CHAPTER III
THE ZELIANGRONG CONCEPT OF MEANING OF LIFE
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Introduction about the Tribe and Creation Myth

The term Zeliangrong was coined on 15, February 1947 by taking the prefixes of three Naga tribes namely, Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei. It is referred to the body that was formed based on ethnological and cultural connection among the three tribes mentioned above. It was formed to enrich and enhance the economic, social, political and educational fields. As mentioned, regarding the basis of its formation, the three tribes are believed to be the descendants of the same parentage or lineage from a historical point of view.

Racially the Zeliangrong are grouped as Tibeto-Burman (Indo-Mongoloid) both ethnically and linguistically. It is believed that the Zeliangrong people must have migrated to the north eastern India by different routes after moving in different parts of south East Asia several thousand years ago. We can unmistakably say that before they settle down in a place call “Makuilongdi”, presently in Manipur, they were moving from one place to another in search of a suitable place for food and for their survival. But after they have come to Makuilongdi everything seems to be congenial for their habitation. As a result, they became self sufficient. It is said that people of Makuilongdi seldom gets any sickness or diseases and so the number of people increased tremendously and reached till 7777 households.

The increased in population to an alarming figure has become a problem to them for governance of the village as well as site for cultivation. From then on, parts of them decided to venture out to search for a site which could give them the needful for their survival. One after another, the two brothers (believed

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to be Zeme and Rongmei), move toward north and south respectively. So, gradually after several years of trying to locate for a favourable place to settle down for a domestic life they at last came to present place. But unfortunately, since and during the colonial rule, they were separated from each other under different states, though they still occupy the same places that are geographically contiguous. All the three brothers, who later on, become the three tribes presently lives in three states namely Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. It may not be wrong to say that the cultural and traditional practices of Zeliangrong were developed from "Makuilongdi".

At present, the Zeliangrong people lives in a contiguous area namely Tamenglong district, Western Sadar hills, Mao West, Loktak project of Manipur, the Halflong sub-division of North Cachar Hills district of Assam and, Peren district and Kohima district of Nagaland. Though the tribes as such are recognized separately under the government of India, they do have several organizations under the banner of Zeliangrong.

It may be pointed out that it was only by the 19th century that through the British colonial rule Christianity was spread to the Northeast region (India). The impact of which reached to the Zeliangrong community for about hundred years ago. Now most of Zeliangrong people are Christian. Before then, they were following their own traditional religion. They are said to be theist since time immemorial. They believe that life does not end here and now. Their belief, in life after death, seems to have influenced and dictated their ways of life dearly.

According to the Zeliangrong’s myth of creation, the Supreme God (Ragwang-gods king), who is said to be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, created the heaven, the universe and then man, through his power by employing his two first creations Didimpu and Didimpui. When it comes to the form of the earth God summoned his two servants Newmeiduan and Newlotiap to go to a place called earth. It is said that the earth was formless in the beginning. So in order to make a place suitable for human habitation and all

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living creatures, the two servants transformed themselves as crow and perched on a plant called Chakhung on earth. Since the earth was filled with water, they transformed themselves into a giant frog again, so that they could maneuver on the surface of water. The two servants happen to notice a huge earth worm. They wanted to eat it, but the earth worm requested them to spare his life with a promise that he would do anything for them. Then the two servants asked the earthworm to drill out mud from beneath the ocean, which the earthworm complied. It is said that through such mechanism the land and the water got separated and it became a place conducive for habitation for any living creatures.

It is said that man was created by God’s two agents (Dampopui and Dampopu) in the image of God.\(^3\) Male and female were moulded in shape from the dust/clay (clay of an anthill) of the earth. Then Supreme God himself breathed life-soul on them on the head of the bodies that they came to life and live.\(^4\) So, man is a being made out of both dust and breathe of God that man becomes a unique and special creation. Soul was given by the Supreme God to men.

**Outline and Object of the Chapter**

The study of this chapter, in particular and the whole dissertation with regard to the Zeliangrong concept of meaning of life, will be mainly based on their life before they embraced Christianity. As a matter of fact, it may not be possible to trace back, how the concept of religion or god came into existence within the community of Zeliangrong, before the God or religion of Christianity was introduced to them. The reason why the thesis is intended to focus during those periods is that the essence and authenticity of the Zeliangrong religion, tradition and culture would be as it was without the influence from the external ways of life. Another good reason in support of this aim is that they abandoned all their traditional and cultural value after their acceptance of Christianity. It is

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\(^3\) Ibid., p.7

intended particularly because religion is one of the main factors which
determine the kind of life how they should live in a society. So, Religion
becomes one of the determining factors with regards to their life either as
meaningful or meaningless. Even after they embraced Christianity they are still
known as the Zeliangrong. But the important point that this work is intended to
bring into attention, is the original form of their life untouched by the alien
cultures. If it is not based on this ground the determining factor to their meaning
of life would automatically be based according to the belief of Christianity. In
order to avoid that and at the same time, to get a crystal clear picture of what
the Zeliangrong were actually practicing their old customs and traditions from
the whole perspective, the study is projected to cover mainly on those periods.

**Foundation and Governing System of Village**

In order to know the whole aspect of the Zeliangrong way of life, it is
important to take note of the way how they established their villages. When
they search for a particular piece of land to settle down, they do not simply and
randomly choose a particular site just because it looks favorable and promising
for their livelihood. They take certain signs and omens, to come to the final
decision, whether that particular piece of land would be suitable for them or not.
The first step that involved in establishing a new village is finding a site or spot.
The location should be as such that all the requirement for a healthy life like
cultivable land, water, security, suitable environment, etc should be accessible.

When such site has been located, the next thing that they do is, make
fire by the traditional method known as “Maaihlapmei”. The first omen that they
take is the flame. If the flame burns properly, they take it as a good sign. They
would then, pile up a dried woods and leaves to read an omen of smoke. The
one, who would be the head and land owner, would offer a prayer in loud voice
to god. “If this place would be prosperous and flourishing, productive and have
a long and enduring life may the smoke billow up toward the sky”. After the
prayer has been offered, they would go to the other side of the mountain to
have a clear view of the smoke. If the smoke goes straight up to the sky,
without any deviation or inclination to different direction, it is taken as a good
omen. They continue to read an omen by killing a pig. They would cut open the pig and see if the spleen is healthy and without any defect. If it is so, it would be considered as a good omen.

Source of water is considered to be one of the essential factors, for survival, by the Zeliangrong. So the next thing is to find a good source of water. They would dig a well and offer a prayer to god. “If this place would be prosperous and flourishing may this well be always filled with water”. They would then leave the well and come back after five days to see if it is still filled with water. If it is so, they would take it as a good sign. Like they take an omen from water, the omen of paddy is also done. Then they would construct a village gate known as Raang. This gate is the main entry of the village. After the completion of all the formalities, before the real entry to the village, all the villagers, except the land owner and old people who could not move easily on their own, along with their belonging have to move out of the village before dust and sleep outside the gate.

The next day early in the morning the land owner would open the gate and ask a question to the villagers who had spent their night at the gate. “Araang bang khou bam mei thou cho?” meaning who is there at my gate? The villagers gathered there would respond by saying “Nampoule, aniu guai hei nang nam khou lung loume, tuna guang pui tuang nge, zeihaang phung puigin humme, ramping puigin humme, ndaap tripui gin de” which means landowner, we came here to live in your village, we are not a guest tainted with blood, nor a guest who fled from fear, but a hungry and thirsty guest. Then they would be allowed to enter by the land owner. While entering the gate each of them must touch a necklace that is hung at the gate. As they enter, there would be a bonfire at the center of the village, which was lighted by the flame of the omen fire that was considered as good sign. Every household must come and get a piece of burning firewood or light it from that bonfire and make the first fire to cook at their homes. That fire is known as “Maaihtan” which mean new fire.85

The question of who should be the landowner or head of the village is different in some villages. In order to find out who should head the new village, all the clans would bring a rooster before they enter the village gate. They would spend one night in front of the gate. At the break of the dawn, whosoever rooster crows first, becomes the founder of that new village. From then on, the founder of the village would perform several rites, rituals and ceremonies to accomplish all the formalities required in establishing a new village.

Irrespective of the differences in selection procedure, we need to take note of the importance regarding the headship of the village. It is considered as crucial because, during any conflict amongst them, of whatsoever reasons, the verdicts of land owner stand final. The landowner even goes to the extent of saying to the culprit “Nangtho amaaihkhou njuanna guangpui meide”. It means you are just a mere person who followed the smoke of my fire. In order to avoid all the unnecessary controversies in future, headship is announced through general consensus. After all the formalities have been completed the next thing is to form the village Council or ‘Pei’.

The Zeliangrong villages usually have dual functions- secular and religious. The secular functions are rendered by the founder (Kadepeo or Nampou) of the village. He deals with the general administration, judicial and social affairs. Whereas, in the religious affairs are headed by a priest known as Tingku, Tingkiupeu, Taku. He is responsible for all the performances of the rites, rituals and ceremonies on every required occasion of the village. Both, the Nampou and the Tingku, are the head of secular and religious affairs respectively. They are assisted by several members chosen as a representative from all the clans. So Pei or the Village Council is a constitution of Nampou, Tingku and all the members from different clans. They are empowered to execute the entire required affairs of the village.

From the historical point of view, it may not be wrong to say, that the Zeliangrong villages were in the form of city state. Each village is a small kingdom. The governance and its administration are handled by few chosen people through traditional methods. Its jurisdiction covers the entire village.
territory. Every citizen has an equal rights and duties. They are equally responsible for any cause within and without the community. It is possible to jeopardize the peace and harmony of the whole community due to one's negligence or ignorance. So in every undertaking, either as individual or group, it has to be done through the knowledge, framework and consent of the society.

As stated earlier, each Zeliangrong village were like a small kingdom and on top of that they live an isolated life without much or very rare contact with the other communities. An account of peaceful co-existence with other communities is hardly heard of other than with neighbouring villages. They do not seem to have much contact with other communities if not during their migration or feuds and wars. From this point of view, we can say that the cultural assimilation might not have taken place within this community in a large scale. We mean to say that they were not influenced much by the other people in their ways of living. So the traditional beliefs and practices are authentic. As any other community would be, the Zeliangrong also believes that the concept of anything they uphold is the best. They are said to conservative and orthodox in a way. They follow a strict principle in their ways of life. They cling to their beliefs at any cost. Any infringement or violation from within and without is not spared by the community without public decision. Changing in their pattern of life is a rare phenomenon. So whatever they have they hold fast unto it. If it is to be changed the consent of the community is consulted. In short, they hold that whatever they believed and does is better than others.

Governance of the village is in the hand of “Pei” (Council). This Council is constituted by a representative of all the clans. Pei is headed by the founder of the village (Nampou, Kadepeo). Nampou usually look after the secular affairs of the village. In the religious matter Tingku /Tingkuhpeo (Chief priest) is the head. In some villages he is assisted by his assistant known as “Tinku Kiakza”. The Priest does all the rites, rituals and ceremonies in the village. At

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one point of time it is said that Tinku was considered as the supreme head of
the village. At times, even Nampou had to obey the dictum of Tingku.\textsuperscript{88} Apart
from the village council there is a court of justice known as Shungbam. When a
dispute of any kind could not be solved by the Pei the case is handover to
Shungbam. This court gives the final verdict to criminal of whatsoever crime.
Among the Zeliangrong how gruesome the crime may be the severest
punishment is in the form banishment and excommunication from the village.
Capital punishment was not practiced among them.\textsuperscript{89} Amongst the Zeliangrong
there is also one important feature known as “Muh” (Shaman) which occupies
an important place in a society. He or she is not selected or ordained by the
people. They are the one who usually used to have a gift which is inborn. Their
knowledge and skill in medicines are not acquired through training or is an
imparted knowledge. They are said to have vision, foresee things and
knowledge of medicine. They are usually known as medicine men.

