CHAPTER-V

TRADITIONAL VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION
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The traditional political institutions of every Naga tribe is of an independent and sovereign nature. The system is purely democratic with some variations from tribe to tribe. The Naga village has great resemblance to that of the Greek City states. Each village strictly maintained its entity. "The most remarkable feature of the Naga life is the (fundamentally) democratic basis of their socio-political organisation." 1 Though the Naga state small it may be, they have the basic ingredients of a state. That, they have the territory, population, sovereignty and the government with the hereditary chief. 2 Like all other Naga tribes, the Tangkhuls have a well organised, political institutions. "Each village was a distinct self-sufficient and self-administering unit". 3 Besides being a distinct political and economic unit, it was also recognised as a single community for all religious purposes, festivals and taboos. 4 The Naga village government of the past was a finest form of government. It was purely a country of the people, by the people and for the common interest of the people. Every village is a small republic having its own Council and Assembly established from time immemorial.

2. The Shepournaramth in the National Movement, GPRN, P. 38.
and is dynamically alive.\textsuperscript{5} Nagas have no written codes and laws like the
unwritten British convention. Every Naga strictly followed the unwritten
conventional laws and anyone who violates and dishonours the laws are
punished according to the nature of crimes and offences.

In the Naga society there is no class distinction of high and low castes.
It is purely a classless society and every one enjoys equal rights and
privileges. They love their native village and they desire that they should be
buried where they are born. They are very active and work till the sunset.
Their principle in life is work and works till one can move and could stretch
his/her limbs. Begging is a shame in the Naga society. They work and toil
together, share and enjoy together. The Nagas social structure is indeed a
well organised and disciplined institution. They are very straight forward,
generous and sincere. Theft, cheating, lies are unknown to them. They do
not lock their houses and paddy granaries are kept in the outskirts of the
village to protect it from fire.

Tangkhul Village is a composition of six or more clans. In a big
village like Tallui or Tuinem; there are more than ten clans. So the numbers
varies from village to village. Each clan has their respective leader called
Wungva. In the olden days, each clan grouped together and lived in one
compact colony called Tang. But in the present village setting, clans do not
group together in one colony. One resides anywhere according to his choice
and convenience. During the early migration period, people in groups

\textsuperscript{5} The Shep\'umaramch - Op. cit., P.40.
travelled around in search of a suitable place for their permanent settlement. While selecting a village site, they studied the possibility of human habitation, strategic location for defence and security. The place should not be an easy exit for both man and animals to attack. Then comes other important considerations like the availability of water, cultivable lands and forest, etc. One wonders as to why Nagas lived on top of the hills forsaking the fertile river valley. The reason is that since Nagas were head hunters, it was not safe for them to settle in a low lying areas. After selecting a suitable land for settlement, the group will perform rites and rituals by offering a special prayers and if the indication is favourable, the group will take the final decision to settle in their selected site. Any one who raised fire first from among the group members will be chosen as their leader and crowned as the 'Chief of the new village. Raising of fire is done either by rubbing two broken dried bamboo sticks or by striking two stones or through some other means. The other leaders of the group remain as wungva who come next to the village headman in position and powers. They are naturally the leaders of each clan and they represent the clan in the Village Council. They administer and execute the whole affairs of the village in consultation with the village chief or headman.

The Awunga or Village Chief:

Every village whether big or small shall have one Awunga or Chief. The village should have population, sizeable land and clear-cut boundaries. The first man who landed and raised the first fire shall be crowned as the new village chief. In case there are two men, they will be decided by performing certain rituals and decide the case according to the indication.
Chieftainship from that day onwards become permanent and hereditary.
There is a saying in Tangkhul as “Wungpam ngapaishara kala yorchashara.” It means it is taboo to usurp the king’s (Awunga) throne or seat and sell out to others.6 This right cannot be transferred nor sold out to anyone else except under some strict conditions for violating certain norms by the Chief. In Tangkhul language, the headman or chief of the village is known by the name Awunga. Literally Awunga means king. There is no other chief for the whole Tangkhul area. Each village was like an independent state. The term chief or headman was used only by the British and the later writers too adopted the term. “According to their tradition and custom, there would be a king/chief who required to obtain the sanction of gods to his kingship, otherwise nobody would obey him”7 He is the head of the village and leader of the councillors. He is a prominent figure in all social, religious gatherings and festivals. As a symbol of love and respect, he is always given the heads of animals which are killed in the village court or at any festival. He is also given the best rice beer which is brewed especially for any festivals or functions. The villagers help him in building and in repairing his house. Awunga summons and prorogues all the meetings of the councillors. The word of the Awunga shall always be the final word in all the decisions taken by the Chief-in-Council. The decisions which do not get the approval of the chief can never be accepted as passed. The approval is given verbally as Awunga na khak tamihaira. No one can strike Awunga. To be a Tangkhul Awunga, he has to follow and fulfill certain conditions.

He should have proper marriage which is accepted under Tangkhul customary laws. An immoral person cannot be Awunga and none of his issues from such relationship shall ever be accepted as the headman of the village. Awungas sons cannot marry his father’s sister’s or cousins’ daughters. This form of marriage is considered as the worst form of marriage which can never be accepted by Tangkhul customary law under any circumstance. But, vice-versa cross-cousin marriage is accepted like sister’s son can marry brother’s daughter and this form of marriage is accepted as the best form of marriage. It is believed that such marriage will bring good fortune and prosperity in the family. The reason for accepting such marriage is that sister’s daughter cannot return to his brother’s line but since the sister has gone to other outside the clan, his sister’s son can marry his brother’s daughter. Marriage within the clan is also forbidden whether it is outside the village or within the village. Chieftainship is cut off from the day he breaks marriage laws and from that day onwards none of his children shall ever be crowned as Awunga.

He should not be a murderer.

He should never indulge in any immoral action or habit.

He should never deceive or cheat others and rob from the widows and poor people.

His manner and speech should always be decent and honourable. He should never speak harsh and malicious words and indulge in any dirty jokes or conversation and keep away from bad company. He must be soft spoken and kind hearted as he is the symbol of both religious and secular head of the village state.
The right of hereditary chieftainship can never be sold nor transferred to anyone else except in some cases where the chief violated certain customary laws which cannot be amended nor rectified under any circumstances. In the case of Awunga's early demise and his son's infancy, the Awunga's younger brother or in the absence of his brother, his first cousin will take the charge of chieftainship till his son comes of age and crowned as Awunga. By virtue of his position, people venerated and respected him and he occupies his kingship till he is succeeded by his eldest son due to old age, ill health or death. Till to-day, the Tangkhul strictly adhered to such moral codes and ethics.

A disabled person should never be chosen as Awunga.  

Powers and Functions of Awunga:

During the head hunting period when there was great animosity and the village feuds and thirst for new heads was very strong, defence was one of the most important functions of the Awunga. "The primary considerations of village site was defensive viability. Each village fiercely maintained its entity. The Nagas are defence conscious because every village attained the status of sovereign state." The chief should always give special attention to the village defence and fortification as peace and prosperity of any village is depended on the ability of the village to keep away from enemy's attack. Once the village is attacked and raided, the whole village administration would be

8. Interview with Ninghei Ngaiqna, Retd. Engineer, Govt. of Manipur, Ukhrul Dist, 4/2/98.
affected and may result in any unwanted incidents and bloodsheds. After the sunset, the village gate is usually closed.

The village land is divided into two categories such as (1) land that surrounds the village. The surrounding woodlands are meant for supplying fire-wood to the villagers and for vegetable garden. Each and every clan shall be given their respective shares and the clans out of their share would again share among their families. Secondly, the land which do not come under the previous categories shall remain as public land and that land shall be in the name of the Awunga. The Awunga has no right to sell out public lands to any individual within the village or to any outside villager.10 For the preservation of land and forest, they have a special act called Meiyan. Anyone who violates such act shall be punished severely according to Meiyan Act. In case any outside villager encroaches a private land or arises boundary disputes, the case should not be done in the name of the individual but the matter is to be dealt with and decided by the village Awunga and Councillors.

The Awunga also “Parcel out cultivable land to the villagers in consultation with his councillors. He uses his discretion, again on the advice of the Councillors, in using the village funds to help persons in financial difficulties due to crop failure.”11 Every year the villagers select a new site for their jhumland. After selecting the plot, the village Awunga would kill one pig for the villagers who are going to cultivate in that selected jhumland.

After doing this ritual, the jhumias would start cutting and clearing the jungle for cultivation. The villagers whatever they produce, be it paddy, chilly, maize, etc., would give one basketful of crops/paddy, maize, etc., to Awunga. The giving of ramshai (land tax) was to be given to the Awunga for offering one pig and allowing them to cultivate.

