

**An Ethnolinguistics Study
of
Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma, Onaeme, Purum, Liangmai and Yimkhiung**

Edited by
Madhumita Barbora



**Centre for Endangered Languages
Tezpur University**

Contents	Page No:
Acknowledgments	
Coordinator's Note	
Foreword	
Editor's Note	
Authors Information	
An Ethnolinguistic study of the Hrangkhoh Community	2
The Liangmai Community	9
Ethnolinguistic study of Biate	19
Ethnolinguistic study of Khelma	24
Ethnolinguistic study of Onaeme	32
Life Cycle Rituals of Purum Community: An Ethnolinguistic Perspective	35
A Brief Ethnolinguistic Study of Yimchunger	42-48
Indices	

AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC ACCOUNT OF THE HRANGKHOL COMMUNITY

1. Introduction

The Hrangkhols or the Hrangkhawls are one of the oldest Kuki tribes in North East India. The term Hrangkhoh also denotes the language spoken by the same tribe. The total population of the Hrangkhoh community is estimated to be about 18,700, according to Ethnologue (2000). The Hrangkhoh speakers are found in some parts of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya.

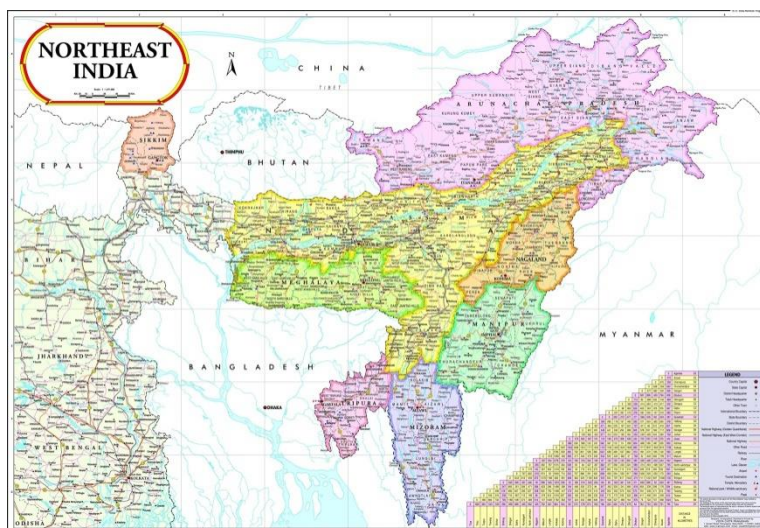


Figure 1: Map of North East India

2. History and Origin

The word 'Hrangkhoh' has been derived from the two words *hrang* 'courageous warrior' and *khol* 'group' which can be translated as 'group of courageous warriors'. According to their oral tradition, the origin of the Hrangkhoh tribe started from a cave called 'Chinlung' or 'Sinlung', located somewhere in China. Though there is no written record about the exact time of their migration it can be asserted that the Hrangkhoh people started migrating from one place to another, after living for centuries in the same place, due to aggression from other neighbouring tribes and also in search of fertile land. It is believed that the Hrangkhohs came out of the cave and migrated to the Shan state of Burma. After staying in Burma for many centuries, they shifted to the Lushai Hills, or present day Mizoram, and gradually, they scattered into different regions of North East India.

3. Demography

The Hrangkhoh community in Assam is mainly found in some villages of Haflong, Dima Hasao district and in some villages of Cachar district too. In Haflong, there are more than fifteen villages. The total population of the Hrangkhoh community in Dima Hasao is 2500 (approx.) There neighbouring communities are Dimasa, Kuki, Hmar, Khelma, Biate, Zeme Naga, Rieng, Assamese, Bengali and Nepali in Dima Hasao. For inter community communication, Haflong Hindi, the lingua-franca of the region is used. Hrangkhoh shares some affinity with other neighbouring languages like Hmar,

Mizo, Biata, Khelma etc., and they are mutually intelligible. The occupation of most of the Hrangkhoh people is Government Service; other than that some people are engaged in private jobs and agriculture. The literacy rate of Hrangkhoh is 66.07% according to the Census Report of India, 2011.