\textbf{Religion and God}

Religion is a human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy,
sacred, spiritual, or divine. Religion is commonly regarded as consisting of a
person’s relation to God or to gods or spirits. Worship is probably the most
basic element of religion, but moral conduct, right belief, and participation in
religious institutions are generally also constituent elements of the religious life
as practiced by believers and worshipers and as commanded by religious
sages and scriptures.\textsuperscript{90}

In studying about the life of any tribe or people, if the concept of religion
is not incorporated in it, its study would be incomplete or partial. The history of
mankind has shown the pervasive influences of religion, and thus the study of

\textsuperscript{88} Gangmumei Kamei, The History Of Zeliangrong Nagas, From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu,
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 329
\textsuperscript{90} “religion.” Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference
religion, involving the attempt to understand its significance, its origins, and its myriad forms, has become increasingly important in modern times. Broadly speaking, the study of religion comprehends two aspects: assembling information and interpreting systematically the material gathered in order to elicit its meaning. The first aspect involves the psychological and historical study of religious life and must be supplemented by such auxiliary disciplines as archaeology, ethnology, literary history, and other similar disciplines. The facts of religious history and insight into the development of the historical religious communities are the foundation of all else in the study of religion. Beyond the historical basis lies the task of seeing the entirety of human religious experience from a unified or systematic perspective.

The study of religions is to understand the structure, nature, and dynamics of religious experience. Only with the attempt to discern the system and structure binding together the differentiated historical richness of religion does a true science of religion begin. As mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, particularly the lives of Zeliangrong were very much influence by their concept of religion. Apart from their daily chores of life activities that determined about their dos and don'ts, the concept of restriction or genna (Neihmei) occurs in their life from their religious beliefs'.

**Functionalism and structuralism**

According to the cultural functionalists, including the followers of Malinowski, the only way to explain facts was to define the function that they performed currently in a given culture. The aim of all cultural anthropological research, they held, should be to perceive the totality of a culture and the organic connection of all its parts. Consequently, comparison did not make sense: each culture was a unique reality. History, moreover, made no more sense; a culture was to be interpreted at one point in time, as if the age and the origin of the elements composing it were without importance. The only thing that counted was the function the elements performed now. Earlier cultural anthropologists had talked of "survivals," customs or other cultural traits that survived from out of the past though no longer with any real function or
meaning. But Malinowski would say, "There are no survivals"; everything current, according to the functionalists, has some function.

Whereas the name of Malinowski is supremely associated with the school of functionalism, the name of Radcliffe-Brown is known as one of the most important proponents of present-day structuralism. Relying on the concepts of formal mathematics and linguistics, Radcliffe-Brown and other structuralists tried to determine whether in cultural anthropology it was possible to reveal that which "suggests the character of a system" beyond empirical reality and which "alone is the true object of science" (Lévi-Strauss). A structure is not a sum of social relations, which are only the primary material from which the observer extracts "structural models." A structure is a system of which the members of the society being studied are not aware or only partly so. The model that the cultural anthropologist constructs from the system is valid when the model's operation can account for all the observed facts. This exacting approach has proved particularly useful in studying kinship and marriage relations as well as myths. The difficulties of using this approach in other fields, as well as the fact that historical changes are difficult to include in this sort of static analysis, strengthen the objections that many workers in the field have raised against it.

Functional and structural studies of religion

The quest for an organized account of the origin of religion in prehistory by reference to primitive societies was hardly likely to yield decisive results. Thus, scholars became more concerned with functional and structural accounts of religion in society and relinquished the apparently futile search for origins.

According to Durkheim, totemism, which he calls nothing but the symbol of the clan's community, represents for him the foundation of all religious forms.91 It was fundamentally significant. Durkheim treated the totem as symbolic of the god, he inferred that the god is a personification of the clan.

This conclusion, if generalized, suggested that all the objects of religious worship symbolize social relationships and, indeed, play an important role in the continuance of the social group. Durkheim's explanation of the nature and origin of religion was vigorously criticized by A. A. Goldenweiser as something not common to every people.

Keeping in view of the citation, now let us look into the Zeliangrong religion. The Zeliangrong are religious people. In all their activities, starting from the daily household chores, cultivation, festival, concept of morality and virtues, etc, they make it to the point that, it is in tuned with their religious belief. W.C. Smith view on the religion of Naga is one good example of the role of religion even in the context of Zeliangrong. He writes;

"The religion of the Naga is intensely practical. He performs his rites lest the mysterious powers about him brings calamities to his door; he refrains from work on certain days that he may have good crops; he goes through the appropriate ceremonies that he may have water in the spring; and he sacrifices at the village gate lest the dread pestilence comes stalking boldly in and ruthlessly claim both hoary age and stalwart youth as his victims."

So in studying about their life, one cannot do away with their concept of religion which they highly revered. Their concept of religion is polytheistic in outlook. But they believe in one supreme God which they called it as 'Raguang' (Ra-God, Guang- King. King of God) or 'Tingkauh Raguang' (God of heaven). In every significant undertaking they always offer a sacrifice to invoke God's blessings. Depending upon occasions, that they undertake, offerings are

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made to different deities. In most of the ritual fowl is offered. The offerings are performed by the high priest known as 'Tingkuh'. In every occasion he always takes the lead role. Without his consent, people rarely carry out their works if it is not for petty daily chores of life. He is said to be the mediator between God and human beings.

Based on the stories, myth, legends, etc, of the Zeliangrong, it is believed that gods, human beings and animals were once living together. Particularly there is one story which relate to the claim that they were once living together. There was once a man by the name of Amangbou. He once hosted a feast. It is said that he invited all the animals and fowls to attend the feast. This story bears as evidence about their claim. According to them, man always tries to follow the footsteps of gods in their ways of life. Their beliefs, culture and traditional practices are believed to be the continuation of what they once were following when they were living together.

The religion that the Zeliangrong imbibed before the advent of Christianity is termed by Namthiubuiyang Pamei as primal religion against the opinion of others who termed it as animist, savage, heathen, primitive, etc,. He holds this on the ground that the Zeliangrong religion has all the features of the primal religion. All the basic features of primal religion are mention below

a) Belief in the spiritual world of power who are stronger than man himself.

b) Concept of the supreme god above all powers.

c) Belief that the spirits of those who have died live on.

d) Dependence on dreams, visions and myth.

e) The use of rituals as means of communication between the world of spirit and the world of the living or between the world of dead and the living.

f) Prayers and offering to god features prominently in the rituals.

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g) Medicine men and the priests play an important role in the society.

They had a strong conviction that there must be something behind nature that controls the whole systems of the living and the non-living. Against the invisible force of nature, which sometimes is merciless, they are helpless. It is during such situation, when natural calamities occurs, where every normal human being, devoid of scientific knowledge about it, is made to pause and think about what could be the source/s of such an immense power that can destroy and affect the normal state of life—nature. It is this intervention of unseen force which led them to believe that there is a ‘being’ out there that control the universe. To that particular ‘being’ they called it “Tingkao Raguang” (god of heaven) or just “Raguang” (god King).

In fact the Zeliangrong are polytheistic. They worship many gods. For each god depending upon the occasion different offerings is made. They believe gods to reside in a place like mountain, rock, big trees, river etc. So they offer the sacrifices in those places. This is the reason why the other writers who study about such people, without an in-depth Knowledge, termed the religion as animist. But such views are not acceptable within the purview of Zeliangrong religion. The simple reason is that the sacrifices were not made to the material objects out there, but were offered to the gods that is believed to be dwelling in those places. They are also said to worship nature like the water, the fire, the wind and the earth with a belief that it is endowed with divine status and powers in them. There are some deities, which are believed to be guarding the villagers, known as shong or Bambu. These deities are worshiped as well for they are believed to be the protector of the villagers from all the evil spirits from without. Ancestor worship is also practiced by them. The spirits of death are believed to be like those deities who guard and protect the village but they are known by the name Kairao. The souls of the deceased are said to be the protector of the particular family, household and lineage.

In any forms of prayer and worship, starting from the supreme god to the lowest deities, rites and rituals are performed. During such ceremonies,
sacrifices of varieties ranging from an ordinary cup of water to mithun, depending upon the events, are offered to gods.

Like in any other religion the Zeliangrong also believes in life after death as well as rebirth. The physical death of a person is not the end of it all. The soul of the deceased lives on. It is believed that when a person dies his or her soul would go to the land of dead known as Taruairam or Taroiram. The soul would continue to live in this land. They say that one's status in this land would entirely depend on the way how a person had lived when he was alive.

They believe in the existence of heaven but the question of hell does not come in the picture of Zeliangrong religion. It is said that heaven is a place of gods and deities. After death most people goes to the land of dead and only few who manages to host a feast of Baanruh Dungmei (Maku-Baanruh) and Tarengkai goes to heaven. It may be mentioned that a clear account of the concept of heaven is not given by anyone in a written form, all the account or information about it, is only through an oral medium. It is only in few occasions that people talk about heaven. But regarding the land of dead, besides the written documents, people still have a thorough knowledge about its concept. It has been handed down from one generation to the next generation through oral tradition, which is one of the main sources and medium about what has been in the past. A detail study of life after death-Taruairam, and rebirth would be done in the later part when we discuss about the concept of death.

The Zeliangrong are said to be stubborn especially when it comes to part with their practices and beliefs. Any new systems introduced to them do not easily entice them. They hold fast unto what they believed to be true and consider their own ways of life to be ultimate and never felt that it is inferior to others pattern. W.C. Smith's view about the Naga too supports this trait about the Zeliangrong. He says that the Naga is conservative. He is not at all enthusiastic about adopting new ideas or new ways of doing things. He thinks the way his father did things is the best, and that this cannot be surpass in

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99 Ibid., p. 32
excellence. But as nothing remain static; though they were conservative and dogmatic, the wave of Christianity reached to them in the 19th century during the colonialism, the effect of which, some of them were converted to Christianity. From then on, slowly and gradually, the good news has spread to every nook and corner of the Zeliangrong people. As stated earlier at present about 90 percent of the Zeliangrong are Christian.

After they embraced this new religion most of their cultural and traditional practices are discarded. In a way, the old practice has become a history. But up to this present day, within the three states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, there are few groups of people who still practice the traditional religion and culture. But one can say that the essence of its traditional values has eroded drastically due to the influence from without.

**Way of Life-Birth-Naming**

The traditional and cultural values of a tribe, community, state, country, nation etc in its crystal clear and undiluted form, may be very hard to trace after a lapse of hundreds of years. For the wave of changes has not left any form untouched. Living in space and time, man has to adapt, refine and cope with the given situation. So in its process of attempting to cope with the changes, the belief, ways of life and their faith are automatically affected. Likewise, in the Zeliangrong community drastic changes are noticed. But in spite of the changes in outward appearances, the past experiences and the memories of the days gone by, still lingered in the mind and that has been transmitted from one person to another orally through stories, myths, legends, folklores, folksongs etc.

Now let us try to explore and ponder on how the Zeliangrong consider life. The term for life in Zeliangrong is *Panti* - life (*apanti* - my life). The literal sense of the term refers to the duration or period from birth to death. This term is also used in the sense of longevity of life span. The context that is used in the sense of longevity is during the dead of a person. ‘Kamei panti mak nga thei

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kan the’ and ‘kamei panti tang nga thei kan the’. Loose translation would be ‘he/she died before his time’ and ‘he/she died a natural death by living to the fullest’. The sense of the term that is used in the context of someone who died a natural death would be used in this dissertation. Among the Zeliangrong longevity of life is considered to be blessed. When we discuss about the meaningfulness of life this would be one of the determining factors. There is an old saying in Zeliangrong about life “mansei panti hei nruai duih kum me”. Which means men’s life is like an egg. The notion behind this saying is that life is fragile, brittle and complicated. If you try to hold it too tight in fear of dropping it, it breaks and if you hold loosely it slip away from our hand. They take life to be complex and complicated. Life is filled with full of mysteries. They believe in life after death, rebirth and moral laws. The concept of their moral law and rebirth are somewhat similar to that of Hindus. They too hold that the fruits of one’s act will be reaped by one self. The effect of one’s action is believed to reflect directly in the next life.