The Awunga summons and fixes all the meetings of all the clans heads and Councillors. The meeting of the Council is usually held at the Awunga’s house and his house also served as the village court. During dry seasons, the meetings are held outside the Awunga’s house. He initiates and presides all the meetings and assembly sessions of the Councillors. No meeting, discussion or any decision can ever be taken without the presence of Awunga. In case, he is unable to attend the Council meetings, he should give prior information to the Councillors. Sometimes the Awunga entrusted one of the Wungva’s (Clan’s head/councillors) to initiate/preserve the meeting on his behalf but all the decisions should get the Awunga’s approval and acceptance.

It is the primary duty of the Awunga to look into the well-being of his subjects and should always listen to their voices and grievances. It is the duty of the Awunga to maintain peace and harmony among the villagers, to maintain territorial integrity and to establish friendly ties with the neighbouring villagers.

During inter village war, any visitor coming from other villages must first get permission and inform the purpose of his visit to the village Awunga. The Chief is responsible for the security of the visitors as long as they stay in the village. Visitors can stay in their friends or relatives house
but in the absence of any of these, he should stay at the Awunga’s house. He will enquire the purpose of his visit and if the visitors happen to be an emissary from warring village for negotiation and settlement of disputes, he will summon an emergency meeting of the Councillors and discuss the matters in depth. During his stay no one is allowed to beat him. If there is any possibility of settlement, a joint meeting is fixed to discuss the matter in order to bring a lasting solution amicably without further bloodshed. The two warring villages, as a mark of ending village feuds and wars, jointly kill one pig and organise a joint feast of both the Awungas and Councillors. The venue can be done at the convenient place or in either of the two villages. The head of the pig would be cut right at the middle and made two halves and presented to both the village chiefs equally. From that day onwards, the war is declared ended. It is like signing of treaties.

**Legislative Functions:**

The Awunga as the head of the Village Council, plays a very important role in making and passing any policy and programme of the village in consultation with the Councillors. No one can speak against the decision taken by the Chief-in-Council. However, the Chief and the Councillors cannot override any customary law and make any new law which goes against the Tangkhul customary laws. Any law or decision can be taken within the framework of the customary laws. These laws are not recorded in writing but handed down from generations to generations through songs, usages and oral traditions. These customary laws regulate all secular, executive and judiciary functions of the village administration.

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Executive and Judicial Functions:

The Awunga is the executive head as well as the Chief Judge of the village. He along with the members of the Council are collectively responsible for the effective implementation of the decisions taken by them. The village Awunga as the head and the chief judge decides the type of punishment to be awarded to the law breakers according to the customary laws. Both private and public disputes are decided by the village Awunga in consultation with the Councillors. It is his primary duty to settle all kinds of disputes ranging from small quarrels to inter-village disputes. He has to see that social, traditions and customs are honoured and preserved in the way it ought to be and the transgressors are punished accordingly. All the decisions and disputes are settled in the name of the Awunga and when given his verdict, the case is declared settled and there is no scope for further appeal against his decision.

Religious Functions:

As a religious head, Awunga is the first man in the village. He is the first to open any village festival, meeting and to sow seeds by performing certain rituals. It is considered a taboo to violate such traditions and practices. In case anyone violates it and sows seeds before performing rituals by the Awunga, it is believed that during the year the villagers would have low production of crops which may in consequence lead to acute famine within the village. In most cases, the performance of seed sowing rites and rituals is done by the Chief’s wife. On the appointed day, the chief and his wife would go down to village harshang’s (outskirts) to perform the first seed sowing ceremony. She invokes special prayer to the goddess of wealth
and start performing the rites of seed sowing. She will then scratch a little area of soil and then seed is sown over it. A chicken would be killed and its blood will be sprinkled over the little areas where the seed is sown. Then the feathers of the chicken would be planted around the seed-sown areas. The villagers would also accompany the Chief’s wife and after finishing the seed sowing rituals, they would also scratch a little areas of soil and sow seeds. After this, the real festive activities of Luiya phanit starts. The seed sowing sacrifice is done to appease the goddess of wealth and bring abundance of crops during the year. The Awungka is also the first to harvest. In fact, he is the first man of the village. At any festival or religious ceremony, the Awungka is also given the first preference to taste the best rice beer called khor and meat before any one could taste and touch. Though most of the religious ceremonies and rituals are conducted by the village priest, the Chief’s presence at any religious ceremony is a compulsory and he presides over all religious ceremonies and festivals.

**Customs Relating to Death:**

In case of any death in the village, the deceased family will first report to the Chief. The deceased family will bring one chick called Khangai Kasang. The small chick will be killed and its blood will be sprinkled over the rihai lung (ritual stone). The body of the chick will then be thrown away. The Chief after performing this rite will then announce the news of the death to all the villagers and an order is issued to abstain from all social and field work activities. Naturally, the day becomes a genna day for the villagers.

13. Ibid.
Actually, the announcement is made by the village announcer called *raivaowo*. He will stand in one of the highest altitudes of the village and shout announcing and informing the orders of the Chief. Each locality has one announcer to inform of all the emergency news or orders of the chief. Once the announcer started shouting Ho (Ho . . . my villagers) *Iramnaobing* – *Oh . . .* then all the households will keep pin-drop silence and listen to his announcement.

With all these powers in his hand, one may assume that he can become a dictator and rule arbitrarily. However, he is also cautioned by the customary laws and practices.

**Village Council:**

Next to the Awunga (king) in the village political hierarchy is the Village Council called Hanga. The members of the Village Councils are not appointed by the Village Chief or elected by the villagers. Usually, the eldest members of the clans are chosen as representatives of the clans. Among the Councillors, the Wungvas came next to the Awunga’s in power and position. The Wungvas are the heads of every clan within the village. From among the Wungvas, there is a person who is regarded as the head of the Wungvas who by virtue of his birth comes next to the king. Wungvas are usually the noblemen of the village. All the animals killed in the village for assembly sittings or fines or any penalty, the head is always given to the village Awunga and the four legs would go to the Wungvas according to their rank and file. The right leg will be given to the Wungvas who comes next to the Chief. The three legs will thus be distributed to the Wungvas according to their position. The rest of the animal will be shared by the Councillors
equally. For the Tangkhuls every part of the animals killed bear significant meaning and it cannot be given to anyone else according to ones likes as it is called 'Saming leiserra'. The Chief and the Councillors are responsible for the proper administration of the village and should govern the state in accordance with the Tangkhul customary laws. The basic principle of the Tangkhul customary laws have many similarities with the Mosaic laws of the Ten Commandments of the Bible, like -

(i) *Thou shall not kill,*
(ii) *Thou shall not steal,*
(iii) *Thou shall not commit adultery,*
(iv) *Thou shall not bear false witness,*
(v) *Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's property,*
(vi) *Thou shall not take the name of God in vain etc.*

as it is said "Leitamang li kazing ngalei kasa khava wui ming Singsharra."\(^{15}\)

Generally there are ten to thirty members in the Council or more according to the number and population of the village and clans. Larger clans may send more than one or two representatives. The head of the clan is considered as the eldest male member of the clan and hold the position till his death. His 'hangapam' (councillor's seat) is permanent. In case of his death or old age, his eldest son will take his place. If the Councillor has no issue or male member to inherit, this right will go to his nearest blood relations.

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15. Y.K. Shimray, Retd. Engineer, Govt. of Manipur, Extract from Unpublished manuscripts
The Councillors are the real administrators in whom the highest power of the village is vested. They formulate the “policy of the village in war and in peace, they make and amend the unwritten laws which are then rigidly followed.”

Women have no representation in the Village Council. “Since a woman is not an heir to her father’s house, her representation in the Village Council is out of question. However, she has the right to attend the court to plead with her family members, especially in the event of one of her sister’s involvement in a dispute.” A woman attending the court for any case should not come with an open hair which hangs down freely upon her shoulders. Her hair should be combed, bound and clipped properly as a sign of respect. She should not sit in crossed legs, as it is disgraceful before men.

The functions of the Councillors can be divided into three broad categories as (1) Executive, (2) Legislative and (3) Judiciary.

**Executive:**

The Councillors form the real executive body of the village. All the decisions taken by the Chief-in-council shall be executed by the councillors effectively. They make and formulate all the policies and programmes of the village in accordance with the existing laws of the land. The proceedings and decisions are all done verbally and become an act after the Chief pronounces his final words of acceptance. “Every decision was verbal, yet it never

failed, for they meant what they said and they said what they meant ... Comparing it with these days, when tall promises are made but seldom kept Verbally. They had no written record, Yet, once agreed upon, the decision was implemented. This quality is however gradually wearing away in the Naga society with their contact with outside world."18 The village councillors are responsible for the proper implementation of the decision taken by the Council. In case a person or a party fails to abide the decisions of the Council, the Council takes necessary actions against the persons concerned. Steps are taken to see that all its decisions are carried out effectively.