Villages	Houses	Male	Female	Total
Zion	33	105	78	200
Muolpung	23	73	85	153
Lungkhok	59	153	147	300
Boro Robi	33	91	75	166
Asiak Robi	40	96	101	197

Table 1: Distribution of population in some villages of Haflong



Entrance to Zion Village

4. Institutional Support and Control

The Hrangkhoh language is introduced in schools in the lower primary level. Presbyterian Church of India (estd.1983): In Hrangkhoh society, the support and control of the church is very important. Hrangkhoh Students' Association (HKSA) plays a vital role among the society regarding socio-cultural issues. Hrangkhoh Literary Committee is a very important platform which works for the development of both literature and language of the community.



Presbyterian Church of India, Zion Village, Haflong

5. Methodology

The data of this paper is accumulated from two sources: primary and secondary. For primary data, field works have been carried out in some villages of Haflong, Dima Hasao district. The secondary data collection has been done in consultation with books, journals and articles.

6. Hrangkhoh as An Ethnic Group

An ethnolinguistic group is a group that is unified by both a common ethnic ancestry and a common language. The Hrangkhoh language is the first language of the Hrangkhoh community, which is the common means of communication among the community in most of the domains. There is a common ethnic ancestry among the Hrangkhoh people. They practise their own customs and traditions from generations. On the basis of these two reasons, the Hrangkhoh community can be considered as an ethnolinguistic group.

7. Religion

The indigenous religion of the Hrangkhoh people was animism. They practised a type of animism called 'sonong' centuries back. The Hrangkhohs believed in the existence of a supreme god, whom they called Ching Pathian (High God). According to Soppit, there are three principal gods of the Hrangkhohs known as Lambra, Golarai and Dudukal. The Hrangkhohs had started to convert into Christianity from 1915 onwards.

8. Family Structure

The Hrangkhoh tribe practises patriarchy. The father or the senior most male is considered to be the head of the family. He has the power over any family matter. The mother is confined to household tasks. In a Hrangkhoh society, both nuclear and joint family can be seen. In some joint families, the elder son would set up a new home as soon as he got married. When the father died, the mother would act as the head of the family.

9. Right of Inheritance

In the patriarchal society, the male is held in high authority in the society. In case of property succession also, the first born male is given the priority. In case of sufficient properties, the father can share it amongst the sons as he wishes. If a man has a daughter but no son, then the father may give the right of inheritance to his daughter provided she does not marry a member of another clan. If the family has no son or daughter, it is automatically passed on to the nearest male kinship of the deceased.

10. House Type and Pattern

The Hrangkhoh people generally used to build their houses close to one another in a systematic row on hill tops. Traditionally, the houses were built of wood and bamboos, covered with thatch roof. However, nowadays, concrete houses are also found in Hrangkhoh societies. Numerous houses form a village where people exercise their customary law. The villages are of different sizes according to the population usually with not less than 25-30 houses.



Traditional houses of the Hrangkhols

11. Village Administration

The Hrangkhols have their own administrative set-up. The village council or court is called *Devan* or *Roirelna* which consists of few members selected by a general consensus. The villages are administered by a group of village officials, the *Kalim* or head-men and the *Kabur* 'additional head-men'. The assistant head-men are the subordinates, namely, the *Chapia-Kalim* and *Chapia Kabur*. Their main responsibility is to promote justice, harmony and maintain law and order in the society. The Devans deal with all the matters that occur within the village; such as, disputes between two villages, in which they come together to resolve the matters. Matters such as murder, adultery, divorce, fighting, etc. that occur within the community are brought to the village court for judgement. In this regard, the village court is responsible for necessary action.

12. Traditional festival

The Hrangkhols observe different types of festivals depending on their agricultural practices and occupation. The two most important festivals are *Rualsafak*, the harvesting festival celebrated in January. *Bahmarinsuk*, is celebrated in March before sowing the seeds in Jhum fields.