The form of life in the next birth is determined by the conducts of a person while he/she is alive. It is possible that one will be reborn in any form. There is one evident which supports their belief in rebirth. When a person dies, there is a tradition which the near and dear ones of the deceased performed. Before they bury the corpse, a piece of charcoal would be pounded and the powder of which will be smeared on the dead body. They will then, utter a wish to be reborn again in future. It may only be a co- incidence that, a new born baby bears a mark on the particular place where they smeared charcoal, but according to the elders, such thing has happened in many cases. They say that such mark appears on the body of the new born baby in the form of a black mole. If such things occurs, they would say, “Mei guangh lung guang dat the” which means, the earlier man have come back again.

Amongst the Zeliangrong, if a woman is known to have conceived, she is prohibited from doing certain things. For instance, she is not allowed to kill a snake; for the child may have a fanglike tongue, not allowed to kill a monkey for they may have a long hand etc. There is one peculiar trend with regard to the
child’s birth. When a woman is expecting a baby or undergoing a labour pain, apart from the midwives and the family members, the dormitories members of both (Male and female), keeps vigilance for the day of its delivery, to claim the child to be one of the members in their dormitory. The youngster belonging to different dormitories would wait right outside the house. The group, who happened to witness the birth, first, would claim the baby. If the child is male, a spear or Dao (Knife) and if it is female Tanbian or Taengu (Weaving tools used by female) is kept in front porch of the house as a symbol to show that the baby has been claimed. Through this sign people will come to know, the gender of the new born baby, even without being informed. A child, right from the moment of birth, he or she is born not only as a particular family member, but becomes a member to one of the dormitories of the village besides becoming one of the members of the whole community. Since the child’s birth, a proper care is taken, not just by the family members but by the dormitory members who came to claim him/her for his/her membership.

The priest, on the following morning, will perform the rite of “Najumgai”. This rite is performed within three days. Then he will bless the child by chanting a prayer. It is in fact interesting to look into the meaning of the words used in prayer to bless the child. ‘Mi nah hei gaona gana ju king nkiu na lung bam kan diu, Makiu Baanruh Dungna kaluatpat na lung mei nah suwo, Nousou gansut mei na su o, meilu lungman o, kapui leng thei jip mei ta njei o, meitan meibao mei pu suna mei pi la mei pusu kan diu o tana suai lou wo’. Loose translation goes like this ‘may this child’s generation be fruitful and plentiful like those of frogs and crabs. May he live to build a house (Tarangkai) and have a plentiful harvest (Baanruh Dungmei). May he commit adultery as many as he can. May he sleep with many girls. May he become a brave and strong man so that he can bring many heads.’ Then the child is given a name.

A child is to be given a name before five days. It is believed that on the fifth day the goddess of creation “Dampapui” (or “Tingranpui” in Zeme) would come and visit the child with a record. She would then ask the child, ‘whether you want to die as a kid, or before getting married (Pengchiumei) or live a
flourished, prosperous and live through till your hair becomes grey and die'. At that particular time, if the ritual of "Nahjumgai" was not performed and had no name, it is said that the goddess of creation would take away the soul of the child. But when those things had done, the soul of the child would answer to the goddess, I was blessed by my father and grandfather to live long enough to see my new teeth grow again during old age. It is possible to question about the visit of the goddess of creation-Dampapui. It is said that she cannot be seen by an ordinary man. Only the priest could see her by virtue of the gift that he is said to possessed.

When they give a name to a child, they do not simply look for simple name.\(^{101}\) They believe that the future of a child depends on the way he/she is named. For instance, if a child is given a name, that bears a masculine and brave meaning, it is believed that, he will become a strong and brave man when he grows up. Naming a child of such is called 'Jandai' (Jan-name, Dai-big or grand). Giving such name to a child is also a matter of family's pride. There is also negative aspect of giving such name to a child. At times it so happened that a child is given 'Jandai', but he could not live up to his name, instead, he becomes a sickly child without having any particular kind of known diseases. During such situation, they assumed that, the cause of sickness must be because of the name. The child could not bear that 'Jandai'. In such cases, there are occasions, where they give a new name to the child again. We do not know how far it was true, but they say that with the new name, the child’s sick used to disappear automatically. Joseph S. Thong also gives a similar account of this naming procedure from the perspective of the whole Naga. He writes “If a child cries continuously, it was believed that the name given disagrees with the person, so it may be changed without any ceremony”.\(^{102}\) Such thing might be more of a superstition, but as the tradition has it, so they do believe in it. They also give the name of the ancestors who had lived a meaningful life. They believe that even the child would grow in the likeness of that person.

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\(^{102}\) Joseph S. Thong: *Head Hunters Culture*, (Historic Culture of Nagas), Khinyi Woch, 1997, p.50
There is one festival in connection with the acknowledgement and recognition of the child, those born in the previous year within the community i.e. “Nanu Ngai”. This festival is celebrated in the house of an old woman ‘Kengjapui Kaibang’. As the name of the festival itself indicates i.e. Nanu Ngai (na-child, nu-ear, and ngai-festival) the child’s ear is bored on that day. The significance of this festival includes the child’s registration to ‘Kengjapui Kaibang’ and further an offering of songs and dances related to fertility are performed to gods for the child’s progeny. Then before the dust, pre-adolescent boys, without clothes, will go around the whole village and sing songs for the fertility of the whole villagers. The following day will be observed as genna (Neihmei) Known as “Nasang sanmei”. On this day, not a single soul in the village will be allowed to go for a work or undertake any journey. Then, after a couple of days, the child will be shaved (Napi kaloumei).

Morung (Dormitory)

When the child attains the puberty stage, he/she is made to wear clothes known as Nsuangphei (red in colour) by the elders. They do not specify a particular age for a child to start wearing cloth. Declaration for the fitness or eligibility of the child, to wear cloth is done during one of the annual festivals. In that festival, if the person concerned, participate in the dance before the elders, he/she will be counted as matured and able to render his service, for the cause of the community. His action will be counted and bounded by the village norms. But before this, though he is given his share, from any hunt, by the inmates of his/her dormitory which he belong to, he does not have any voice or his action is not counted as that of a person who has attain manhood. He is not entitled to participate or represent the village, during any occasion or event, not to talk of wars and conflicts. If only he has worn Nsuangphei, had performed a dance, in one of the festivals of the village, he will be asked to attend, work, help and sacrifice as his duty for the sake of the community. From then on, he becomes a responsible man. Wearing of this dress is also a sign and an indication, that

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he/she is matured enough and is fit to undergo the morung (*khangchiu*) life. After the completion of those formalities, with the consent of the parents he/she will be taken to morung by the dormitory member who has claimed the child right after his/her birth.

Morung or dormitory is not a house built separately and entirely for the inmates. It is usually hosted by the rich and wealthy families within the village. Male and female have separate dormitories. Male’s dormitory is known as *Khangchiu* and females as *kailiu*. In a single village, it is normally comprise of more than one morung. There is one interesting point about the origin of the pattern of this institute. According to the myth- mythical God Tengpu Rengsonnang, the Patriarch of the dormitory of Zeliangrong, this system is believed to have been practiced by gods before the existence of man. So morung life is considered, as the continuation of what has been, when men and god were living together.

This morung life is a must for both the genders. When a male member joins the dormitory, his membership is known as, *Thien* and among females *Tuna*. Morung is headed by the eldest among them. Among males they are known as ‘*Khangbuan*’ and among females ‘*Tunapi*’. But in female dormitory apart from *Tunapi*, two elderly persons from male dormitory are entrusted to take care of their affairs. Such people are known as *Tunamun sinmei*. There are grades within each morung. It may be noted that, man, even after marriage, is still a member of their morung for several years. But for girls, from the day of her marriage, her membership in morung is ended.

The youngsters, who recently joint in morung, are entrusted to serve the seniors of his or her morung. In rendering this service, the child learns a lesson from the elders through his observation, guidance and instruction. Here the elders play a vital role in moulding and imparting all the necessity of life to the

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child. In fact, the art of living a meaningful life is taught and learn from here. The objective of this morung's life covers the whole aspects of imparting the knowledge of what a man should be, individually and collectively. In *Naga Path*, Ursula Graham Bower writes "An admirable institution, the morung disciplined and educated the young; united the householders". Though it is not in a written form, there are many rules and regulations that bind people to live harmoniously, within the morung in particular and the whole village in general.

In this morung, all the inmates usually come and stay only during night time. But whenever there is a festival or any other occasion in the village, they would gather at their own respective morung and do the necessary things even during day time.

The purposes and functions of morung may be noted in brief:

1. To impart traditional education, warfare and art of fighting by the use of weapons, dance, music, art and crafts, customs, traditions and folklore to the younger ones.

2. To act as a guard for the defense of the village. Such warriors are known as ‘Riphien’. Sometimes protection of the people is done single handed by a hero known as ‘Liangtong’.

3. To act as a centre of cultural activities. The festivals and ceremonies in a village are organized by them.

4. To construct paths and clean ponds in and around the village.

5. Girls learnt folklore, art of spinning, weaving, dance music etc.

6. It is served as a house of information.

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107 G. Kamei, p. 254
Since tribal life is community oriented, in everything that they do, the welfare of the whole community is always considered as the first and foremost importance. In this morung, the sense and importance of being oneness is made to inculcate in the minds of people. In short, it can be said that, what is meant to be a man are taught, learnt and practiced from this institution.

Morality and Virtues

When we talk about the question and the concept of morality and virtue in the context of the Zeliangrong, it has to be understood within the frameworks and value systems of the community. To those people, who are not familiar with the mechanical pattern and functional structure of the value system that they espouse, it would be tempted to think it otherwise. They may say that is not in tuned with the general notion.

What is moral or immoral? Why should a person be moral? The nearest terms in Zeliangrong for morality would be ‘lamchat’ and ‘kheiliak’. Of these two terms, the former would be closer than the later to the word moral. The later term refers more to the character of a person or behavior. Of course, both the terms are used in the context of a person’s morality. But when it comes to the sense of the term, lamchat is broader than kheiliak. It encompasses the whole aspects of a person’s conduct.

A person is judged to be moral or immoral from their character or conduct. In Zeliangrong community, a person without lamchat is considered uncultured. At times, people without lamchat are considered even less important than the animals, when it comes to the affair of community welfares. Now let us ponder upon who is considered to be a moral person by the Zeliangrong. In Zeliangrong, ‘lamchat gaimei’ mansei’ means ‘morally good person’. The issue of morality starts within the family itself. It starts with the words of prayer in blessing the child. If we look from the present perspective and speak about their concept justice cannot be done. So, let us try to see as the way they uphold the concept of morality and virtue. In every family the eldest is the head. He decides all the affairs of the family. A child, being
obedient to his decisions, is the first and foremost thing that leads to a person toward ‘lamchat gaimei mansei’. All the members of the family are bounded within the boundary of his decisions. This tradition is followed among the Zeliangrong because they believe that, parents, since they are the one who has tasted the sweetness and bitterness of life ahead of the young ones, knows much better what is to be or not to be. In such context, they generally use to say that “they are the one who step first on pig feces” (Guak bah tao rei mei). This means they are older than the speaker.

Apart from one’s family members, a person in Zeliangrong society must also be obedient to the senior citizens. One should respect the elders in every matter. For instance, in a gathering of any forms, if an elder is talking, young people are not supposed to interrupt them until they are asked to.

As in any tribal community, the interest of an individual does not over rule the interest of the community among the Zeliangrong. Sometimes, personal interest may collide with the community’s, but since part is less than the whole, personal interest is side tracked. This is so because a person has to obey, abide and be bounded by the spirit and interest of community.

Now let us turn to the concept of what a person should be according to the Zeliangrong. There are certain qualities that a person should possess to be classed as good man. The qualities mentioned below, about the concept of good person from the Zeliangrong perspective are not exhaustive, but it cannot do away with it, if we are to talk in terms of meaning of life.

The first and the foremost thing that a man should possess and is appreciated is “chakhuang”. The accurate translation of this term is difficult. Its nearest terms can be respect, manner, humility, etiquette, etc. It is something to do with one’s behaviour and conduct in a society. This is an important trait in the patterns of their life. A person without ‘chakhuang’ is considered foolish and uncultured.

The term chakhuang have different senses, depending upon the context and action, where it is used. It is an act that is performed by every one in every
aspect of life. The sense that is common and widely understood is ‘the respect that one has for the elders’ irrespective of the profession or position. The notion behind this act of respect that one shows to elders is that they are the one who are not just older but believed to be wise in every aspect of life.