The Council enjoy the power to punish any villager who violates and break the laws of the land. "Every person is expected to be conversant with the traditional laws, customs and usages. Ignorance of them is no excuse. The Tangkhuls, in the early days, had innumerable taboos involving 'dos' and 'don'ts'. Any conscious or deliberate breaking of the set norms brings down the wrath of the entire village community. In a superstitious community such as the Tangkhuls, it is imperative that the observation of law is strictly followed."19

Administrative Functions:

The councillors are the real administrators. The village whether big or small have an organised administrative system. As mentioned earlier, they have no written laws but like the English conventions, people have

great respect and honour for the customary laws. It is like a chain which checks an individual to act freely and prosper oneself at the expense of others.

The administrative functions of the Council include, the maintenance of the village water supply and foot-paths, construction of new paths and bridges across the streams and rivers which are difficult to cross, maintenance of law and order, checking proper maintenance of youths boys/girls’ Longshims (dormitories), etc.

The Councillors assist the Awunga in matters of village defence and fortification. During the head hunting period, it was considered as the utmost duty of the councillors as peace and prosperity of the village depended on this aspect. Constant vigil is given day in and day out and check the fortification in case any damage is done in any corner through which the enemies might enter and attack the village. The councillors also supervise and control the village warriors. In case, any inter-village war is declared, all the ablest male members of the village shall go to the war. From childhood a boy is trained in the art of fighting with spears, daos, bows, etc. The councillors with the warriors would have a close door emergency meeting and plan the war strategies. The warriors are to be equipped with armouries and weapons. The warriors must possess high esteem of moral character. An immoral person is never allowed to go to war, as it will bring ill luck and fall at the enemy’s hands. The warriors, if they are to go the next day, should not sleep that night with his wife. War is purely a holy war. All these are checked and arranged by the Councillors.
All the land except the private land belongs to the public and the village Awunga is the custodian of the public land. A village land is subdivided into convenient sub-areas. Each sub-area is under the charge of one Councillor. If anyone is found setting fire in the jungle or forest and the guilty person cannot be apprehended, the councilor-in-charge of the land would be held responsible.\textsuperscript{20} Road side trees are also planted and preserved under the Act of Meiyan. If a person is found destroying or cutting a roadside tree he would be fined under Meiyan Act (Act for preserving forests and trees). These are all under the supervision of the Councillors.

**Village Fund:**

The village council is also the custodian of the village fund and finance. Each family is to make a voluntary contribution of one-tenth of its paddy. The paddy so collected is kept in a granary called the village granary. This grain is collected against a rainy day when the entire village may suffer a poor crop or to be given to families who may not have sufficient food due to crop failure in a particular year.\textsuperscript{21} Other agricultural products like chilies, sesamum, maize, linseed, soyabean, etc., are always shared amongst neighbours. In case the collected grain remain unused because of bountiful harvest during the year, it is usually auctioned among the villagers and used as the fund for village development.

The councillors in consultation with the village Awunga fix all the festivals of the village. After the proclamation by the Chief-in-Council,

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
the real festive activities will start. The Councillors also make announcement of religious ceremonies and genna observations. No one can go out and work on the genna days.

**Judicial Functions:**

The Chief and the councillors constitute the village council. They have no separate court. The Chief’s house serves as the village court. During dry seasons meetings are often held outside the lawn of the Chief’s house. Thick slabs of stones are arranged meticulously around the courtyard in an oval or rectangular shape with a passage in the middle. The councillors would sit around the slabs of stones and the Chief being seated in the middle.

The traditional village court consisting of the Awunga and the councillors try all cases. The procedure of trial in the village court is very simple but honourable. It is the customary method to call both the complainants and the accused along with their witnesses to the village court. The village court heard from both the parties. Then the members of the village councils after hearing all the facts and evidences the case was finally decided.

"Tangkhuls are very fond of litigation and take even trivial issues to the village court. But whatever the person’s attitude towards quarrels and differences may be, one thing may be safely said about him, namely that he honour the law of his land and very rarely did he go to the government court."²²

According to Khashim Ruivah, the most interesting feature of the judicial administration of the Tangkhul was the system of jury. The headman (Awunga) could never begin the trial of a case, unless he was assisted by the representatives at least one from each clan of the village. They must try the case impartially and must be based on the prevailing customary law of the land. It was the duty of the councillors to restrain capricious headman going astray and giving a wrong decision.\(^{23}\)

If the case is controversial and critical and the Council cannot settle the case amicably, they resort to taking of oaths and ordeals. But it is a dangerous practice and in most cases these practices are avoided. Fine and compensation differ according to the nature and kinds of offence. An offender besides paying compensation to his victim, offen pays a fine to the Village Court usually in the form of a live pig or it could also be a vat of rice beer, a cow or a buffalo. Any animal killed would be feasted in the village court and sometimes along with both the parties in order to abandon any idea of retaliation in future. The animal killed in the village court would be shared by all the councillors and the village (Awunga). The Chief by virtue of his office is always given the head and to the councillors according to their status of *hanga Pam*.

Land disputes are mostly settled by oath taking. "*The oaths are taken at the scene of disputes usually by biting or eating a small piece of land under dispute. The person swearing falsely runs the risk of either dying before reaping a harvest from the land or of swelling up and dying.*"\(^{24}\)

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Oath Taking

Many disputes as stated earlier are settled by oath taking among the Naga tribes. Some Naga tribes like Tangkhul, Ao, Angami, etc., very often used oath for settling vague and critical disputes. Oaths and ordeals formed a part of many ancient system of judicial administration and were widely prevalent in Europe during the middle ages. In England, during the Anglo Saxon age, in criminal cases, the ordeal as a proof was resorted to. In tribal areas of the north-eastern region oaths and ordeals were prevalent till independence, and are even now prevalent in certain interior places.\textsuperscript{25}

"Both oaths and ordeals involve appeals to supernatural power. An oath is the act of calling upon a deity to bear witness to the truth of what one says. An ordeal is a means used to determine guilt or innocence by submitting the accused to dangers of painful lists believed to be under supernatural control."\textsuperscript{26}

Among the Tangkhuls, there are many form of oath taking. The weightiest form of oath taken by Tangkhul runs thus "If I lie, may I and family or clansmen or co-villagers descend into the earth and be seen no more."\textsuperscript{27} Others swear by the name of kameo deity and by swearing before heaven and earth (Kazing-Ngalei).

\textsuperscript{25} J.N. Das – A Study of Administration of Justice Among the Tribes and Races of North-Eastern Region, Pan Bazar, Guwahati, Pp.15-16.

\textsuperscript{26} N.K. Das – Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Social Stratification in N.E. India, Inter Publications, Delhi 1987, P. 137.

\textsuperscript{27} T.C. Hodson - Op. cit., P..11
In case of land disputes, both the parties will swear at the spot of the
disputed zone. A little soil is taken out from the disputed zone and immersed
in a cup of water and let both the disputed parties drink the water. The one
who dies first after drinking is considered wrong. Another difficult method
of swearing is sharing a chicken’s intestines. In this case, a certain period of
time is specified and the one who dies earlier is considered guilty.

Oath on the Kazei (spear) or rihai (genna stone) is also a severe form.
On the specific date of oath taking, no one is allowed to work in the field or
at home. It is a genna day for all the villagers. All the village households will
perform puja or rituals with the incantation to their deity ‘Kameo’ for the
occasion at home. After having done all these pujas, the two parties would
take the oath and the one who dies or face any misfortune is taken as guilty.

Regarding the oath for burning forests, house or any property, the ash
of the burnt is put in a cupful of water and let the swearer allowed to drink
the ash water. The guilty would die within a specific period.

For any kind of vague dispute, a case is also settled by diving or
immersing in the water. Both the parties will be immersed into the water for
a certain minutes and the one who cannot come out within the stipulated
time is considered guilty. Some swearers even died within the water.

Regarding women’s swearing, the right hand fingers are all inserted
within the mouth of each other and let them bite at the same time after
giving the signal for biting. Due to severe biting, their fingers are naturally
injured but the first finger to ooze out blood is considered as guilty.
The practice of oath taking is generally stopped after christianisation but this evil practice is not completely extinct from the present society. Some Christians still practice though it is very much against the Christian doctrine. Swearing by biting soil, immersion in water, etc., are still prevalent though it is of a rare practice. When one’s temper is high, he forgets his religion and does not bother for its evil consequences and it makes him fearless to undertake this evil practice of swearing.

**Customary Laws:**

There are innumerable customary laws, which govern the whole spheres of social, economic, political, religious and individual lives of the people. These are not written down but everyone respects and honours it. These laws served as the constitutional laws and guiding principles of the village administration, which are strictly followed and observed by the people. Cases of any kind of disputes are settled according to these unwritten laws. There are numerous laws but let us discuss only the laws that are related to administrative and political aspects.

According to T. Luikham, these laws may be broadly divided into five subjects for administrative convenience – (1) Shaiyan (Collection of tributes), (2) Khuyan (Village administration), (3) Long yan (Zone-wise an area-wise administration), (4) Shiyan (Public regulations) and (5) Shongran (Penalty).