13. Traditional Attire and Ornaments

Hrangkhol people wear handwoven attires produced by them. They have their own weaving tools and instruments in almost every household. Hrangkhol women use to weave dresses for the family members. They prepare the threads from the cotton cultivated and produced in their *Jhum* fields.

Followings are the different type attire for male:

- a) ***Diar* or *peduri***- the Hrangkhol males tie a thread round their waist where a piece of cloth is tucked in to cover the lower part of the body.
- b) ***Songkol***- a shirt or a type of dress which is worn by the males to cover the upper part of their body.

- c) **Lukuom**- traditional turban; a piece of cloth is used to wrap the head like a turban.

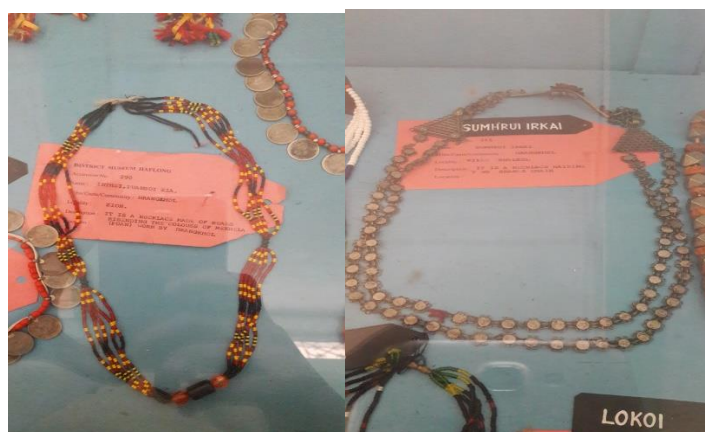
Female attire and ornaments are as follows:

- a) **Puanbom**- a cloth to cover the lower part of the body, extending from the waist to below their knee.
 b) **Lungbom**- a cloth covering from their breast to the knee.



Hrangkhol girls and boys wearing their traditional attire

Some common ornaments worn by Hrangkhol women are *samkil* 'hair-pin', *kuordoi*, *kuorbet* 'varieties of earrings', *banhrial* 'bracelet', *irthei* 'necklace' etc. These are made of coins and beads and wool.



Traditional Necklace

14. Food habits

The staple food of the Hrangkhols is rice. Rice is cultivated in the Jhum fields along with other vegetables. Hrangkhol people mostly eat boiled vegetables with rice. Other than that, meat, fish and dry fish are also consumed by them. Apart from the cultivated vegetables, they used to collect some locally grown leaves and

herbs from the nearby forests. Earlier they used to go for hunting, but nowadays, meat is mostly bought from the market.

15. Life cycle rituals

Although, the Hrangkhols had converted into Christianity, certain customs are followed by the Hrangkhols with regards to their life cycle rituals. They practise their traditional rituals right from the birth of a baby till its death according to their traditional belief.

15.1 Birth Ritual

When a child is born to a family, males of the family cannot enter the room where the baby is born. A black thread is tied on the wrist of the new born to ward off the evil eye. As a symbol of the birth of a new born baby, a kind of wild orchid *naisul bang* is hung up on the main door until the purification ceremony is performed. There are several rituals and ceremonies of purification of the child till it attains adolescence.

15.2 Naming

The first ceremony after the birth of a baby is the naming ceremony. The naming ceremony is performed on different days depending on the gender of the child. If it is a male child, the name is given on the 11th day; if it is a female child, the name is given on the 9th day. The child's name should be derived from its grandfather's or grandmother's name.

vanneihli

van-nei-hli

grandfather-grandmother-new name

15.3 Marriage

According to the Hrangkhol tradition, both girls and boys are restricted to get married outside their community. Marriage within the same clan is discouraged, but not prohibited. Polygamy is highly forbidden among the Hrangkhols. In case of an arranged marriage, the parents of the groom send a proposal to the bride's family. The proposal is sent in the form of *Kutchavi* which includes a piece of cloth, pan 'betel nut and leaf' etc. if the *Kutchavi* is accepted, it indicates agreement; if it is sent back it means denial. In Hrangkhol tradition, *Kuvaichu*, the bride price is settled before the marriage. It can be negotiated from the groom's side. After that the discussion, the date and time of the wedding is fixed. The wedding ceremony is performed according to the Christian wedding rituals.