The second sense of chakhuang has something to do with hesitation. For instance, when someone offer us something, even if we are the rightful candidate to accept it, we always say ‘no you don’t have to do that or its okay’. If one accepts things just like that without any hesitation it is considered as manner less.

The third sense come closure to honour. A person who wins in any competition held by the community is highly respected and honoured by the people. Especially to those who come back as a war hero. There was a time when a single handed warrior would wage a war against the enemies. Such type of warrior is known by the name “Liangtuang”

Another usage of the term chakhuang is in a situation like we have the opportunity to take something, from any sources, sometimes, it so happen that things are not enough for all. In such cases, one refrains from accepting it even if one needs it. This occurs in a situation where anyone have the right to claim, but irrespective of the possibility and our rights, one gives up the idea of taking it by assuming that the other person might need even more than us. This act is considered to be a virtuous act. People do not consider as an ignorant or timid person for not claiming his rightful share, for this element does not come into the picture, rather they are considered to be a thoughtful person. Whoever claimed that particular thing would in return acknowledge the one who has back off. This is how one earns respect from his fellowmen.

The concept of chakhuang is closely related to ‘Tathuan or Thuankei mei’. The winner in any competition is respected. This Thuankei mei is a treat offered to the people by the winner. The concept of prize or reward within
the Zeliangrong community is altogether different from the other communities. To make it clearer, the contemporary understanding of prize or reward was not there before the wave of modernity swept through the Zeliangrong. We can say that the concept of reward among the Zeliangrong is totally a unique one. The winner, in any event of competitions, is recognized and acknowledged by the community. At the end of the competition, one of the village elders would come forward and raise the hand of the winner to congratulate and bless him. He not only blessed the winner but would tear parts of the winner’s clothe. This is the tradition practiced by the Zeliangrong. The winner must claim his clothe again but, with a certain conditions. People usually bring a good wine and a meat prepared from home. The elder then would then hand over the clot to the winner. Now the winner has to throw a party, to celebrate his winning, to the whole community. The treat or party could be in any form. If one is in a position to feed the whole community, one goes ahead with it, but giving a grand feast is not a must. It depends on the capacity of the champion. It is traditional to offer something not as must but out of happiness.

In other tribal societies this type of practice seems to be uncommon. The Zeliangrong uphold this practice with pride and honour. It is a matter of prestige and reputation. To them, to be known by the people and blessed by elders, for their achievements in any aspect, has a great value.

It is not within the realm of their interest to store up things in their barn or granary for several seasons. The apparent evident that support this view lies in the fact of a feast thrown by the highest harvest in the village in each seasons. It is a tradition to throw a feast, by the one who has got the highest harvest, to the whole villagers. They do not bother about how much it is spent on such occasions. They take pride in being able to throw such feast. For it a reputation-name-honour that they live for as this goes on for generations to generations. What matters to them, more than anything else, is a life that is honoured and respected by others (Chakhuang sulou mei panti). There are several personal qualities that a man should possess to live a life that will be truly honoured and respected. They are shown under the following heads.
Apart from acquiring other material things, to live a meaningful life or worthwhile life, one has to possess the following personality traits or virtues. A life, devoid in any of these traits would not come into the realm of meaningful life. In fact, all these aspects are particular state of human qualities that has been acquired through other means. What are the means would be a question that would click to every inquisitive mind. The means, in a broad and simplest term can be said that, it lies in the action of every person. This implies that a meaning is acquired through one's act. To be static (like sleep) without any activities or an act outside the purview of society (i.e. alone-Robinson Crusoe) these traits cannot be acquired and no meaningful life can be ascribed to it. This seems to suggest to the view that meaning resides out there (in the act) and it is to be acquired. But the case is not so; for it is the conglomeration of both within and without.

**Thailoumei (recognize by the people)**

The term 'Thailoumei' can be translated as known, or acknowledged, recognize by the people. It is not referred to a mere knowledge or recognition of our existence, but they are known for being a particular person. For a man to be in this state, it requires a lot of an effort. The term 'Thailoumei' is in fact used widely in daily discourses. The meaning of its term differs according to the context where it is used. For instance, 'gann khat rienra thailoumei' (knowing the difficulties of others). Here the concept of thailoumei is used to refer to the feelings that one has for our fellow beings. Like such case, it is also used in different occasions. In fact, it is important to point out that the concept is to refer to a bad person as well for certain degree of being bad. The concept thailoumei has a similar thread in its usage in referring to good and bad person. But usually and generally the term is used to refer to a person who is well-known for his goodness. But before proceeding further let us examine the Zeliangrong view of good (person). The equivalent term for good in Zeliangrong is 'gaî'. Here the usage of the term good will be only from an ethical point of view that is ascribed to man.
Chakloumei (Accounted or Accountable)

The second trait is more or less equivalent to accountable/ility / considerable. The term ‘chak’ is normally used in the context of counting the numbers of things. When it is used in the context personality, in terms of its meaningfulness, it means altogether a different thing. Man is counted (Chaklou) by the community from the way he projects to it through his acts. In any occasions or events undertaken by the society, an accountable person will be informed and given an in charged to perform certain things, depending upon the issues related to the occasion. But why the concept of accountability is so important in Zeliangrong society? How does the concept of such things come in the picture of their society? Is it the case that there are people who are not accountable within their society? are some of the questions, which any normal people, would pose against them.

It is an obvious fact that, in a society, there will be people who are not in tuned with the norms and objectives that has been laid down by the society, for the smooth functioning. Such reason might have been the cause, which made the Zeliangrong people to question about the concept of accountability, when it comes to the concept of meaning of life.

Lumloumei (Trustworthy, Trusted)

The third trait is ‘Lumloumei’ which means trusted ‘Lumlounumei’ (trustworthy) in Zeliangrong society this element in man can be said to be the core issues which stands the test of being who you are to the society. A society with no relation is no society at all. It is the binding force that keeps man intact with each other. Particularly in a tribal society a bond of relation is really strong. Each person within the community is no less important in this subject matter. Everyone is equally responsible for any cause. And so being trustworthy is vital for the welfare of society. In person, if one cannot be trusted, even though one may be alive the purpose of one’s own existences in a society stands
insignificant. Any important task would not be given in charged or allow to work by the society. Here we may post a question that is, will the society treat that type of person in the same fashion all through out of his life? The simple answer is no.

In the Zелиагронг society punishment is not uncommon. When such type of people is found in a society they are punished. And the punishment varies. The punishments are entirely base on the customary law. Though the laws are not in a written form, it exists and has been practicing since past generations. Depending upon the crime, which is done by the culprit, punishment is imposed by the concerned authority. After the punishment, if the culprit can comply with the social norms, he will be treated as any other good citizens. Most importantly he should be trustworthy to get that same treatment again.

Akhengthaimei, lungningsangmei (Endurance, Forbearance)

As a social being, men always have contact with each other for one or other reasons. In a social interaction, handling of numerous businesses is a normal chore. As a man, we have so many limitations and weakness. We or our fellow being, at times, may not come up to the level of our expectations. Sometimes it may be intentional, through ignorance, or through human limitations. During such situations, disappointment or even anger, though it depends on the intensity of the mistakes, is bound to happen. Pride of man is then wounded. We cannot always expect only good things to come on our way. How fervently we may long to live a life without any problems, but as the popular saying ‘to err, is to human’ we sometimes, become the victim of this human trait. It can be either through our own mistake and ignorance, or that of others. We do grow weary and annoyed of the happenings around us. Now it is during such instances that the test of personhood comes in the picture. If we succumbed easily to our emotion and start reacting, the beastly nature of man becomes dominant. The result, even for a silly reason, could be devastating. The string that binds and holds the spirit of oneness, or the possibility of becoming a grand success in our undertaking, may be blown away within a
fraction of seconds. So a person who can withstand the test of time by following his reason, rather than yielding to emotion and hold back his anger, is considered as a wise man. As the result of such contact and interaction, it can lead to an argument or conflict with each other. Even then people who can bear or tolerate with his fellow men are appreciated. The ability to endure without resorting to anger or violence is known as akhengthaimei or Lungningsangmei.

**Tamjanthaimei (Systematic, sense of Distribution,)**

It is referred the quality of man who knows how to adjust or divide things proportionally or equally depending upon the situation and context. It means ones who knows how to adjust accordingly, at the need of the hour even with the limited sources. He is one who does not think for himself. It is referred to a selfless person.

In a society there are people who always want a lion’s share. They do not bother about their fellow men. They want everything for themselves. They do not sympathies and empathies to others. Such type of person is known as Agem-Agamei. It means greedy and too ambitious. There is another type of person who is really good in management. They do take their fair share but at the same time, leaves enough to others what they deserve as well. Even in time of crisis, such person would negotiate in such a way that neither party would have a sense, that they were cheated or exploited. Not too much and not too less. Everyone gets their equal share. Such person is known as Tamjanthaimei.

**Suriakthaimei / (Cautious)**

This term is more or less equivalent to the saying ‘prevention is better than care’. It is important to take care of what we say or do. The words that we say or the things that we do may harm others, though it was not intended to do so. So before undertaking any work the Zeliangrong people do consult to the elders or any other person who are expert or have the knowledge of the
concern work or plan. This is done so to avoid creating unnecessary problems due to one’s ignorance and negligence.

**Manguipuimei (civility)**

A person who possesses the quality that is gentle, humility and congenial is called Manguipuimei. The literal meaning of Mangui comes closer to attractiveness. Here the term is not used to indicate the looks of a person but it is the behaviour and conduct. In any society, everyone may have the equal rights in every sphere, but when it comes to wealth and status, in spite of the equal rights granted to every citizen social and economic status is bound to vary dearly. Amongst the Zeliangrong in spite of the wealth and status that one fits in, instead of becoming too proud or boastful or timid, if people have the quality of Manguipuimei, they are considered as good person.

**Jaojienthaimei (Gracious)**

The Zeliangrong, being a tribal, are community oriented. The notion of mind your own business is not applicable or practiced in their society. The welfare of all or each for everyone is the main concern. For instance, ‘X’ is in a good position in terms of wealth or money. If ‘X’ sees or knows that ‘Y’ is in trouble or problem, it is ‘X’s duty to extend a helping hand to ‘Y’. They do not just sit back and watch their brethren suffering from any sorts of problem. The Zeliangrong called such kind of act as Jaojienthaimei. There is also another term Njienlouthaimei which is closely related to Jaojienthaimei. This term is referred to the act of knowing how to love and have concern for others.

**Ninglouthaimei/Kadanlouthaimei (Mindful for others)**

The attitude of those, whose concern are always inclusive or others based and not self centered is known as Ninglouthaimei or kadanlouthaimei. They do not like the people who always think for themselves. In life, we are not always fortunate or successful in our endeavours. Sometimes an untoward incident may occur to us, rendering us in a terrible situation, where even the
question of survival may so happen. So, it is during such circumstance, that the notion of Ninglouthaimei becomes vital amongst the Zeliangrong people. One is not expected to just sit back and be a spectator in such time. If there is anything which could be of any help, a person who has this quality would willingly stand out and try to mend the situation. So people of such type are highly revered.

**Houdumei (Farsighted)**

Amongst the Zeliangrong, people of farsightedness are look up, respected and honoured. It may not be wrong to say that in a society many people are just complacent with the things just before their eyes. If they have food and shelter for the whole year and a family without any sickness, they thought that there is nothing to worry about life. Looking beyond sights or the immediate needs is something which people rarely do. In every walk of life, taking things for a long term process evades future troubles. For instance, at the moment, one may not have any problem or difficulty, but it does not mean that one will not have in future. It is always consider as good to help people in every possible way or look beyond the present. If only then, one will have a better future.

**Chamdanthaimei (Preparedness, Readiness)**

We never know what tomorrow will bring to us. We certainly do not know what future holds for us. Any moment, anything can happen either for good or bad. Being unaware of these unforeseen phenomenon, laying wide open with so many possibilities, to stay alert, get ready and prepare to face such situation and circumstances is one thing that the Zeliangrong considered to be a wise and noble quality of man. This preparation before hand, for any reason whatsoever, is known as Chamdanthaimei.