There are many subject matters which come under each sub-heading. Let’s examine only the relevant aspects:
Shaivan (collection and payment of tributes):

Raishai (war tribute): When a war is waged upon a village, the defeated village shall have to pay tax annually to the victor village. Secondly, in case of any kind of war is launched upon a small village and a protector (sharva) comes to defend the village from the attack of other villages, usually a war tribute is given to the protector who saved and protected the village from the enemy’s attack. The payment of tribute depends upon the agreement signed between the two villages. In the olden days, war tributes are given to the protector who had saved and protected the village. War tribute is usually given in kind such as buffaloes, clothes, salt, chilli, paddy, cotton, etc. Some tributes are paid annually and some in two or three years by instalments.

Chinaoshei (brother’s tribute):

The payment of younger brothers’ tribute to his elder brother has been in practice since their history of migration. Younger brother who settles in another village, usually pays tribute to his elder brother as a sign of respect and love. There is a story of paying tributes to his elder brother who stays in the hills by his younger brother in the valley. The payment of brother’s tribute is lighter than that of war tribute (raishai).

Shimkham Tax:

Some powerful Awungas (Kings) collects a sort of tax every year from some villages for allowing some of his people to settle down elsewhere of their choice, forsaking their old village. The villagers as a mark of respect, paid tribute to their former Awunga every year in the form of meat.
In case the chief cannot go and collect the tax, he would send one of his councillors or villagers to collect the Shimkham tax.

**Lamshai Tax:**

Land tax for cultivation in the public land should go to the village Awunga. But in the case of cultivation in the private lands, the payment of tax is given to the individual landowner. The tax can be either in kind or cash. Generally in most cases, the cultivators give a share of the products of the land as tax. It is also a usual practice for the owner to perform egg divination for the cultivators for bountiful harvest out of his land. This kind of payment of tax is called lamshai.

**Ringshan:**

It means payment of tribute by the defeated village to the war victor village. From then onwards, payment of tribute is given every year and the stronger village would give protection to that village not only during war but when the villagers are threatened, looted, burgled or any injustice done by other villagers.

**Wungnaoshai (king’s tribute):**

The village Awunga other than war tribute receives another kind of tribute known as Luichumshai from his villagers. The tribute or tax consisted of paddy, firewood, labour, animal’s head, etc. In some villages where there is more than one Chief the animal’s head is divided and shared among them equally. The animals should be cut just in the middle of the head and the two
equal halves are given to both of them. The clan heads are given animal’s legs, neck or meat according to their social status.

**Khuyan (Village administration):**

**Hangashim:**

The Awunga’s house serves as Council Assembly and Court. The Chief-in-Council meetings are held in his house with the Chief in the chair. Cases or disputes within the village or interstate issues are discussed and settled in the village court by the Assembly. Imposition of fines and scale of compensations differs according to the nature of cases.

**Hanga (Councillors):**

The Awunga (Chief) and the representatives from all the clans form the Village Council. The village hangas (councillors) are not elected nor appointed by the Chief or the clans. Normally the Councillors are the heads of all the clans residing within the village. Other than the heads of the clans, more representatives are also sent to the Village Council from the family of hangvapam (having the right to be a member of the council). They assist the Awunga and carry out all the functions of the village.

**Zungphun (sense of unity and loyalty):**

The sense of unity and loyalty in a village is called Zhungphun. None can escape and break such Zungphun (unity). In case of war, every male member who can hold a spear, dao, shield, bow, etc., and has attained manhood shall go to the war front. No one is allowed to make complaint or escape from such orders. It is a moral obligation and sanction. This kind of
compulsion is possible only through village zungphun. The warriors who are to go to war front are also strictly warned not to have any physical contact with women and touch anything of lady’s garments as it would make them ill luck called khanei in Tangkhul.

**Raikhan (sentry):**

In the olden days, where human head hunting was a way of life and practiced in full swing, the defence of the village was one of the most important functions of the villagers. They took extreme care of their village fortification and guarded the village alternately. The village sentry also took extreme care of any fire breakout outside or within the village premises.

**Mawun:**

It is related to sowing paddy seeds, planting, finding jhumland, performance of egg divination or rites, fixing of dates of village festivals, house construction, village road clearance and widening, pond cleaning, etc. For carrying out all the above functions, there are different persons who are to perform the first work before it is being carried out or conducted by the fellow members of the village.

**Lam (land):**

The village has a clear-cut boundary. There are three kinds of land called (a) Imahwui lam, (b) Lamshai lam, and (c) Khamang lam.\(^{28}\)

*Imahwui lam* belongs to an individual but Lamshai lam and Khamang lam belongs to the public. These lam (lands) cannot be sold out or disposed off to any individual or outsiders without the consent of the villagers and the Awunga (Chief). Rivers, ranges of hills and mountain served as natural boundary and in the absence of these, demarcation is done by erecting a boundary marked by stones. For such markings, a number of stones will be collected and piled up to a certain height to mark the boundaries. For the preservation of land and forests, there is a special land and forest called *Meiyan* in Tangkhul. The village Awunga delegates his councillors, the duty of looking after the village land. The Awunga allocates the different sector of land to each Wungva (Head of the clans) and each Wungva is responsible for any happening within his jurisdiction. The villagers also plant trees in and around the village campus and these areas are also governed under Raiyan Act. The land of an individual, which comes under dispute with his neighbouring village or villages, should be dealt in the name of village though it belongs to an individual. The owner of the land will bear the expenditure and give labour help to the councillors for the settlement of disputes.

**Meiyan (special act to prevent fire):**

This is a special kind of unwritten act purely enacted for the protection of any outbreak of fire within the village and forest. Anyone setting the village forest or woodland on fire is punished severely according to the customary laws. This system helps in growing more trees and thereby protects the natural habitats, flora and fauna. Villagers also guard the village turn by turn to prevent any outbreak of fire within the village premises,
when the villagers are away for their respective field works or engaged in some other social activities outside the village. Usually children stay at home. To prevent any outbreak of fire, villagers are not allowed to make fire from around 11 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. at home. This is being looked after by the village guards. They also take extreme care while setting fire on their garden, jhumland or field farm. Trees felled in the jhumland are collected in the center of the field and set on fire to prevent the catching of fire in and around the nearby jungles. In case of any out-break of fire, the culprit should be found out by the councillors in cooperation with the villagers and action taken according to Meiyan Act.

**Shimlui Khavor (Selling of property):**

The landed properties acquired by an individual can be sold by him to anybody but the inherited properties cannot be sold without first consulting his clans, particularly the next lineage who would succeed him.29

**Seihomphung (Cattle grazing ground):**

Usually every village has a well-demarcated common grazing ground which is fenced around carefully to prevent the animals from going astray during the off seasons of cultivation. All the village cattle is kept together in the said protected grazing ground. The cattle owners will guard and check the animals alternately turn by turn. Usually none of the villager is allowed to cultivate in and around the grazing ground. In case anyone cultivates resulting in the damage of the crops, no fine or any compensation can be

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demanded or obtained from the cattle owners. In Tangkhul, it is said as ‘Sailui shai makharom paimana’ means no compensation can be demanded for the damage done by the cattle.

**Shimsak (House Construction):**

For the building of a house within the village, all the villagers should participate without any labour charge. It is a free service and they build houses turn by turn. In big villages, it is done khel-wise (locality) Generally rich men give feast or distribute meat to every household of the village for helping in the house construction.

**Ransuk (Feast of merit):**

Feast of merit was naturally thrown by rich men of the village and in times of yore, it was considered as one of the most important functions which elevated a man in position and prestige. "If we travel through the unrecorded pages of Naga history, we shall find that the core of Naga life was full of competitions and challenges of which feast of merit was the highest form . . . It was partly the generous philosophy of feeding the poor and sharing wealth with the entire population but mostly due to the competitive spirit to climb the ladder of social recognition . . ." 30 To host the feast of merit in a big village like Hunphun and Humpum the host should kill twelve buffaloes, two cows, 12 pigs, one dog and one cat. All the twelve animals bear significant meanings and it should first be offered to their god Kameo to get his sanctification. If the host cannot kill the mentioned number

30. Ibid., P. 108
of animals, the villagers will talk of him as unfit to host feast of merit.\textsuperscript{31} For the preparation of the feast, helps from the villagers are very essential as he cannot perform it alone without their cooperation. Before throwing the feast, a live pig is given to the village councillors called ‘raivao hok.’\textsuperscript{32} During maran kesa (feast of merit) a genna wooden ‘y’ post is usually erected to commemorate the hosting of the feast of merit. The genna posts called Tarung is dragged out from the deep jungles after the performance of rites and rituals as their deity’s will indicate as to which tarung genna post the deity will permit. So, for this purpose, they also listen the dreams. In case anyone is hurt while dragging genna posts (tarung) from the deep jungles, the owner is not responsible but the councillors are held responsible as they are already given charge by offering one live pig called \textit{raivao hok}.