15.4 Divorce

Divorce is very rare among the Hrangkhol society. In case of adultery, a man when caught in the act is imposed a *pabi* 'fine' of 300, along with domestic animals such as pig and mithun. In case of women, if she is caught in adultery, she will be exposed naked publicly by the relatives of the man's wife.

15.5 Death

There are two kinds of death, *thi pangai* 'natural death' and *sara thi* 'unnatural death'. In case of natural death, the corpse is washed with hot water and wrapped with new clothes along with food that is prepared for the departed soul. Soon after the death an elderly cock is sacrificed near the feet of the deceased in order to show the right way to heaven. This sacrifice is performed by an elderly lady. After the relatives and friends of the deceased family have assembled, the corpse is carried in a procession for burial. A feast in the name of the departed soul is held. This ritual is called 'Rouk Ngha'. The family of the deceased may hold the feast one year after the incident takes place or whenever they find themselves capable to do the same. They erect a memory stone on the name of the deceased on the day of this ceremony is held. In case of unnatural death, the corpse is neither carried into the village, nor can any formal funeral ceremony be performed. The body is either buried outside the village or where the incident takes place.

16. Conclusion

Hrangkhoh is maintaining their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual situations. Hence, it can be considered as a distinctive and active entity in intergroup situation

References

- Fought, Carmen, 2006. *Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Giles, H., R.Y. Bourhis, and D.M. Taylor. 1977. 'Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations'. In *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup relations*, H. Giles, 307-48. London: Academic Press
- Giles, H. and Johnson, P. 1987. Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A Social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68:69-99.

THE LIANGMAI COMMUNITY

Introduction

Liangmai (ISO 639-3 njn)¹, is a Western Naga belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language (Post & Burling, 2017). It is primarily spoken in Manipur and Nagaland states of Northeast India. The Liangmais have been living in this area with their distinct traditional culture and language over a long period of time. Most of these Liangmai people largely settled in Tamei and Tousem sub divisions of Tamenglong district, Kangpokpi, Senapati district and Kanglatongbi of West Imphal district in Manipur. A considerable number of Liangmai speakers are also found in Tening Sub-division of Peren district in Nagaland. According to the 2011 Ethnologue, currently there are approximately 49,800 Liangmai speakers in Nagaland and Manipur.² In Nagaland, the state government documents refer to Liangmai and Zeme collectively as Zeliang whereas in Manipur, both these tribes are recognised as Zeme and Liangmai. The language has a few alternate names, viz. Liangmei, Liyang, Lyangmay, Lyengmai (Lewis *et al* 2015).

The Liangmai People

As noted, the majority of Liangmai speakers are found in the Peren district of Nagaland. A substantial number also live in Dimapur and Kohima respectively, the commercial and political capital of Nagaland. Despite the recent advances in modern science and technology as well as an increasingly wider use of Nagamese as a lingua franca, but they retained their distinct identity rather in a remarkable way, particularly in the Tening Sub-division of the Peren district. However, in terms of education, and economy, the Liangmais are rather a marginalised community in Nagaland.

Before the arrival of the Christian Missionary, the Liangmais were not exposed to the outside world. Fishing, hunting, and jhum cultivation (i.e. shifting cultivation) constitute their main occupation. The economy of the Liangmais is thus agrarian in nature. The community follows a patriarchal and monogamous family system.

However, regular shifting from the village to cities for job and education; younger generation adopting cultures of others ignoring their indigenous identity; lack of awareness about the increasing endangerment of their language in the process; lack of support from the government to preserve and promote their language and culture are some of the crucial factors that could lead to the extinction of Liangmai and all that it carries in the near future. At this juncture, there is no significant amount of written documents that could showcase the Liangmai tribe.