**Ginkiphaipammei (Hospitable to Guest)**

This term is concern with the way how the Zeliangrong treat or take care of the guest. Taking a journey or traveling is part and parcel of life. During those
days, there were no inns or hotels where one can put up. So, one has to stay in others home. In such cases, the way how guests are treated or the hospitality shown to guest is called Ginkiphaipanmei. Hosting a guest is considered as a privileged and blessing to the host. There is one common saying that is, you may be rich, but even if you call people to come and stay in your family they would not come. The implication of this saying is that the concern, care and the hospitality of the host toward the guest is vital. So the act of such is praised and honoured.

With regard to this subject matter Pamei gives a lucid exposition. He writes “However poor they may be, they practise good hospitality. The home is open for everyone. If a stranger guest is found or know staying in the village, he will be invited by many families to eat with them”.

**Kuaklouthaimei (Forgiving)**

As the popular saying goes ‘to err is to human’, people go wrong or commit mistakes in one or the other way. There are different types of doing things to deal with wrong doers. The intensity of crime is one determining factor to solve the problem. There are certain crime which cannot be just neglected or let the culprit walk free. The Zeliangrong do punished the culprit depending upon the crime. But there are occasions where the culprit pleads for forgiveness. In such situation, it may be forgiven, provided the necessary formalities are fulfilled by the culprit. But there are occasions where the guilty people are set free unconditionally by the victim or family or even by the whole community. The later form of dealing with the wrong doers is called Kuaklouthaimei. This is considered as a good gesture or large-hearted. The reason why forgiving is considered as virtue is that, even for a little mistake done to us, our sentiment is hurt. So instead of recurring to anger or give in to our emotion and create enmity with our fellow beings, it is always better to give reason a place for a better tomorrow.

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**Latlingsamei (Honest, Truthful)**

It is through language that, human beings communicate to each other and also uses to refer or mean something. A daily chore of life without language is unthinkable. But there is no such thing that can restrict people from using this medium in the way they like. So, there is a possibility that it can be used either for good or bad. This does not mean that people are encouraged to use for destructive purposes—lying. But it is a known fact that, in a society there are some people, who have the habit of lying and spreading rumours. The Zeliangrong loathe those who lies, bear or give false testimony for whatsoever reason under any circumstances. The quality of being truthful, honest and sincere to his/her words and deeds is honoured, respected and trusted by the people.

**Thouthengthaiimei (sincere in duty)**

Human beings are born to a society that has its own distinct identity, tradition and culture. By virtue of these natural phenomena, man is bounded by the norms of a particular society to which he/she is member. Part of a whole has some role to play to make the system moved. Every individual in a society have varied duties or functions. A single failure could destabilize the whole mechanism. So being responsible is one quality which the Zeliangrong values dearly. There are certain things which every member is expected to contribute or even sacrifice for the welfare of the society. For example, parents look after the family, youth go to morung, etc., Those who neglect their duties are not trusted and accounted for any important issues of the community.

**Minammakmei (Fair/Just)**

An act of being fair or just in words and deeds is valued by the Zeliangrong. The literal meaning of the term Minammakmei is ‘not cheating, no foul play’. The sense in which people used this word is taken to mean just or
fair minded.\textsuperscript{110} If a person is found involving in bamboozle, they are despised and term them as reprobates. So everyone is encouraged to be fair with their fellowmen.

\textit{Kaihoumakmei (No Stealing)}

An account of Elwin gives a lucid picture of how the then Nagas were in the context of theft. He writes "\textit{For they know nothing of locks and keys, and indeed have no need of either since the habit of stealing from each other is unheard of among these simple people}".\textsuperscript{111} It may be wrong to say that, there was absolutely no case of theft, but at the same time, we need to admit that it was something which people rarely and hardly practiced. They have a saying "\textit{Kaihou meikhang jangru, kapou khang neikha}" which means ‘ten days to steal and one day to catch’. A thief cannot escape all throughout his life. One day he/she would be caught. It is a shameful thing to involve in such act. So for them it is considered as wise virtuous not to involve in such activities.

\textit{Kachapkariaktatmei (Adherence to Laws and Orders)}

Being able to follow, abide by the rules and regulations, norms and standard, laws and orders properly are known as \textit{Kachapkariaktatmei}. The Zeliangrong people did not have a well documented laws and orders or norms. Every dos and don’ts were informed through oral tradition. But, nevertheless, it can be said that executions of such dictums were no less than those community with written document. It is the duties of every citizen to obey such verdict upheld and passed by the community.

\textit{Manmahmakmei (Non-jealousy)}

Jealousy is one of the root causes of evil in a society. When one is jealous of others success or fortune, evil thoughts creep into our mind. When


\textsuperscript{111} Verrier Elwin, \textit{The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century}, Bombay: Times of India Press Bombay, 1969, p. 455

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such evil or negative attitude is entertained in our heart, one would resort to any kind of evil plan. For this reason parents or elders always warn children not to be jealous of others properties or belongings.

**Nkhalouthaimei (Charitable)**

It is one of the highest forms of love. It signifies the love, which we have toward our fellowmen that is made manifested in the form of giving and helping unselfishly. It is a virtue, when our affections are perfectly ordered, without any motive or expectation of benefits and rendered our service to our fellowmen. It is a well known fact that men do not live a life without any problems. It could be of any sort. At times, we are struck by misfortunes or may fail in our works. Such things do happen in a society. So seeing the needy person, the act of extending a helping hand without expecting anything in return is known as Nkhalouthaimei.

**Kadatkariatthai subv (Judicious, Balance-limit)**

Literally it means having the knowledge of limit. Related to this word is **Kagan-Kadouthaimei** which means having the knowledge of time and moment. One should know when to do what and how much is to be given or taken. Too little or too much, and doing things at any and every time, without having the limit or following the standard of the societal practices is not appreciated by the Zeliangrong. Knowing one’s limit and keep pace with the time of others is considered as a fine quality of man.

**Meinraumakmei (Non-criticize)**

In a community, language is one thing which we cannot do away with. Through this medium it binds the group of people. But at the same time, it can be used in otherwise. A good orator can help bridge the gap, bring peace and harmony, and solve or negotiate any conflict between two parties or more. But at the same time, this skill and the medium are employed even to serve other purposes. There are some people who loved to backbite, gossip, speak ill of
others and criticizes with an evil intention. Such type of people are considered as uncultured and hypocrites. The term Meinraumakmei is referred to those people who do not involve in such habits.

**Karou-karengsimakmei (Non-Cunning, Non-Craftiness)**

It would not be wrong to say that in a society, there are some people whose motive is always directed toward personal gains or benefits. In order to fulfill that desire or wish, they do employ any means that can be accessed. They poke their nose every where to find an opportunity, instigate people and spread rumours to spoil the image of people. When such people are more in society, conflicts of interest is bound to happen, thus leaving a room wide open for enmity and chaos. The Zeliangrong called such people as ‘Jaokirou Phungmei’ meaning cunning as the wild act.

There are certain qualities which a person should posses within himself to be able to live a meaningful life. All these virtuous traits of a man, though it starts from a family, are suppose to learn when one stays in morung. Being rational is the foremost. Mentally retarded, mad, lunatic, idiot, etc people are not encompassed within this scheme. Life in itself may have a meaning but this aspect may be discussed later. One should be mentally sound and have robust mind. A will to act should be there. The act that is performed, good or bad, determine whether a person falls within the framework of those traits or not. From an ethical point of view, to be within that parameter, a person must be good and moral in conduct. But who can be termed as good and moral person? Most definitely anyone who possesses those traits automatically is moral and good at the same time. This statement presupposes the concept that anyone who is known by society to have those traits do so because of their good conduct. The concepts of all these virtuous traits are co-related with each other.

Those personality traits, which we have discussed, are the qualities that are ascribed to a person by others, through the judgment of their every day ways of life. It can be said that, there is no particular criteria or standard that has been laid down to judge a person on this ground but nevertheless, there
are certain ways of behavior and norms in the Zeliangrong society. Certain dos and don'ts are imposed on every citizen. The infringement of such conditions laid down by the community invites nothing but punishment. So to live devotedly, within the framework of the social interest, is mandatory for every citizen.

**Malaanmei**

The literal meaning of *Malaanmei* means taking a good food without any work for a particular period of times to become healthy. It has two types namely 1) *Khangchiu Lun* and 2) *Ra Lun.*¹¹² This practice is known to have its existence only in the Zeliangrong community amongst the Nagas. Even amongst them, only male members are allowed to undertake. As the popular saying goes ‘Health is wealth’ the Zeliangrong were very much conscious about their health. One good reason is due to frequent conflicts or wars. The male members are responsible to protect their fellow members. So, physical fitness is a must. This is an act undertaken by the parents to show their love to children and wish that they may grow healthy and live long. *Malaanmei* is practiced only by those families who are well-to-do. From another point of view, it is said to have concerned with the family’s pride to have their child undergoing *Malaanmei.* It is so because, if a person wants to take part in it, he has to be always fed with the best wine and food. He will not be engaged in any other work except eat, drink and sleep.

The duration is not fixed. Those families who can afford can let their son stay longer as well. It is a matter of willingness and affordable from the parent’s part. In some villages, this kind of practices is not a matter of family’s pride but they do so in order to prepare the concerned person to become an efficient village guard or warrior. There is also another aspect of this practice. It is concerned with the second type of *Malaanmei* known as *Ra Lun.* In this type participants are more in number and they commence on the same day for the same period of time. Like in the other case, they would stay in morung but are

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fed by their own family members. On the completion of the course, there will be a show. Whoever has gained weight most or fattest, will be blessed and honoured, by one of the oldest men of the village. The fattest will get the prize of village known as Luang Thuan and the second will get the prize of morung known as Khangchiu Thuan.

All the members of morung will then proceed to the house of the winners. Both the winners will then give Thuan to the old man who has blessed them. This act of giving is known as Thuan keimei. It may be in cash or kind. This is practiced not only in the context of Malaanmei but in any other sports or competition as well. Apart from Thuan given to the old man, a pig, which was rear before hand for this occasion, will be killed. All the villagers will have a grand feast with songs and dances.

**Liangtuang**

The term Liangtuang is given to a person who is extra-ordinarily huge in size and strength. They are said to have a giant like physique. Sometimes, they are also known as the sons of god because of their physical structure and strength. It is said that such type of man are rare and hardly born. They are considered as a gift from god or god-send to guard the community. Due to this unusual feature of Liangtuang PH. Gongchalung in his book Zelianrong Naga Phaikam, talked of the time when sons of God married to the daughters of man and had children. He quote from the Bible “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.” We have discussed in the earlier part that, according to the myth of Zelianrong gods, human being and animals were at one point of time living together. So they believe that the blood line of those times might have been the reason of such birth. In a village it usually used to have only one. If there is more than one, they say that war used to be a frequent phenomenon. In times

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113 PH. Gongchalung: Zelianrong Naga Phaikam, kadang l, Imphal: Manipur Press 2000, p. 65
of wars, by the virtue of his strength, he would fight the enemy single handed. He represents the whole villagers. He is the defender. For this reason, those villages who has Liangtuang are feared even by the vicinity villages. There is one unfortunate phenomena of such type of person, that is, most of them do not have their offspring. They are also said to be a bit dull. They rely mostly on their strength and take pride in it.