\textbf{Veishunsra (gates meat):}

In the days of yore, every village erected a tall and strong gate at the exit point of the village for security purposes. So if a girl is married to a person belonging to another village, the marriage party of the bride should offer gate’s meat to the groom’s gatekeeper as gate pass. Without obtaining the permission, the bride’s party will not be allowed to enter the village premises. After obtaining the gate pass, the marriage party will enter the village by saying – hao, hao and meet the groom’s family. Generally Veishunsra (gate’s meat) is given to those households who stay near the gate.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} T. Luikham, Op.cit, Pp. 54-55.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Raivao – hanga (Councillor) announces to the whole villagers from a higher altitude of the village premises about the ensuing feast which is going to be thrown by the richman.
\end{itemize}
In case of any war, they are the first victims to be attacked. For these reasons, the villagers willingly accepted the offerings of gate’s meat to them.

**Chanrei or Shongzan khamathai (clearance or widening of village paths):**

Every year when the crops begin to ripe or any festival is to be observed, the villagers clear and broaden the village and field paths. No one can escape from this special social work. It is compulsory. In case anyone fails to join the work, a fine is imposed on him. The significance of *chanrei khamathai* is for bountiful harvest and to keep the village clean.

**Kha Khangakham:**

It means whenever a village taboo or genna is observed and during the outbreak of any epidemic in and around the neighbouring villages, no one is allowed to go out and any person from another village also would not be allowed to enter the village. Every inhabitant of the village observes it as a religious obligation.

**Shangashai (subscription):**

Every household of the village should pay subscription or household tax to be utilised for village development, administration of social or any religious activities. As such, no one is exempted from paying any subscription as the benefits of the village are being shared equally by all the households and inhabitants of the village.
Phanitret (fixing Festival dates):

The Awunga and the councillors fix the dates of all the festivals and religious activities. Whenever the village Awunga pronounces observation of gennas or taboos, all the inhabitants should observe with due respect and do pennaance according to the occasion. The non-compliance of the Chief's order is to be punished or fined according to the laws of the land.

Kha khangareng (Ex-Communication by the villagers):

Any person who violates the village laws, rules and regulations is ex-communicated by the society. No one works together nor give any cooperation to such a person in any occasion and event. He is not allowed to sit or go with others, nor allowed to take fire from others. Moreover, no one is allowed to cut his hair.33

Lakhot (Marriage):

For Tangkhuls, Marriage is a sacred institution upon which a family is founded by the union of two persons. As a sacred institution, marriage should be within the framework of marriage customary laws and should obtain the religious sanctions. There are certain conditions in choosing a wife or a husband. A man or woman should choose his/her partner in accordance with the Tangkhul customary laws.

Pam:

It means cross-cousin marriage i.e., brother's daughter marrying sister's son. It is considered as the best form of marriage and this tradition is to be followed generation after generation. On the other hand vice-versa marriage is considered as the worst form of marriage called vakhalat i.e. brother's son marrying sister's daughter. Sister's daughter should never come back to the maternal uncle's clan, but, since sisters have married to other clans, sister's son can marry brother's daughter.

Chinaora:

Children of the sisters born of the same parents can never marry with one another. Relaxation may be given at least after three generations but not very acceptable.

Shokhala (Incest):

Marriage among brother's children, including children of the sisters and marrying within the same clan, all came under shokhala. Such marriage is never considered valid under any circumstance within the village and according to the Tangkhul customary laws, they must get divorced. As a mark of their divorce, they should give one live pig as a penalty to the village councillors. The councillors would kill the pig and cut the pig right in the middle from head to anus. One half of the pig will be kept facing towards the sky and the other half downwards facing the earth and should be buried outside the village gate. Any partner who refuses to get divorced will be banished from the village and abandoned them in the land of
khaorui. In case of brother's death after marriage, any of his younger brothers can marry the wife of the deceased but it is not a compulsion.

**Kapang (Divorce):**

Husband and wife who are blessed in the name of heaven by the priest before the villagers can never get divorced. In case divorce takes place due to husband's fault like marrying another woman, the property, movable or immovable shall all be in the name of his wife and their children should also be looked after by the wife. In case, there is no issue, the wife as long as she lives shall enjoy the husband's property till her death. In case the divorce is due to wife's fault, she has no right to take away a single property of her husband. He has the right to chase out his wife from his house on the ground of her infidelity like involvement in adulterous act, proved by evidence.

If a man divorces his wife for a serious offence like adultery, or for being barren, but for incompatibility of temperament, he is entitled to the repayment of the marriage prize. Regarding guardianship of children in case of divorce, all weaned children belongs to the husband or his clan and can be claimed by him as heirs. A woman may keep weaned children but would ultimately be under the guardianship of their father.

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34. Interview with Khangkhui Awunga, K.A. Ringshi, Ukhrul 3rd February, 1999.
36. Ibid., P. 102.
The Tangkhul widows and divorcees are allowed to remarry. One of the notable features of the Tangkhul society in the days of yore up to his time is that divorce rarely takes place. Small squabbles, quarrels or misunderstanding of the couple are solved by the family elders and the Awungas in councils and thus avoided divorce as far as practicable.

Shimluikat (inheritance):

The Tangkhul customary law permits only males to inherit the parent's property. Daughters have no right to inherit parent's property. Usually, the eldest son inherits the lion's share of the family properties both movable and immovable. The younger brothers inherit the lesser portion and sometimes the youngest brother does not have a single property to inherit. In such a situation, his elder brothers would contribute and buy a paddy field for him.

In case of husband's death, the property will naturally be in the hands of his wife who will look after his children and get them married. She cannot sell any inherited ancestral property at her own will without consulting with her husband's brothers and clansmen. If she sells out after consultation, it is normally acquired by her brother-in-law or any clansmen. In case there is none who is capable of purchasing, it is sold outside the clan.

A man with only one daughter could leave his movable property in the hands of his daughter (if he dies before her marriage) but as soon as she is married, the nearest male relatives of her father's line would claim it and may give her a share. Properties either moveable or immovable brought in

37. Ibid., P. 92.
by the mother to their family, and properties which are obtained by the
couple after their marriage or which are not ancestral properties can be
presented to daughters, provided the family has enough property for their
sons.38

Any dispute regarding the rights of inheritance is tried in the village
court based on the Tangkhul Customary law of inheritance. The court cannot
override these laws and take decision according to their own whim and
fancy.

Mingpho (Title):

The title of Achon (women) and Amei (men) is addressed only to the
children of the clan's heads. This title signifies the noble and the higher
status of the family. The eldest son of the clan is addressed as Ameikharar
and the eldest daughter as Achonkharar. It is a dignified title. The younger
brothers or sisters are addressed as Amei and Achon respectively. Inter-
marrriages are also arranged from amongst the members of these clans. The
sons and daughters of the village chief can only marry from this noble group
of people. Women below the status of Achon usually find it difficult to
shoulder the responsibility of Ameikharar's family affairs. As the head of
the clan, all the clan meetings and discussions are held at his residence and
the clan head being the second most powerful person who comes next to
Awunga is engaged in the clan and village administration. So
Ameikharar/Amei always marries Achon Kahrar Achon. Moreover, it is

38. Z.V Free Paathing – Status of Tangkhul Women, Joint Women
Programme, Manipur. 1994- P.50
also a family pride to marry a girl belonging to the same status. In case Ameikharar has no male issue to inherit the property and title, it is transferred to his next brother. The titles of Achon and Amei are allowed only to the children of the inheritors (the direct inheritant is not entitled to get the title), the confirmation of these titles is done after the performance of rai vao. It is the declaration of acquiring the honourable status and title of Amei and Achon to all the inhabitants of the village.

In case, there is no male issue of the family or clan to inherit, the ancestral properties of that family shall be inherited by the village Awunga (Chief). The name of the clan will thus be vanished with the expiry of the last man. In most cases, the nearest clansman from other villages would come and inherit and thus survive the clan through him. So inter-marriage within the clansmen even outside the village is strictly prohibited since they are the descendents of one parent.

**Family and Relatives:**

Parents and children form the family. Brothers and sisters of the same parents are called ‘zarpani’.

**Pam:**

It is referred to brothers’ and sisters’ children.

**Chinaora:**

Children of the same sisters of one parent are known by the name Chinaora.

**Iriha:**

Son-in-law is called or addressed as ‘Iriha’ by mother and father in-laws and Iriha to daughter-in-laws.
Mother-in-laws and father-in-laws of both sides are addressed as ‘Ani’, and ‘Awo’ respectively. Imak is addressed to brother-in-laws and Amui to sister-in-laws of both sides.

Married daughters are called ‘Yorla’ and her brothers ‘varei’.

The title of Amei, Achon, Achui and Achei are given according to the social status of the village.

Miyan (Protection of Life):

Like the ten commandments, thou shall not kill is the first commandment of Miyan Act.

Thou shall not quarrel in thy neighbours house.

Thou shall not commit adultery.

Any quarrel or fighting can be intervened or stopped but no one is allowed to side or support either of the two opposing parties. The one who break this law is imposed a fine as penalty.

No man shall ever lay a hand on a woman.

