaithful girl is fined according to the customary laws and in case of her denial, physical check up would be conducted and if it is proved, a double fine would be imposed on her. Thus laa khanganui or virgin dance is "the secret declaration of virginity." Among the dancers, the most beautiful girl is made the hostess of the ensuing feast called 'yarra' (youth festival) which would be shortly followed after 'luiira' festival.

This beauty contest has been in practice since time immemorial. Virginity is the highest code of conduct of the Tangkhul women.

**Thingreira Khangakhun s (tug of war):**

Thingreira Khangakhun is an interesting game which is played mainly during Luiira Phanit (festival). There is no age bar in joining this game. Every young and old, boys and girls of all ages can join. The rope is also pulled long wise (ward wise). Touching the rope is believed to be a great blessing. They call it "Seichang Khamei Khamayut." Mothers carried their small babies on their back and let their children touch the rope. People who went out to other villages would also come back in time to join the Thingreira Khangakhun. The winning party would possess the rope which will be divided among the whole locality or ward on the last date. Each house is given a piece of the rope in order to bring good luck and prosperity.

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47. Ibid.
**Khangatuk (wrestling):**

Tangkhuls very often wrestle in any festival and especially on marriage feast. It is only a gradation of strength of the youth and also to witness the strongest man of the locality or village. Tangkhul wrestling is a peculiar type. "*They do not hold on clothes as other tribes do. They stand straight, touching the opponent with the right shoulder only... A slight touch on the ground with the hand is declared defeated. The game is limited to two rounds only. If one is let down twice, his opponent will be declared the victor.*" Even if defeated, the players congratulate each other without any ill-feelings. There is no bitterness or pride.

**Zeina khanga phar (Zavelin throw):**

This game is also another way of showing strength and art of the youth. Dignifications of one’s locality is the appetite of each and every individual. “Hence only the salubrious, robust and vigorous youth are let to participate in the game.”

**Y arra (Youth festivals):**

Yarra or youth festival is a special festival for young people. It comes off in April, when the world is adorned with colourful flowers and fresh green leaves. Usually, the celebration is done on groupwise and the young folks organise grand feast in the house of their respective beauty queen.

48. Y.K. Shimray - Khangatuk’ (wrestling), Unpublished manuscript.
selected during the last festival. It is the month of merry-making and jubilation, many songs are sung during this festival by the youths in praise of the beauty of nature and “many impromptus songs are composed by sighing lovers, and as such this is a season of poetry, song and dance.” A yarra laa or song runs as-

“O katang kara kumlo,
(O, when shall the season change?)
Kapaiwon saihar won wanaya,
(Pear flowers, cherry flowers bloom)
Iya, raosei ji kei,
(In order to pluck)
Iya semya semvaya
(I run hither and thither (shall)”)  

The above song indicates that the men and women long for the arrival of yarra phanit (festival) for its many pleasures and merry-making. Even the married person and children join in the feasting. First of all, they will find out a house for hosting the feast. After finding the house for feasting, they would collect rice for brewing rice beer in advance for the festival.

51. Ibid, P. 59.
When the festival arrives, they will kill animals and collect vegetables from the field. Generally the youngest yarnaoo (society) do not kill or buy meat. They catch fish, crabs or collect any vegetable from the field and give it to the senior yarnaoo. They in return give them meat for their feast. During this festival, each group also prepared rice cake which is made of a special rice called sticky rice. This rice cake is called 'khamui dalu'. The festival goes on for a long period in feasting, drinking, eating, singing, etc. The feast of the youths are longer than the married persons, old aged groups and children. Even now, the festival is observed with great festive mood and gaiety by killing animals.

Mangkhap Phanit (Festival after the completion of cultivation):

Mangkhap festival is observed after the completion of heavy ploughing, seeding and rice transplantation with much eating, drinking, feasting and merry-making. This festival usually falls during the month of July which is more or less the beginning of the lean months. But ignoring the consideration of lean seasons ahead, they lavishly draw out grains from their granaries and enjoyed the festival. They wished to have a complete rest after days of long toils and heavy field works with drinks, meat, etc. This festival is observed especially to regain and replenish the lost energy. The best enjoyment of the festival is marked by invitation of relatives from other villages and from the local village itself. They have song competition, dances, etc. This festival is still observed in the same old ways with some modifications and by adding certain Christian norms.
Chumpha festival:

This festival is meant for first opening and utilising the granaries after the harvest. On the eve of chumpha festival, one young boy of each family takes a small guard container and goes to fetch water from the stream or any source which the villagers consider as the purest water. All the ponds of the village are cleansed thoroughly every year especially on the eve of this festival. "Early the next morning a woman of high standing will first draw water from the well that has been refilled with spring water over the night . . . water drawn first by an immoral person is believed a precursion of misfortune, epedemic, etc. through the year." 52 One unique feature of the Tangkhul is that since their naked days, they take special care for drinking water and they drink only pure and boiled water which is cleansed from time to time.

It is a taboo to start eating new rice till chumpha festival is observed and necessary rites or pujas are performed to the goddess of wealth by the women. On this day, male members usually stay out of home for two consecutive nights, as it is a bad omen to witness ritual. In that case "he finds no success in hunting and fishing or taking of heads and during war" 53

A family that has a new bride will kill animals and make special prayers for her prosperitry. They call this 'Chumsinsa'. For the bride or the young woman, it is the first time in her life to enter into the barn as a

housewife. After performing the ritual and rites with her mother-in-law at the barn, they will all sit around the family hearth and her mother-in-law will vacate her stool and let her sit on it. The significance of vacating the stool is that the young bride is then given charge of every household works and has become the mistress of the house. “With the opening of the granaries, one could start blowing the bugles upto the end of the soul separation ceremony after which the used of bugles was strictly forbidden. Having filled the granaries, their most touching duty was to bid farewell to the souls of the dead.”