In some villages of the Zelianrong the concept of Liangtuang has different version or account. It is not referred to the type of person just described but to those people, who are strongest, skillful in war tactics, successful in head hunting and possessed a good quality like physically fit and strong, pious, intelligent, moral, truthful, and peace loving. In short, he should have all the good qualities that are required of to be good and well cultured man. This latter version of Liangtuang is given by Hunibou Newmai in his unpublished thesis entitled The Concept of Good and The Godly Man in Liangmei Naga Tradition. He writes;

"In Liangmai Naga society, as I have shown those great warriors who work for the welfare of their fellow men and strive for peace and harmony in the society are considered as Liangtuang. The word Liangtuang stands for the one who sacrifices his happiness for the welfare of his fellow beings. He is the upholder of moral values, justice, equality, unity and balance of power in the community. He is also the defender of human rights and the protector of the innocent people who suffer from injustice. His goal is to fight against the evil force which disturbs the peaceful existence of his people even at the cost of the lives of his dear and near ones, and his own life".\textsuperscript{115}

As far as the role of Liangtuang is concerned, to some extent Newmai’s account is in line with the former account. But the description of the term Liangtuang given by him, as quoted above, seems to be off the track. His

\textsuperscript{115} Hunibou Newmai, The Concept of Good and The Godly Man in Liangmai Naga Tradition, Deptt. of Philosophy, NEHU, Shillong, 1992, p. 100
description is inclined more toward the role rather than the term itself.\footnote{116} It may be pointed out that, even the role that he ascribes to Liangtuang is in a way exaggerated. It so appear to the reader that the sole factors responsible for survival depend on him. Thereby, it can be said that he has neglected the important role contributed by Nampou, Tingku, etc., for the welfare of the community. It seems to be impossible to have a society without the existence of Liangtuang. It may be mention that such kind of person is not born every now and then. As discussed in the former case one do not become Liangtuang through any sorts of training or experiences but only by virtue of the birth. The popular belief of the Zeliangrong seems to go well with the former account than the latter. An account of such person (Liangtuang) in the form of a legend about Hungenang is given by Sujata Miri\footnote{117} though she did not mention him as Liangtuang. According to the Zeliangrong oral tradition Hungienang is remembered as one of the many Liangtuangs. He is said to be from Thingkaral/Singkara village and belongs to Newmai clan.\footnote{118}

**Head Hunting**

The saying that, 'Might is right' or 'survival of the fittest', might have a certain role among the Zeliangrong in some cases about few hundred years ago. Name and fame is something which one cannot overlook. In one hand, we can say that longing to be in power or have name and fame, is one driving force in man to explore all avenues and try to excel in it. On the other hand, there is a possibility that when one fail to have a fair share of the endeavour; even exercising the unfair means might come up. It is possible that, when such negative element overshadowed the human mind, the true meaning of hero might glitches and only a tainted picture of hero might prevail. As Gandhi says, there are brute force and soul force in man.\footnote{119} How good a person, community, or nation may be, in one or the other way, the negative or the irrational element

do persists in it. It is not known how head hunting was started amongst the Zeliangrong. There is one interesting account of an Ao Naga given by Temsula Ao on how this practice was begun. She writes;

"One day, a warrior was resting by the road on his way home. He noticed that the spot where he was sitting was swarmed with ants and they seem to be engaged in a frantic affair. He watched them keenly and discovered that in fact the ant groups were having a fight.

After sometime, the activities of the ants became less frantic and he could see only a few of them. As he continued watching these few, he discovered, to his great amazement, that these few were engaged in a peculiar activity. They were beheading the slain ants and were carrying off their heads". 120

She says that the Aos had learnt this practice from the ants. Instead of taking the trouble to carry the whole body of the slain warrior, it is easier for them to chop off the head and bring home as trophy. This is how the head hunting began among the Aos. A similar version about the origin of the head hunting is also shared by Joseph S. Thong in his book entitled Head Hunters Culture. 121

In the context of the Zeliangrong, it is not a strange thing to say that they were engaged in feuds or wars with the neighbouring villages, at time with other tribes and even among their own tribes. So, in the process of trying to survive the attack from without, the game of head hunting and the philosophy behind in it might have evolved in due course of time. If we refer to the prayer offered to god and the way how they give name to the child, the practice of head hunting is not something to be surprised about. If we put ourselves in their shoes and look from their perspective, the question of good or bad and right and wrong does arise. Being successful in the game is like a feather in one's hat. On their way home from a war, if they manage to kill their enemy but unable to bring the

121 Joseph S. Thong: Head Hunters Culture, (Historic Culture of Nagas), Khinyi Woch, 1997, p. 11
head home, they would howl before entering the village gate as Hojam in a rhythmic succession. But, when they come home with the enemy's head, they would howl Hojambo. When the worried and anxious villagers hear these howling they will instantly know the outcome of the war before their arrival.

There are several reasons why this head hunting was practiced by the Zeliangrong in particular and the Nagas as a whole. Successful in this hunt is considered as an achievement, honour and something to be proud of. Rev. Ramkhun Pamei in his book *The Zeliangrong Nagas* writes

"It was believed that the spirit or the energy, the essence of great power of man stays in the head. If the head is cut off and brought into the village, the head-taker is strengthened with the addition of the spirit of the head. It is also believed that it will increase the fertility of the land and yield more crops".\(^{122}\)

The Zeliangrong believe that a person who is successful in this hunt is also respected and honoured even in the land of dead-Taruairam. W.C Smith writes about the Ao Naga as;

"With any primitive people, tradition and custom play a very important part; and it even enters into the bloody pursuit of head hunting. ... the folklore says that this practice begun with the very birth of the race, and has been continued; there was really no reason for its beginning, but it was perfectly right and fraught with much glory. .......A slender economic motive also appears, for the successful warrior would become rich, and that meant in other words, that he would have good crops. Such a hero would also, in some measure, secure immunity from sickness. These men had, accordingly, something to gain through the fortunes of war. But these economic motives were fundamentally religious, for to become rich meant favour with the gods.....killing some other villager, they would be pleasing their god, Lizaba...........but the

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most deep-lying motive seems to have been of a social nature, because a man's social position depended upon his success in war. ..... They gain respect, fame and honour, they become full fledged member of the community after a head is brought otherwise they were called or teased as boy, women, or even cow, and they have a better chance of winning the heart of girls of their choice".123

Chakravorty also writes about Naga head hunting from the perspective of achievement on the male parts to be favoured by the opposite gender.124

According to Mao Naga, it is a yardstick for measuring social status and recognition. A victor is prized with a shawl that is meant only for a successful hunters and he will be given a special seat in times of ceremonies. M. Daniel in his thesis says that, there are metaphysical implications behind the practice of head hunting. Those warriors who failed to procure the heads of an enemy have many disadvantages in this life and also the next life. More over it bring disgrace to the ancestors and cosmic forces.125

The practice of head hunting is not something which people follow every now and then. It is usually carried out during the time of war or conflicts with the other party. They do not go and kill any passerby without any reason. It is a fair fight, either between two individuals or as a group. Alien to this practice and the norms related to it, might be led to misconstrue and embezzle to mean as a heinous crime. So the social values, religious implications and philosophy behind it should be considered. When they go for war, it is said that, they always carry a piece of ginger with them. This ginger is not an ordinary one. Starting from its plantation there are certain requirements. It is the high Priest who is responsible in planting this ginger. The priest will decide a suitable day to plant. None of the villagers will be made known about the reason of his going and the place of plantation. He has to go secretly and plant it with chanting a

124 B. C. Chakravorty, British Relation with the Hill Tribes of Assam, Calcutta: Mukhopadyaya, 1964, p. 13
prayer. Even at the time of harvest, he does it all alone. It is said that not all the
gingers, grown by him, is used but only those which branches or sprouts toward
the right is used. One particular reason that they give about the importance of
this ginger is that it has a medicinal component.

When they go for a war or a fair fight, sometimes, it last for quite a
number of days. So, when they cannot find food, they would chew that piece of
ginger to quench their hunger and at the same time their stomach may not be
harmed because of the emptiness. Another very interesting reason is that, it so
happen that right after chopping off an enemy's head, their eye would become
so blurry that they cannot see anything. During such time, what they do is take
the piece of ginger and smear it with blood of the kill and chew. If only then,
their sight would regain. Those days, people were always on alert. In each
village there will always be a guard or sentinel known as Chabam or
Akhebou\textsuperscript{126} or Riphen\textsuperscript{127}.

This Chabam is a well-trained member of a morung. But they are again
different from the rest of the member because they do not go for any work.
There are certain differences among the villages regarding the duties of this
Chabam. In some villages they take turns in guarding but in others they select
the fittest and most capable in terms of physique and war techniques. Those
Chabam who belong to the second category are the one who had undergone a
special span of time of Malaanmei (time-bound special diet to enrich and
enhance the health and physique). This village guard must have started
because of the constant threat, conflict and war with others. Chabam are the
one who had offered themselves for the cause of the village. Their main duty is
to safe guard their fellow villagers. There will be at least two of them in each
village. They stay awake the whole night, singing songs to let the people know
that, there is no threat or danger to the resting villagers. But if they come across
anything that might destabilize the peace and harmony of the village, they will

\textsuperscript{126} Namthiubuiyang Pamei, The Trial from Makuilongdi, The Continuing Saga of the
Zeliangrong People, Gironta Charitable Foundation, 2001, p. 39

\textsuperscript{127} Gangmumei Kamei, The History Of Zeliangrong Nagas, From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu,
give an alarm as well as defend the village. That must be one of the reasons how the Zeliangrong community manages to survive from the external threat.

Genna and Taboo (Neihmei/Nuhmei or Nuh-Neihmei)

We have discussed earlier that certain dos and don'ts in a society are sanctioned, and have its derivation from the religious belief. The concept of genna and taboo are observed by the Zeliangrong in different seasons and occasions. Its practice is rooted in their religious beliefs but the purpose and reasons for such undertakings are different again. The reason could be religious, social, economic and political. In general man's worship of God by collective abstention from work is popularly known as Neihmei. The anthropologists describe these Neihmeis as Gennas from the Angami word Kenra. It is observed either by the village community or a group of lineage households or individual household.\(^{128}\)

*Neihmei* means taboo. The customs relating to rites of passage like birth and birth ceremonies, festival and religious ceremonies, death and death ceremonies cannot be violated. This prohibition is called *Nuhmei*. Those who break the *Nuhmei* will be regarded as breakers of social, religious and ritual practices and moral code.\(^{129}\)

Both the term are also used as *Nuh-Neihmei* or *Nuh-Neihye*. In every Zeliangrong village this *Nuh-Neihmei* is strictly observed. They do not fix a particular date to observe this day. T.C. Hodson reproduced Colonel McColloch's remark of the Kabuis;

"A whole village individual members of it are often 'neina' or under prohibition. Sometimes this state of things lasts a day, sometimes several. The 'neina' may be against the entrance of the strangers, or the exit of members or of both, or, allowing the entrance of strangers, disallow their going into houses, etc. peculiar circumstances also induce


\(^{129}\) Ibid., p. 73
prohibition in food and drink, but to attempt describing them would be to pretend to more knowledge of minutiae than I possess.\[^{130}\]

There are several of them throughout the year. Number of days to observe also depend upon the reasons and occasions. It is their firm belief that, if they observe this properly, all the bad fortunes that may befall on them would be ward off by gods or the particular god, spirit etc for which Nuh-Neihmei is undertaken. In a village there will be one elderly person (usually Tingku- Priest) in charge to declare the day for Nuh-Neihmei. Once he has announced, there will be Neihmei in the village. None of the villagers would be allowed to go out of the village gate for any purpose. What W.C. Smith writes in the context of Ao Naga is also similar to that of Zeliangrong. He says “The word genna is used in two ways:

1) it may mean practically a holiday, i.e. a man will say, ‘my village is doing a genna today,’ by which he means that, owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occasion as an earthquake, or burning of a village within sight of his own, his people are observing a holiday;

2) Genna means anything forbidden. Primarily the term means “forbidden” or “prohibited” and it applies to the large number of prohibitions which constitute so important an element in the social and religious life of the Aos as well as of the large number of the related hill tribes. These restrictions apply to individuals or to certain groups. Some are occasional, some come at regular times, some are of short duration, while some are permanent.\[^{131}\]

It is a sort of sparing a day or days paying respect or honour to the concerned of different Neihmei, so that, it will not harm them in future. They do this with a belief that life, animals, crops and the village as a whole would prosper and flourish. Among these, some are seasonal and some are

\[^{130}\] T.C. Hodson: The Naga Tribes of Manipur, Delhi: B R Publishing Corporation, 1974 p.165
As discussed, there are numerous of them but only some of them are highlighted below.

1. **Rah Neih (gods’ genna):** This Neihmei is observed in the beginning of the year with a view that from this day onward all the gods may not disturb or create trouble to mankind as they start their work all throughout the year.