Poor people, orphans and physically weak and handicaped persons should never be mistreated nor apprehended by force.

Orphans can be adopted but the customary law does not permit them to keep as servants. The guardians of these orphans shall also find a suitable girl/boy and get them married.

Pukahao:

It is taboo to threaten any one with spear, dao, bow, axe, etc.
No one can ever lay a hand on Pukreila who has married to another village and acted as mediator during inter-village war.

**Kakazanao:**

Any one who gets sick or died in a distant land or nearby village shall be carried by the different villagers turn by turn where the sickman has to pass through till he reaches his village.

Women who have gone out beyond the village premises should be guarded by men as they often fall victim at the enemies hands.

**Ngaraikacha:**

Everyone is equal in the eyes of law and should be treated equally.

**Kashao:**

Even if a man has committed a mistake, he/she cannot be beaten up.

**Khamang kaphor:**

*Shangzan sangmika hai mili khamang maphor paimara* – means anyone coming from other village or community to a new village and gets an admission in one of the clans of the village shall never be termed as lost person of no identity.

If the village is attacked by enemies, the villagers will shout and give signals to all the inhabitants wherever they are.

During the outbreak of any epidemic the villagers should kill a chicken and lay out the intestines at the village gate or at certain vulnerable places in order to divert the epidemic from entering into the village. The
villagers are restricted to go out and no outsider is allowed to enter the village in order to prevent the spread of epidemic disease in the village.39

**Raikui (Enemy’s Head):**

At any war, the victor or champion shall bring the enemy’s stained head or heads.

All the warriors who brought the enemies head would be given felicitation by killing animals. The head(s) would be ritualised by the village priests and hung up on the main entrance of the house of the Awunga (chief) or the warrior.

No one can bring any head into the village from any other village where the village owes no dues or from any friendly village. Such killers are fined and given severe punishment.

*Raikui Yomshara* - It is taboo to insult or make fun of enemies war heads.

**Ngashan (cultural elements):**

Some of the related cultural aspects, which are practised and strictly followed in the village are mentioned below.

**Longshim:**

Every village whether big or small shall have separate Longshim (dormitory) for both boys and girls.

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39. Y.K.Shimray - Unpublished Manuscripts Raikui (Enemy’s Head.)
**Longpet:**

Those who have constructed a big house and possessed the giant Long bed called *sumkok* which approximately accommodate 10–20 persons can be the host of the Longshim.

**Meisum:**

Courting of girls is done in the longshims (dormitories).

**Yar:**

Persons of different age groups work together in the fields.

**Tarung Kashun(genna post):**

Erection of genna posts (tarung) by a rich man within the village is done with the help and cooperation of the whole villagers.

*Khana kaSo*

For longevity and to mark the child’s legitimacy of their parents, every born child’s ears should be pierced by performing rituals by the village priest.

**Sumkok:**

Pulling of sumkok (giant bed) from the thick jungles shall be taken in-charge by the clansmen and the colony. If the sumkok is extremely big in size and length, all the villagers should involve in the pulling of sumkok. It is then ritualized by the village priests followed by grand feast.

**Ngalang Khangaraoo:**

In times of any misfortune or sickness in any family, the villagers extended both physical and material assistance to the family.
**Maran Kasa (Feast of Merit):**

The rich man in the village is allowed to throw feast of merit after the construction of the big special house called *lengcheng shim*. Such type of houses can only be constructed by the noble and the richman of the village. Many animals are killed and the host gives a grand feast to the whole villagers. The family relatives from the neighbouring villages are also invited to the feast.

**Songfa:**

The construction of footpath, ponds, cattle paths, bridges across the rivers or streams, cattle wallowing wet places, stream, etc., cannot be objected by any individual even if it falls within an individual’s private land.

**Shongzanthing:**

*Villagers* should plant trees all along the village roads and around the village premises. It should be strictly checked and maintained by the villagers.

**Luiria Phanit laa nganuiria:**

It is a customary practice that every year during *Luiria Phanit* (festival), all the virgin girls of the village shall join in *Langanui* singing and perform the gentle and graceful dance, which moves in circular and parallel motion.

**Chumphu:**

During harvest, every year, the mistress of the house shall perform a special ritual and invoke prayers to the goddess of wealth for bountiful
blessings upon the newly collected food grains of the year. On a particular night it is a customary practice that men-folk leave home and sleep in their respective fields. It is believed to be a big omen if her husband by chance happens to witness her puja performance.

**Moreisam:**

Girls involving in any immoral activities and caught red handed shall be punished by cutting her hair short.

**Games:**

The various types of games ranging from indoor games to outdoor games are played and fixed at different times according to the nature of games.

**Construction of lengcheng shim** (special house of the nobles) is done by the whole villagers till the completion of the house without counting the days and labour. Thatch houses are constructed by the clansmen or relatives in the same manner.

Whenever a guest or guests come and stay overnight, the family shall kill a chicken or cook any delicious dishes like meat or fish, etc., and dine together with him around the warm family hearth. When the guest leaves, a guardful of zam (rice beer) shall be presented to him.

**Ngaronshai ngaron mang ngarokra:**

Every villager should practice and inculcate the spirit of sharing with his fellow friends and neighbours with whatever he has, like agricultural
products, food, drinks, labour etc. It is considered as a good culture and till date every Tangkhul possess this spirit of sharing.

It is a tradition that married women are invited to a sumptuous meal at least once a year by her brothers, generally done during Mangkhap phanit (festival) and will be presented with a bowlful of cooked or uncooked pork. On any special occasions, whenever his brothers kill any animal, the sisters are given legs. The eldest sister is given the right leg and the rests are given in order of seniority. If the sisters are more than four, any portion of meat is given equal to legs. Married sisters are presented with one traditional shawl and rich sister may even come with a gift of a full-grown buffalo.  

Public Regulations:

**Shimzan (House theft):**

All the stolen articles or things whether big or small shall be returned to the owner and a fine will be imposed on the culprit.

**Shimkai:**

Shimkai means stealing of any properties or things from the house, removing boundary demarcation, stonewalls and destroying any household articles.

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40. Ibid., 91-92
Luizan:

It means theft in the paddy fields.

Phophat (adultery):

Husband has the right to chase out the wife who commits adultery from the house, and imposed adultery fine on the person who lied with his wife for defaming her husband. Even killing the man during the process is justified.

Latuk:

Rape is considered as a serious crime and the culprit is imposed heavy fines or given stringent punishment.

Divorce:

There are various kinds of divorces like Lahom, (divorce by force), lapan (divorce by agreement), Laphit, etc. If divorce is caused simply by husbands’ dislike and lose of love, the kind of divorce is called laphit. If such a kind of divorce takes place, the husband has to repay double dowry of what he was paid as bride price on their wedding. She will take back all the presents brought by her like kongsang, set of the most highly valued necklace and headdress set, bangles, anklets, waist belt, huishon, long chains of silver weighing around 10 kgs. iron staff, wedding baskets, properties both movable or immovable, animal, etc. One third of paddy of the family will also be given to her. If the divorce is vice-versa, his wife will go with only her dress and clothes.
Phamashao (rob):

If someone is robbed off by the same villagers, the case shall be decided by the village itself and punish the culprit according to phamashao laws. In case the victim belongs to other villages, the case is put up in the regional court and action is taken accordingly.

Miyum (murder):

It is a big taboo to kill or murder a person. In case of any murder out of anger during the fights or over boundary disputes, land etc., there is no specific fines. The villagers may swarm into his house and take away all their movable belongings or properties. If they are not satisfied they can even cease all the belongings of the next inheritors. If the murder is intentional and pre-planed, the case is settled by taking the revenge.

Preizei:

Married women cannot be beaten up or touched by anyone except her husband. She may commits mistakes but none can raise a hand and an offender of such law is punished and imposed fine.

Shukeiyuan and Seiyum:

Cruelty to domestic animals and killing of other animals is a big offence. For such offences, animals of the same value would be replaced and shukeiyuan fines imposed.

Pangkat:

Anyone who strikes first in a quarrel has to pay fine.
Wungnaovan:

No one can strike the village Awunga (Chief). He should be revered and respected as a village chief. The offender is fined.

Shimvor:

Selling of properties should be done after consulting the family members and clansmen.

Thingyum:

It means stealing of trees, firewood, beams, etc. It is a serious offence and in such cases thingyum fine is imposed.

Sakuiphit:

The animal’s head given to the Chief, according to customary law, cannot be taken away or dismissed by anyone under any circumstances. If such incident takes place, sakuiphit fine is taken.

Shongran (penalty or fines):

Penalty or fines are usually imposed on any person who violates any customary laws. The nature of fines differs according to the nature of the crimes and offences one has committed. Fines may be in the form of paying properties like utensils, tools, agricultural products, landed properties, animals etc. It may be in another form like chasing out from the village, excommunication by the members of the society, keeping as hostages, locking up, revenging a head for a head, money, etc.