**Khana Kasa (Boring ears):**

Khana kasa is an ear piercing festival which is being observed for two days. Richmen usually kill animals like pigs, cows, etc. Poor men generally kill chicken and give cooked sticky rice for the children. Ear boring and piercing ceremony should be performed by an old priest. A bamboo mat is spread and a wooden stool is placed on the mat. The old priest will sit in the middle of the mat and those children who are going to pierce their ears stand in rows. One after another the children will come and the priest will place his or her head on the stool and pierce their ears. He will then insert a black thread to retain the holes. It is their belief that after boring of ears, the child is blessed and bear a significant sign that the child belongs to a family of the village.

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Thisam Phanit (Festival for the dead):

Thisam festival is observed for twelve days. It takes place at about the end of January each year. There is a strong belief that souls of the dead do not leave the world till a special farewell ceremony is performed. From the date of their death till the farewell ceremony, the dead souls are believed to join the family at every meal. For that purpose "Thikhong, meaning plate for the dead is placed with a clean sheet of cloth on the Naga stool or on raised wooden platform"55 The food that is offered to the dead is then collected and given to children as it is taboo for the elders to taste any portion of it for fear of following their souls with the soul of the dead.

In the land of the dead (Kazeiram) Kokto is the king. All the dead will meet Kokto at Kazeiram and lived under its rule. So in order to please and appease the Kokto, certain rituals of singing accompanied by Hao – Haoing (Khamahon) is being conducted and a traditional Tangkhul shawl is also "earmarked for him when the dead was buried and the remaining shawls of the dead were torn in the margin so that Kokto might not take them away."56

Thisham is marked by killing buffaloes, pigs and other animals which the family can kill in the name of their dead family members. The animal that will be killed in their name will become the animal of the dead in the other world according to their beliefs. Some old people get ready with articles, shawls or any thing that will be needed in the next world during

55. Ibid., P. 151.
56. Ibid.
their life time, He sometimes tell his children, the songs to be sung and the number of animals to be killed on the day of his death. The deceased is always presented with many gifts.

From the first day of Thisam festival till the seventh day, the preparation for the last rites goes on like collecting robes for killing buffaloes, pine woods for using as torch for the rites, makig rice cakes, brewing rice beer and hanging up of clothes, etc.

On the tenth day, all the effigies are brought to a particular place and are arranged in order on a big mat. The younger ones and the children are placed in the middle and the stronger ones in front and at the back so that they can protect and lead their way till they reach the land of the dead called Kazeiram. The dead persons are believed to reach Kezeiram on the same line as it is arranged on the mat by the living people. Their foods are also displayed and arranged in the same manner. At this function, men and women of the same age personify the dead persons and acted as the dead person. He is treated as a person who is going to take eternal leave from the family. ‘Thikhang Kaphung’ (who personify of the dead) then takes their seats by the side of their food and effigies which has already been arranged in line. In case of a rich man’s death, the Thikhang Kaphunga in full death ceremony dress dances around the vicinity with the dancing party. The Thickhang Kaphunga will go round sobbing and sometimes stopping according to the tune and movement of the dance. In case, the husband died, his wife follows her husband (Thikhang Kaphunga), weeping and crying. She holds a guard container filled with rice beer and let him drink every now and then as he moves up and down in dancing. It is really a touching sight to
witness that her loving husband is going to leave her after the sun set though thikhang kaphunga is just a personification of her husband.

When the dead spirits are presumed to have taken their food, the Thikhang Kaphungas are taken back to their respective homes of the bereaved family and are given food and drink for the last supper in this world. There is a strong belief that the food which are displayed around for the dead spirits are found to have taken as they find the amount of rice and curry lesser when they collected in the evening. With the setting of the sun, Thila Kaphunga, will once again dance around the court-yard and would pronounce, "Ara Zatugei, mawung luimalakho (now I am going away, never to come back home)"57 As he pronounces, he would go dancing towards the village gate and his family members follow him. At the village gate, the Thikhang Kaphunga puts down his Vakui (head-gear) and hand it over to his wife. Woman Thikhang Kaphunga lays down her ‘Tansop’58 (small basket) as a sign of her departure from this world to the land of the dead.

Kazei Kata:

When all these formalities are performed, the dead souls are seen off which is known as ‘kazei kata,’ means down to hades. This is done on the last day of the festival. On this day, no one should remain hungry for the fear that his soul too would go along with the dead persons and dine with the dead souls. So extreme care is taken for this send off ceremony. The

58. Ibid., P. 26.
Thikhang Kaphunga who personifies the dead would go down to a particular place called ‘zeipher’, a little way down the village in group. They would carry with them pinewood torches (meila) to light their way and make a bonfire with all the pine wood torches and come back home. The Tangkhul in general believe that the dead soul holding their respective torches move towards the west in groups in a procession. It is seen by people who watch late at night.

After Christianisation in the first part of 1896, the importance of all the traditional practices are greatly affected. No Christian is allowed to perform traditional religious rites or ceremonies. Only some non-Christians or pagan are found practicing such rites and beliefs. However, some festivals like Luira Mangkhap, Yarra, Tharao etc. are still observed in the same old traditional ways with some modifications.
Tangkhul woman and man in traditional attire

Front view of traditional Tangkhul house

Longpi potter at work
Shirui Lily

Front view of Khangkhui Mangsor Cave

Two Tangkhuls drinking wine

Baskets, Containers, Raincoat