2. **Ting-Neih (rain genna):** They know that rain is one of the basic needs to survive for all living thing. But this genna is observed because they hold that excessive rainfall is not good for all living thing. It is their wish that such type of rain may not occur to them.

3. **Zaam Neih (wound genna):** This genna is observed just before they start clearing the jungle for cultivation. They do this so that no injury would happen to them.

4. **Tingthim Neih (thunder and lightning genna):** They say that thundering and lightning during rain is terrifying. They do this with a hope that it might strike them.

5. **Nah-si theimei/Maomunsan Neih (death of mother and baby in delivery):** Dead of such kind are considered to be one of the worse by them. They observe this genna to ward off such kind of death in future again.

6. **Kamang Neih (Lion genna):** this genna is observe with a condition that both lion and man would no more be an enemy and kill each other. There is a term that if lion kill any man may his teeth break vertically. Likewise if man kills any lion may he live without wife and children.

7. **Dangpi Neih (head hunting geena):** This genna is observed so that during war one may not get killed.

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Apart from those mentioned above, there are Malaih pangbinmei neih/Khow-pangbinmei neih (Landslide), Riang thaang luaimei neih (Suicide by hanging), Thing phian luaimei neih (Pierced by wood), Thingbang keimei neih (Fall from tree), Duikeimei neih (Pierced by wood), Duikeimei neih (Drown), Gan keimeihei neih (Lightning) Bu-Nei ram luak pei neih (Eclipses), Bangla neih (Earthquake), Rapian Neih (Epidemic), Nabung neih (Dead of Baby in Womb). The genna which are mentioned without further explanation are those concerning with the dead of man cause by natural events.

Ganthiangmei (Abstention from Good curry and Sex)

The literal meaning of this term is abstention from curry. The metaphorical meaning, which is more important, is abstention from sex. It is a form of penance. When someone dies in a family, especially the elders, the eldest son of the deceased would observe or undergo this penance. If the eldest son is not a healthy person or sick at the moment, the next male member can take his place. During this period, the person concerned is not allowed to take a good curry and more importantly, he is prohibited from sleeping with his wife or to be specific, he is barred from having sex. It is more or less the same like the Hindus who shave off their head when the head of the family died.

This practice has a deep rooted philosophy behind it. This hard penance is undertaken to please the departed soul so that he may happily and satisfactorily leave, the living ones, for his journey to the land of the dead. From the social perspective, this is practiced to acknowledge that even though he is death, he is remembered, respected and honoured by the family members and the society he left behind.

Feasts of Merit

Joseph S. Thong writes “The term ‘Feast of Merit’ was used by Anthropologists and Sociologists to express the true English equivalent of the
Naga concept of the ceremonial grand feast given by the rich men for the acquisition of status and is accompanied by wild merry-making.\textsuperscript{133}

The Nagas are festive lot. In spite of the heavy works and frequent wars, they still find time for merry making. They celebrate numbers of festivals. Each tribe has their own festivals. These festivals are not merely a time set aside for enjoyment. It is always attached and connected to social, economic and religious importance. It is a matter of social status; it involves a huge amount of expenditure and is an acknowledgement of the abundant god's blessing bestowed upon them. Apart from the normal routine kind of festivals there are 'Feasts of Merit'.

Prakash Singh highlighted about the importance of these Feast in the following words

"The Feasts of Merit are the hall-mark of social distinction for a Naga villager. There are a series of feasts, each one costlier than the preceding one. Every feast entitles the host to social distinction and increases progressively his standing and position in the community. It also entitles him to wear special dress and ornaments and decorate his house in a particular manner, marking him out from the others in the village".\textsuperscript{134}

The Zeliangrong celebrates two 'Feasts of Merit', namely Baanruh Dungmei and Kaihsume (Tarangkai). Apart from the social status and the involvement of expenditure in these two Feasts, the religious significance has a vital role. Especially construction of Tarangkai is considered as a sacrifice to god.\textsuperscript{135} Another important aspect from the religious point of view is that, those who have managed to host these two Feasts, they will be given a grand well come, and well respected and honoured even in the land of dead (Taruairam).

\textsuperscript{133} Joseph S. Thong: Head Hunters Culture, (Historic Culture of Nagas), Khinyi Woch, 1997, p. 19
\textsuperscript{135} G. Kamei, p. 266
These two Feasts of Merit are performed by the one who is, successful in harvest, in terms of paddy and in terms of rearing an animal, philanthropist, generous and rich enough to feed the whole villagers. People cannot host the feast of Tarangkai before hosting the feast of Baanruh Dungmei.

Baanruh Dungmei feast is hosted by the one who has harvested the highest amount of paddy within the community. The literal meaning of Baanruh means full granary, which is round in shape, the size of at least ten times both hands full stretch. And the term Dungmei means sitting (literally). In short, it is referred to a harvest that can fill that size of granary. This festival is hosted after careful assessment of the wealth which one has managed to gather. The basis of this event is a good harvest. But there are other factors that are involved in it. For instance, one should have a good number of tamed animals and fowls for an offering and to feed the whole community. There is one very important and interesting thing about hosting such feast, among the Zeliangrong, which in a way, shows about their far sightedness regarding ways of life. In a moment, one may be very rich and wealthy but no one can predict the future. There is a traditional saying which goes like this- life is like the fly of a butterfly- and so after few years, it is possible that one may be struck with misfortune in the near future. After all the unforeseen factors are taken into account, and if they still feel that it can be hosted, then the feast is hosted. The reason why all these factors are considered is because of the fact that, as on the day of the feast, even on the day of one’s death i.e. who hosted the feast, the whole community is to be fed in the same manner as done during that feast.

The animal/s that is killed to feed the people who attended the funeral is called Takaan. It may be pointed out that this system is practiced, even when an ordinary person dies, if the family is in a position to do so. This is not compulsory for everyone. But, when it comes to the person who has hosted the feast of Baanruh Dungmei, according to their tradition, ‘Takaan’ is a must. It is said that if the near and dear ones of the deceased, is unable to keep this Takaan, it is a shameful thing. This is a reminder and a sort of warning that hosting such feast is not a simple thing. It may be pointed out further that, even
on the tomb of the death couple, who has hosted this festival, the shape of a granary are placed as the sign or symbol to indicate their achievement. So even after their dead they are remembered and acknowledged by the community as the one who managed to host the feast of 'Baanruh Dungmei'.

There are certain minute details that are involved in hosting this feast which cannot be neglected at any cost. It starts from the willingness and desire on the part of the host. The host itself should fulfill certain norms, bring up the subject matter to the Council (Pei), decision will be finalized, and if it is only agreed by the Pei, one can go ahead with it. It is said that from beginning, till the end, all the dos and don'ts should be strictly adhered to it. If even a single required ceremony is missed out, it is believed that, untoward misfortune would befall on them.

According to Zeliangrong, hosting the feast of ‘Baanruh Dungmei’ is only a partial achievement and so they call it as a flower (Kapuang). After Baanruhmei comes "Tarangkai sumei" or "kaisumei". Kaisumei means construction of a house known as Tarangkai. If one can accomplish this feast, it is considered as a fruit in the realm of achievement through one’s own hard labour. It is a house with unique architectural designs, which is believed to be the pattern of the house of god. This house is constructed only by rich and wealthy person and also who has hosted the feast of Baanruh Dungmei. But this house is not constructed just because one has wealth and wish to do so. If one is in a position to construct, like the feast of Baanruh Dungmei, the first thing that one should do is informed the Pei. If only they have consented for the construction, one can go ahead with it. The work of construction should be completed within three months of its inception. The host of this feast must be a married man and should not be a handicap.

Like hosting the feast of ‘Baanruh Dungmei’, construction of this house is also done with a careful assessment of one’s own wealth. If only one is confident enough, about one’s own wealth to last long enough till one’s life span, than one goes ahead with the plan. This assessment is done because when the one who has constructed the Tarangkai die Takaan (feeding the
whole community who attended the funeral) is to be prepared by his or her family members. When the host of this feast died, the dwellers of the morung and the whole villagers, would start playing drums from morning till dusk. This is done so with a belief that, on that very day, the heavenly people are also happy and rejoicing. There is no definite reason why people have to be so happy when such person dies. But it is believed that, since very few people could construct such type of house that is really expensive, and on top of that, it is the highest achievement, so they must be celebrating an accomplished life of that person. In a way this act indicates that such a person is happy not only while alive but his happy memory is cherished by his community happily even after his/her death.

There are four types of Tarangkai 1) Pumtan Kai 2) Mullan kai 3) Sialluan Kai and 4) Thingku/Nkhuang kai. Pumtan kai is referred to the most common design of Tarangkai. Mullan kai is on top of Pumtan Kai. Sialluan Kai is constructed by a very rich man. Walls will be pasted with money. In order to avoid any stealing or destruction by the enemy sentry is kept. Thingku/Nkhuang Kai is the acme in the hierarchy of TarangKai. The uniqueness of this house is that, no robe or string is used in the house but only with a wooden plank. If one can hosts the feast of Baanruh Dungmei and construct the four types of Tarangkai in series, it is considered as the highest form of achievement by the Zeliangrong. He is supposed to have accomplished his life's work on earth.

It is said that a man by the name of Mr. Ningkhui of Abian village has managed to achieve that highest achievement or ideal of life. Ningkhui is said to be the only man who could built that house.

The structure and drawings of Tarangkai has an important meaning. In the front porch of the house should face toward the east and in front of the rooftop a horn like structure called Kaichei is kept. The significance of this horn like structure is that, the host and his generation or family line has never been a slave in the past.\textsuperscript{136} The drawings of different animals, heavenly bodies, men,

\textsuperscript{136} Khuanjiang Gangmei, \textit{Chiu Lon Kamthanh}, Tamenglong: Chiu Lon Pei, 2004, p. 64
etc is to be started only by the successful hunters. It could be in the form of head or any other wild animals. Once such person has started the drawing, the experts can complete the remaining.

**Death and After**

Death is an inevitable phenomenon to all the living things. The only difference is a matter of time and how it comes to them. It is not something that is wished for or under the control of human being. It comes to us in various ways. Now the question is, as a man, death is bound to happen, what are we suppose to do? Do we have to just wait for the time to come? Or there is nothing that we can do about it. The answers to those questions would definitely have its base on the belief system of any community. In the context of the Zeliangrong there is a significance of death. For them death is not the end of it all. It is the beginning of life in another form. Death marks the end of this worldly life and the beginning of life in the world out there. So the question of how a person lived his life and died matters a lot to them. The life out there would depend on these very two factors dearly.

Death is broadly classified into two categories as 1) Thitgai and 2) Thitsi. Under Thitgai there are three types Namely Rathit thei (old age dead), Paengchiumei (death of a youth before marriage) and Nahbung Huimei/Nahthit Theimei (death of a child in the womb or while delivery). Under thitsi there are six types as Nahsitheimei (child death while delivery) Kamang Kaina theimei (death by lion’s bite) Rihdangna theimei (death during war) Duikhou keiloemeil Thingbang Tak keimeil Gan keimei (death by drowning/ tree/ lightening), Malai pangbinmei (death from landslide) and Riangthengluaimei / Puh tuna theimei (suicide by hanging/poison). When a person is dead due to sickness or old age, genna is not observed but in other cases of death, genna which has been discussed under the head of the concept of Genna and taboo are observed strictly, so that it might not happen to them in future again.

There is very unusual and unthinkable tradition among the Zeliangrong with regard to Nahthit theimei. The term Nahthit theimei means both the child
and mother died while delivery. This type of dead is considered as dreadful and worst type of death. When such thing occurs, both the mother and the child, and all the goods in the house are not taken out. Even the house itself is cut down or dismantled and left to rot. It is said that in some villages even the other children born of that mother are buried alive. Those children are not even touched while they were buried. They opined that, even by touching them, it will be infected to them. They say that such type of dead occurs to people whose blood-line is not good. When such type of dead occurs in a village they will beat a drum, which has a unique beats, to let the people know of the incident. All the villagers who hear the sound of that drum will instantly leave their works, loads, etc and come home straight away.

When a child is dead within the womb, it will be buried inside the house right under the bed of the mother without any ceremony. If the child survive after the birth but died again before reaching five days they are also buried without any ceremony. A child is considered as a gift from god. So even if the child could not survive, they believed that god knows that the child could not live up to the standard of any other person. So god took it away.