The nature of traditional political institutions shows a mixture of social, economic and political matters. Social and customary laws played a
very important role not only in the infrastructure of the village but also in the superstructure (political system). In fact, they are the binding force for the smooth and efficient running of the administration.

Another notable feature of the political institution is the direct participation of the people in the administration. The members of the village council, being the senior-most member of the clans, always try to observe the customary laws and rules and try to promote the welfare of the people. The direct contact between the councillors and the villagers are always there because of the small size of the village population.

There is close interaction between the social life and the political life in the village. The chief being the head of the social life as well as the political administration of the village enjoys a high position and status in the village. Next to the Chief, it is the councillors who enjoy second highest position in the social and political activities of the village. For short, the traditional administration is a very closely knit social and political organisation.

**Traditional Regional Administration:**

The traditional Tangkhul area stretched over a large tract. Its traditional boundary reaches up to Thipongmei in the North and up to Chakva Kabo Kantak Kong (Chindwin river) in the South, from Angoching range up to Somra tract in the eastern side and Ching Shong Kong covering the entire Khaorui, the present eastern part of Sadar Hills. The boundary in

the older days were marked by mountain ranges, rivers, stone and stone walls. While marking boundary lines by erecting stones or stone walls or by rivers, streams or mountain ranges, the two parties bordering each other would erect or mark the boundary in the name of their Kasa Akhava (creator of heaven and earth) as “Yeh, lui thari hi mina hei mi thilo, sana hei sathilo.” 42 It means anyone who removes the boundary mark be it animal or man, let him die or let it die. According to their beliefs, the animal or man die within a short period of time. These natural boundaries are still in existence. The Tangkhuls take their land as their lives and soul and revered as their sustainer. They had a strong belief that their kasa Akhava protects their land from any encroacher or invaders. Though Tangkhuls have become Christians, yet, they still hold on their traditional beliefs and values. No one dare to defile and act against their beliefs and tradition.

To govern such an extensive tract of mountainous regions and date the land was divided broadly into seven regions. They are: (1) Raphei-(North) (2) Somra (North East now in Myanmar) (3) Kathur (central) (4) Kamo (south) (5) Remkhong yang (East) (6) Kharao (west) and (7) Khaorui (south west). 43

42. T.Luiikham - Wung Tangkhul Naga Okthot Mayonza-Tarun printing works, Imphal, 1961,p.132.

(1) Raphei:

From Lunghar, Longpi up to the extreme north-east were called Raphei, Raphei means "Khor pam" (Place of wine). In the days of yore, the Tangkhul ancestors according to their culture and tradition drink country wine (zam) as the babies suck their mothers milk. The people of this region drink wine from morning till sunset. They drink while working in the field or traveling and drink profusely during any festivals and celebrations. Though they drink heavily, they maintained moderation and never get drunk and did nuisance like the modern drunkards. As it is the place of wine, the people of this region are called "Raphei" (Ra-wine, Phei -feet or place). The people of this region are also known by the name 'Kashung'.

According to Maiya Gachui, the villages which came under Raphei region are - Lunghar, Longpi Kachui, Herei, kalhang, kuirei, Ngahui, Marem, Maremphung, Namrei, Razai phungcham, Razai Phungdhar, Kharasom, Layi Khuman, Phungtret(jesami) Soraphung, Tosom, Tosom Phungdhar, Wahong, Chalou, Kuingai, Chingai, Pui, Huishu, Khamasom, Phungrei, Waleli, Siaiphungcham, Sihai phungdhar, Chingchui Phungdhar, Paoyi Paorei Phungcham, Luiri Halang, etc.

The people of this region manufactured salt in their traditional way. There are many brine wells in this area, this region supplied salt to the entire Tangkhul areas. The people are expert in pot making, wooden plates, wine vats, spoons, shields, musical instruments, fishing nets. rain coats, armlets, anklets, baskets of various designs and purposes etc. The region is famous

44. Ibid p.9-10.
for its unique way of coking meat. Still in the modern days, Raphei ‘ham han’ (Raphei’s way of cooking) is very popular among the Tongkhuls.

(2) Kathur (Central)

The villages which come under Kathur region are Hunphun (Ukhrul) Shirui, Langdang, Choithar, Khangkhui Phungcham, Khangkhui Phungdhar, Nungshong, Shangzing, Shangshak, Kuishui, Lungshang, Humpum, Ramva, Tashar, Ringui, Pharung, etc. 45

In the olden days, due to the prevalent of head hunting, essential commodities could not be obtained, as there was no trade business among the neighboring villages. Usually, they exchanged their essential commodities on barter system. The villages, which fall under the region could not produce sufficient salt, chilies, etc. for their daily consumption. In Hunphun Somsai, there was a brine well and the taste of the salt was a little Sour. For this reason, this region was called ‘Kathur’ in Tangkhul. The literal meaning of Kathur in Tangkhul means sour. The people of this region are expert in making spear, metal-staff, spade, axe, knife, hook of spear, daos, baskets of different designs, musical instruments, wood crafts, etc.

3. Kamo (South):

The name of the villages which come under this region are Nungou, Yentem, Apong, Hankou, Ningthi, Bungpa Phungcham, Bungpa Phungdhar, Sampui, Phange, Kongkan, Lammak (Grihang), Leishi, Phaklang

45. Ibid. p.32

These people are excelled in making bow, spear, spade, knife (dao) axe, mat of different purposes, cane table for dining. Women carrying water tight baskets, hooks of daos and excelled in weaving. They are also expert in copper and iron works in their traditional way.

During migration period, these people moved towards Maram (Senapati) and slowly moved down towards the Southern part of the Tangkhul area looking for a suitable place for settlement and fertile land. The villages where these people are settled are very fertile as all the rivers flowed down towards the south. The people of this area mainly practice jhumming cultivation but in some places, terrace wet cultivation are also practised. These people are excelled bow shooters and expert in handling sword or dao for war or any other purposes. The northern people commonly used spears but these people hold bow or dao while they work or travel for security reasons during the head hunting period. Uptil now, ‘Komo Khai’ (Komo dao or sword) is very popular among the Tangkhuls.

46. Ibid., P. 33.
(4) Kharao (West):

The villages which come under this region are Ngainga, Tallui, Shongran (Somdal), Phadang, Tuinem, Hoomi, Kachai, Thiva, etc. These villages are the biggest villages in Tangkhul. They migrated to these villages from Phungcham, Faling, Champhung, Lunghar and Hunphun. For instance, ‘Zimik’ clan of Tolloi village are from Phungcham Zimik’s clan. They still have close relationship.

Tangkhuls are defence conscious tribe. The utmost duty of every region or village was defence. For defence purposes on the western side, these new villages were set up from among the above mentioned parent villages. The people are very expert warriors and defended their land from their enemies attack.

The paddy fields of these villages are extensive and stretched over a large area near the riverbeds. Most of the paddy fields are wet terraced fields and this enables them to have sufficient leisure time, as it is easier in cultivation. Women of this region are skill weavers and made various intrinsic patterns of colourful designs. This tradition of weaving continues till to-day. Men in their leisure time made different designs of baskets. A unique pattern of men’s carrying basket of this region is very famous known as ‘Sochui’.

47. Ibid, P. 33.
(5) **Khaorui (South West):**

Villages under this region are: Khampha Ramhon, Lungka, Aphung, Ahang, Tanrui, Khamsom, Sihai, Maichon, Zartek, Sitangphung, Zingtai, Ngavao, Hongman, Hakhui, Theishitphung, Parum Phungcham, Parum Phungdhar, Thangkan, Mayanglasom, Nurathen, Sharung Hokvasom, etc. 

Like other region, these places also made baskets of various types and usages like winnower, fishing nets, headbands, etc. They have extensive paddy fields and as such women get leisure time for weaving. In the olden days, people who have incest marriages or who broke the customary laws were exiled into these areas.

(6) **Rem-Khongyang (East)**

The villages covered by this region are khayang, Phungtha, Sayeipok, Chakman, Harngui, Ronsak, Zingsui, Ngapum, Wongshim, Shingcha, Maku, Langli, Chahong Phungcham, Chahong Phungdhar, Chakchi, Sayang, etc.

These people are excelled in making head bands, men’s head dress called mayo pasi, axe, spear, metal staff for women, various type of baskets for storing things and carrying purposes, small granary, mats, pounding tables, bangles etc.

These people practice Jhumming cultivation. Due to rugged terrain and narrow river valley, big villages could not be established. The bigger and more powerful villages from other region take advantage of this small

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48. Ibid., P. 34.
49. Ibid., P. 30.
village and often attacked on these villages scattered on the extreme border of Myanmar. In the olden days, the people of this region have fear psychosis all the time and could not concentrate in their cultivation work as their minds are always haunted by the enemies attack at anytime. In this situation, people of this area always look melancholic and for this nature, the people of this region are called Rem Khongyang.

After the coming of the British, the people of this region started living peacefully without fear. They took out all their costly ornaments, jewelaries, bangles, anklets, armlets etc. which they kept hidden during those uncertain periods of war which they brought from Myanmar and started wearing. From then onwards, lives became more lively and secured and they began to live peacefully.