**Theigui loumei**

The term *Theigui* refers to an animal or fowl that is killed when a married lady is dead. So this act of killing and performing a ceremony for the departed soul is called *Theigui Loumei*. This act is not practiced in all the cases of dead. It is done only when a lady who is married died in a family. This act is not performed by any other person but only by the brother (*Kapuning*) of the deceased. There is no particular number or size of an animal or fowl. This act is carried out by the Zeliangrong to show that, they love and care for each other right from birth till death. So, if the brother did not perform this act, he is known by the society as a person who does not have love and uncultured. It has become a tradition. If this act is not performed by *Kapuning*, it is said that his sister's soul may grieved and bewailed over him. If such things happen, her brother will have a mad or a mentally and physically retarded offspring. This is also one reason why they performed this ceremony. There is a saying "*N-tumei*
tho thei puinung kapuning kaih thei guang datre" which means when a woman dies, they reach their bother’s home again. This saying refers to the act of Theigui Loumei.

**Theimei luan**

According to their tradition when a person dies, the place where his/her soul goes solely depends on the way they lived. If a person has a good moral conduct possessing the moral virtues, has hosted a feast of merit, he /she is said to go to heaven. People who do not fall under the above category will go to the land of dead. There is a contrasting view regarding who goes to heaven and who goes to the land of dead. Some account says that people who are good and manage to host a feast of merit also goes to the land of dead. There, those people are said to be respected and honoured by the rest. We can see the contradiction between these two accounts. But there is one story in favour of the former account. Once upon a time, a man by the name Meijipu lost his wife. He loved her so much that he followed his wife till the land of dead. When he reaches there, he met wife, some of his family members and friends, but those people who were good, and those who have hosted the feast of merit were not found. He started enquiring with the inmates and later came to know they went to live with god- heaven. It is said that he lived there for some time, but could not continue, because the language that they uses were always contrary in its meaning. So he came back to live with his fellow men. It is also said that, he brought back some songs, which he learnt from the land of the dead. This story is one of the evidences which are cited by the Zeliangrong to say that there is a place call Taruairam – land of death. From this we can see that there is also a place called Tingkao (Heaven) where only some exceptional people go.

Joseph S. Thong in Head-Hunters Culture gives a typical depiction about the Naga traditional ceremony of dead. He writes;

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“The body is laid out on the bed and washed by the village burier. 
A little cooked rice is wrapped in a leaf and put in the dead man’s left 
hand, for him to eat in his journey to the land of the dead. A little chicken 
is then selected to go ahead of the dead man to search and find water 
for him on the way. A small stick is tied to its legs and the bird is allowed 
to wander over the corpse”.

Pamei also shares about their belief in life after death. He says the 
Zeliangrong believe in the existence of the soul after death. The soul is 
believed to go to Taruiram after death. The condition of life after death will be 
determined by the kind of life he lived on earth. The next life is dependent on 
its antecedent.

Sujata Miri also mention about the land of dead while she narrated the 
story about the two orphans (brother and sister) of the Liangmai Naga. The 
story says that parents of those orphans visited them in the field. Then the 
children insisted their parents to take them to the land of dead. On their way 
they come across a river called Chakaguiki. This river is said to be the dividing 
line between the living and the dead. When they reached, those orphans found 
out that, everything in the land of dead was reversed. They could not 
communicate or eat their food. At last they got tired and came home.

With regard to their belief in afterlife, Bower also gives and account from 
the zeme/zemi perspective (One of the tribes of the Zeliangrong). She writes;

“The Zemi believes in an after-life. The dead, he thinks, lingered in their 
old homes until forced to go, and after a death in the house, food and 
drink are set out for the ghost at every meal until ceremonial separation 
is complete. On feast days, sometimes, great bowls of pounded soap-
creeper, thick with suds, are put out so that ghosts may bathe, like the

138 Joseph S. Thong: Head Hunters Culture, (Historic Culture of Nagas), Khinyi Woch, 1997, 
p.51
139 Ramkhun Pamei: The Zeliangrong Nagas: A Study of tribal Christianinty, New Delhi: Uppal 
Publishing House, 1996, p. 35
140 Sujata Miri, Liangmai Nagas, Legends and Stories, Har-Anand Publication1991, pp. 87-88
living, and join the celebrations. At Hkakngi comes the final parting. The last sacrifices are made. All that the dead will need is the next world, gourds, cloths, tools, seed, anything else omitted from the grave-goods at burial, must be provided now. When everything is done, the priest goes up to the top of the village. Then, when his ritual there is complete, he moves down the street, and, calling aloud, bids the ghosts take their possessions and go. When the last of the invisible host has passed through the lower gateway and taken the Low Road to the land of the dead, the old man shuts the gate, and returns again to the village emptied of all but living men". 141

Erica Simon in her book Life after Death writes "Being visited by someone from the world of the dead is one thing. But some of the dying also claim to actually see this world, in a landscape vision". 142 She shares in a belief that physical dead is survived by the spirit or soul or in other words there is life after death.

Colonel McColloch made a remark about the Kabuis that "the villages and its immediate precincts form their graveyard and when for a time, from whatever cause, they have been obliged to desert their village, I have heard them more often express their wish to return to it as being the grave of their ancestors than as being their own birth place." 143

We also have from Dr. Brown the statement that "after death the souls descend to an underground world where they are met by their ancestors, who introduce them into their new habitation; the life they lead in this underground world is an exact counterpart of what they have led in this—the rich remain rich, the poor, poor". 144. He also states that "after living their lives over again they return to the upper world and are born, live, and die unconscious of their former state; the bad, however, are annihilated"

142 Erica Simon, Life after Death, Delhi: Sahni Publications, p. 93
143 TC HODSON, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, Delhi: B R Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 146
144 Ibid, p. 146ff
According to the Zeliangrong tradition, as soon as someone has died, the priest would perform a dead ceremony known as *Theiphah*. A fowl is killed for the ceremony. Another important thing that they do is kill an animal for the departed soul. This act is called *Takaan*. The reason for killing an animal is that, they will prepare a food for the departed soul to have a parting feast. This parting feast is known as *Pukpaumei* or *Pukdungmei*. This feast is prepared before the burial. On that particular day, the soul of the dead person will be invited for the final feast by the priest. They believed that the soul really turn up for that feast. It is not visible to the naked eye or to the laymen, but only to the priest. The priest is said to have a power to communicate with the soul. A bowl of rice, meat and local wine is place near the corpse. This is done by the near and dear one of the dead person because of their love. Sometimes it so happen that people do not have time to say even their last word before their death. So when the soul has been call upon to come, through the priest, both the family members and the soul could communicate and bid fare well to each other formally. It is said that even a secrets, which the family members needed to know, are also transmitted at this time again. How those things were possible, is something left to the reader to take a pause and try to reason within the context.

The foods which they prepared will be put in a basket and keep above the grave. On that basket a miniature replica of a raft and fruits will also be kept. The foods were meant for the soul to eat, till he/she reaches one river by the name *Kanung Duithuak / Chakaguiki* (Miri), on the way to the land of the dead. And the raft is to be used for crossing this river. Once this river is crossed the soul will go empty-handed.

The Zeliangrong believes in the continuation of life after dead in the form of soul. This soul is said to descend to the land of the dead after life has left from the living body. The souls of good and bad person find their destiny here. It is said that there is one tree known as *Nrembang* (Banyan tree), which is blocking the view of this land of dead from the eye of the livings. In regard to this tree there is one story that narrates about it. Once, a man and his son saw
this tree. They went and stood beside the tree to see the other side. To their amazement, right before them was none other than Taruairam. Then they realized that, it was only this tree that was separating the dead and the living. So they started cutting the tree but before they could fell, tiredness and sun turn harsh to them. The next day they came again but to their distress, they saw the tree standing still without even a single cut. That is how they believe in the existence of this tree and the reason how the dead and the living are separated.

**Zaobuangpu**

There is another account which refers to another tree by the name Marin Bang. The significance of this tree is that, on the way to the land of dead, they have to pass by this tree. They have to touch the tree on their journey. Those people, who were married or have had sexual relation, are said to pass through without any problems. But they say that, if a male or female who have had not involved in sexual relation touches the tree and try to cross, their sight becomes blurry and they would start to circle the tree. So it is said that before they could cross the tree, war would come to them and die again before reaching the land of dead. On the way to the land of dead, the soul would also meet one old man known as Zaobuangpu. Like the case of that tree (Marinbang) all the souls would have to pass through him. As they passes by this old man would ask them to look for lice like insect in his head. If that insect is caught, they are supposed to bite it. For that reason, in order to avoid biting those lice, they will bite the fruit which was kept in the basket for him. It is also said that all the virgins, if it is a girl he will sleep with them and if it is a boy he will be tortured. In order to escape, from such thing to happen when they die, boys and girls were encouraged to have their own lovers. If a youth of a marriageable age dies as a virgin or before marriage it is called Pengchiumei.

In the land of dead the meaning of words and objects are said to be opposite and deceptive. This view is also shared by Miri. Any reasonable person would certainly pose a question regarding the genuineness and authenticity of the given description. But there is one important thing to be
noted in such kind of claim. Practical sciences do not have a room to proof about its authenticity nor any empirical study method. Since it is based on the oral tradition, there are number of accounts that has been passed on to the people, about those person who have visited the land of dead, it cannot be shown on the experimental table. The only reason that one can give is that they believed in their belief.

**Theisi Theimei**

This is referred to unnatural death. Two common causes of death are sickness and old age. The causes of death apart from this two are known as *Theisi Theimei*. People, who die of such, from outside the village, are not brought to the village. They will be buried outside the village gate. The question of who or how a person lived is determine or known on the day of his/her death. If he had led a good life, he is honoured and respected by the people on the day he died. If an ordinary man dies, after all the formalities and ceremonies were performed, it will be buried right away. On the other hand, if someone who has managed to host Feast of Merit dies, instead of mourning and weeping for the dead, the whole villagers will celebrate the accomplished life by beating drums and dancing. Even the beats and timing of the drum is said to be different from any other occasions. They called that beat as *Tingthimdaomei*. The feast and merry making would last for two to three days. Then one of the old man would announce, ‘now that all his wealth and belongings are finished celebration would be stopped’. And thus he will be buried.

There is another important and interesting aspect about the land of dead. They say that every soul of the dead will go to this world. In this land of dead, as we have discussed already, ones status and place will be decided by the deeds when one was alive. So everyone will reap what they have sown. Every soul is said to land up in this land but there is another place in this land where all the cursed people, whose deeds were evil and despised by the people, go. That place is called *Thuntadijang*. It is not known that people in *Taruairam* would be punished or live a suffering life but people who go to this *Thuntadijang* will have a never ending suffering life.
Those people who managed to host the Feasts of Merit are said to be respected even in the land of dead. But those people whose deeds were evil will be despised and will live a terrible life. The human soul, after physical death will go to the land of the dead. The worldly life is not the end of man's soul.145

Within the Zeliangrong community, the code of conduct, moral laws, traditional beliefs and gennas/taboos are strictly followed by every citizen. Any breach of such things is to invite a punishment upon oneself. Since the Zeliangrong are community oriented, the bond of brotherhood is very strong. A single deviation, if occurs, it affects the whole systems. So in order that such things should not occur, a child since its birth is given a proper care by the whole community in its upbringing. Every citizen is equally important.

Another question is, we may be abiding all the rules and regulations, law and order of a society for which we may be branded as a good citizen (this judgment, we assume, would be based upon only external affairs of our acts). But even if we bear the name of a good citizen, the most important thing is will we be happy? By being a good citizen, does it guarantee one's own happiness? If then, what is it that makes a man happy from the Zeliangrong perspective? As any man would be, an achievement of one's target makes us happy. From the Zeliangrong point of view, we have said that, particularly there are two things which they consider to be the highest achievement of mankind which necessarily makes a person happy.

For the Zeliangrong meaning of life would be to possess the moral qualities of a virtuous person, manage to host feasts of merit, live a long life and die a natural death. To such life they called Tingpuimarumi Panti (well flourished and happy life).

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