(7) Somra (North East):

This region is now within the political map of Myanmar. When India got independence this area was demarcated out into Myanmar without the knowledge of the Tangkhuls. Moreover, people on the border in those days were ignorant and could not raise any word for inclusion of Tangkhul villages into Myanmar. The name of these Tangkhul villages in some region are: Somra, Phungcham, Somra Phungdhar, Leiyan Pansha, Mayirlung, Kongkailung, Kogi, Numityungbi, Leishi Ngachan, Jagaram, Hangkok, etc.50

Over and above, these divisions and social identifications, Long was instituted as an apex governing body of the whole regional units. The above

50. Ibid., P. 17.
7(seven) divisions of land in the Tangkhul area is not a political divisions but a social identifications. There was a common constitutional laws which were enacted uniformly for the entire regions covering each and every village of Tangkhul. There were regional Longs under the apex body which looks after the whole sphere of their respective regions. Any case whether criminal or civil would be settled within the respective regions (Luiyan). In case the concerned region could not decide the case, then a meeting of all the Luiyans will be convened and settled the case. The chairman of the Long was called Longva and the headman of all the villages covering the entire Tangkhul regions were the ex-officio members of the Long. The present Tangkhul Long gradually developed from this organisation. "Built upon the disciplined tradition of the fore-fathers’ such organisation had became a strong U.N.O. of the Tangkhuls leading to a more refined system and inter-village administration."51

**Administrative Divisions:**

For administrative convenience, the whole Tangkhul area was broadly divided into 3(three) zones (Luiyan) known as (1) Kasomkong Luiyan (for western area), (2) Shongva Luiyan (for North and Eastern area) and (3) Vara Luiyan (for southern area) including Ukhrul (Hunphun).

According to this Luiyan, each Luiyan or zone will take care of their respective zone. In case a dispute arises within a particular zone all the headmen and representatives (Councillors) within the zone will decide the

case and punishments are also awarded according to the nature of the crimes and offences. If anyone was found stealing standing paddy and caught red handed, the thief could be killed instantly and the case could be decided later on. As a mark of paddy theft, his spearhead would be wrapped up with hay stick. His head would be cut off and used to block the water outlets of the wet paddy field. For such killings, action cannot be taken on the killer as longyan permits to kill if caught red handed during the act of process.\(^5^2\)

Even a minor thing like the big bees which served excellent food for the Tangkhuls were within the ambit of the Longyan. If somebody became the first to put a sign like scarecrow or some marks near the beeline he was entitled to become its owner. Even mushroom growing by the roadside cannot be taken away if somebody had already marked it with some signs.\(^5^3\)

There are also certain rules and laws regarding the sharing of river water and channels among the owner of the wet paddy fields.

In case, a case caould not be settled within their respective Luiyan, then it was put up in the apex Long. In the olden days, the assembly of the three Luiyans was called Long (highest assembly). It acted as a supreme court of the modern judiciary.

In addition to the above three Luiyans, there were several sub-Luiyans in a single zone. It is to make the administration of Long easier as Long will not be able to administer from the grass root level. Moreover, every single zone or sub-zone knows the problem and situation of their respective Luiyan


better. It is just like the modern break-up of sub-divisions and Blocks. For instance, under Kasomkong Luiyan, there were sub-Luiyans, (1) Masai Luiyan, (2) Ngachang Luiyan, (3) Yakrei Luiyan and (4) Ma' ham Luiyan (Ngahem). Other than this, there are still further Luiyans like Lamva Luiyan, Lungra Luiyan, Kongyan and Phungyan. Kongyan means Luiyan according to the course of rivers. This area covers from Lungshang Kong to Hurshung. If anything happens within this area, the Long members would come and settle the case.

Phungyan means division of land according to the ranges of mountains such as Pharung Shimtang and Ringui Hongrei. There are such sub-Luiyans in all the three Luiyans.

Other than these sub-Luiyans, there are certain duties and rules to be performed and followed by each Luiyan. These are as follows:

(1) Yangkhei Mayon:

Any village which was vulnerable of any attack, burglary, waylaying, ambush or indulgence in any secret war, that village was given protection by sending some strongmen from other villages under the directions of the Long.

(2) Luipet:

During autumn season when the paddy started to ripe, the selected male members of each Luiyan in their respective Luiyan will guard their standing crops in the paddy field in full war dress and armouries in order to
prevent and protect any attempt of stealing their standing crops. Sometimes, surrounding villages grouped together and guard their respective fields.

**Meivan:**

Every village has their respective Meivan, (law of protecting fire) and protect their village from any outbreak of fire within the village compound or village forests. If any fire breaks out crossing the village boundaries and have caused much damage to the other neighboring village, the case would be appealed to the regional court and they would settle the case. Only a difficult and controversial case was put up in the apex court of Tangkhul Long for final decision.

**Ngalei Khamor:**

It means no man’s land i.e. the land outside the above mentioned three Luiyans. Head hunting, burglary, etc., was free in these areas where the land was not included within the ambit of each Luiyan. Anyone who was killed within this zone was accepted and the family could not put up any contempt case against the culprit in any of the above mentioned Luiyans.

**Raiyan:**

Rai means war and yan means law. It was therefore, the law that governed the conduct of war. Whoever violated the law of war (Raiyan) was punished severely by the Long. For example, under the law of war (Raiyan) no head could be taken in the general war. In this kind of war, a day was fixed and the warring parties in full armouries met at a selected battlefield or place called ‘Ngapharphung’ and fought the battle to the last. During the
fight, chopping off the enemies' head was strictly forbidden. The representatives of the long members along with the villagers of both the villages would watch the fight. In case, no party wins or a party wins after killing many warriors, the Long members would enter into the battle field and stop the fighting in order to avoid further bloodshed.

In every village there were safe zones and war zones. Anybody being chased by the enemies could not be killed if he entered the safe zone with the usual cry or shouts as “I am in the safe zone”. There were sentry posts in all the vulnerable points and for fear of being seen by the sentries, the pursuer usually stopped chasing the person. In case any head was taken in the safe zone area, the individual who killed the man was punished adequately under the Raiyan Law.

To cross a war zone, a person must first obtain permission from the village by offering meat to the villager. In case the person crosses the demarcated zone without prior permission, the host villager could kill the trespasser. The family of the dead man and the villager could not take revenge upon that villager or appeal to the Long for their lost head since he had violated the laws of war. So war zone was strictly maintained and no one dare to trespass it.

**Kachika (passport):**

If the head hunting party or an individual had to cross some villages to reach the destined village, they should obtain the passport of the villages, which they had to cross, otherwise they could be killed by the villagers on the way or kept as hostages in the pillory called ‘zurthing’. No criminal case
could be charged for such killings as he had violated the inter village passport rules.

Other than the above-mentioned subjects, there are various customary laws, which govern the whole spheres of village and regional administration. The executive members of the Long would decide any case according to the rules and regulations under the Tangkhul customary laws and conventions. As mentioned earlier, these are not written down but through the continuance of practices, usages and oral traditions, the system is still continuing in the Tangkhul society. The Tangkhul Long is the apex body of all the regional Longphangs. It also acted as the highest court of justice and whatever case is put in this court, the case is settled and no one dares to go against the decision of the Long. The traditional Tangkhul Justice was based on the dictum of the Tangkhuls as “Shonglun Khamashungna Yui” (righteous comes out victorious). Accordingly, the righteous always wins the case. After a long spell of centuries, there were some changes in the political administration of long and regional Long. In 1733, the Meitei king sent a military expedition to Ukhrul, the headquarters of Tangkhul Long and was captured by the Meitei forces. After sometimes, Hundung was also captured. The defeat of these two big villages was a landmark in the establishment of the Meitei political hegemony over the Tangkhul Hills, which started feeling the brunt of the Meitei power. These two big villagers were the headquarters of the Tangkhul long. May be after the conquest of these villages that the administrative division of the traditional Tangkhul Long was modified and changed. The Long was divided into three new sub-divisions by changing the names of the three original Long Liuyans. The areas covering the entire North-eastern zones were called ‘Shakta Lam’. The head of this long, called
‘Haokok’ was Hunphun (Ukhrul), the Southern areas were called ‘Kameng Lam’, the Haokok (head) was Humpum (Hundung), and the Western areas was called ‘Sagolmang Lam’. In the initial years, the Haokok of Sagolmang was Shongran (Somdai), but later on Kachai village became the Haokok. As the traditional Long, each region was taking care of their respective zone.54

This new administrative divisions was carried on for some periods but it got defunct after the arrival of the British. The British introduced indirect rule in the hill district of Manipur and allowed to retain their traditional system of administration (both village and regional). It was only “after the World War I, that the Tangkhul Long was revived in 1919”55. It is the apex socio-political and cultural organisation of the Tangkhuls based on the Tangkhul traditional political system.

55. T.B.L. centenary souvenir 1996. P.20