Monarchy is not prevalent in Liangmai society. Jhum cultivation is still important type of cultivation. As this language did not have its own script, the missionaries used the Roman script to write this language at the beginning of 19th century for the first time. However, not much of literature was produced by them in this language. It is an agglutinating, verb-final language. Liangmai is an indigenous minority tribe both in Nagaland and Manipur. Liangmais had their own traditional religion before their conversion to Christianity. After the arrival of the Christian missionaries, they have embraced Christianity as their prime way of worshipping the almighty³. However, in Nagaland, a small section of the people at Tening

¹<http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/codes.asp?letter=n>

² The Census data of Liangmai does not distinguish between Liangmai of Manipur and of Nagaland. The figure provided by the Ethnologue is rather doubtful.

³Rev. William Pettigrew was the first man to bring the gospel to the Liangmai soil in 1919 A.D.

town, still uphold the traditional religion by affiliating a cult with Heraka which was founded by Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu.

VIABILITY

Liangmai children who grow up within the village community learn Liangmai as their first language and stay mostly monolingual till they start school around the age of five to seven. In the school all subjects are taught in English but as soon as the children arrive home, they switch back to Liangmai. If young people stay within their village community they are not pressurized to speak Nagamese or English, unless they become teachers or government officials. However, since more and more young people are travelling in and out of the Liangmai area they have started to borrow more vocabulary and expressions from English and losing the richness of expression and vocabulary of their own language. Youngsters are encouraged to excel in Nagamese or English, both of which are perceived as prestige languages. Attendance in a Nagamese- or English-Medium school is also highly prized; the goal is that these children will get good government postings after they finish their education. Considering the economic and social status associated with language use, the viability of Liangmai must be considered marginal.

According to UNESCO (2003), Liangmai language is a vulnerable and this language primarily needs serious attention to be protected before its perished. The youngest speakers are either of the parental or grandparental generation and children are not learning the language adequately and the domain of language is primarily only home domain. Therefore, there is not only an acute need for documenting and describing the language but also the community's attitude towards the preservation and practice of the language is important.

MIGRATION

Though the indigenous languages of Nagaland are not mutually intelligible but they all trace their origin or place of departure to Makhel. The Liangmai has no historical documents to show the migration and origination. But the folksongs, folktales and legends of different Naga tribes are sorts of Naga history through which we can trace the origin. Many writers considered Makhel (as the Liangmai called Makhiang) where all Naga tribes lived together before a major dispersal took place.

Many ethnologists had studied the Nagas and traced the origin connected with the head-hunters of Malay and traces of Southern Seas, while other traces them back even to China. Some of the tribes in Malaysia (Iban, Kayans), Indonesia (Dayaks) and Philippines (Igorots) are very similar to Naga tribes in their cultural and social life. L. W. Shakespeare (1881), who wrote the history of Assam, also wrote that Nagas resembled to those tribes of Dayaks and they loved the marine-shells. Thus he wrote, "they recognize a slightly resemblance in matters of counting names domestic implements, in a way village architecture and head-hunting propensities to those of the Dayaks". It is also supported by historical facts- folklore, folktale, and legend that there is a dim similarity with Borneo in that the two have common traditional ways of head-hunting with Indonesians as both use the loin loom for weaving clothes. Naga tribes must have wandering before they found their permanent abode and ultimately reached Makhel following the big river. Like many Naga tribes, Liangmai has its own version of migration and origin. They have their history as well as rich cultural heritage. To trace the origin, migration and settlement pattern of the tribe, is not a very simple task to investigate. To trace the origin, one has to depend heavily on the oral tradition in the form of folklore, folktale, legends, proverbs etc as well as other materials that are available. Following the oral traditions, one forms a rough idea that the Naga tribes traced their origin

from Makhel. All Liangmai elders agreed to this version that dispersal took place from Makhel. Liangmais are one of the Naga tribes that belong to Mongoloid group who for a considerable period lived in South-West China and migrated to Northern South East Asia and North East India around one thousand years before Christ. No written record is available about their migration to Makhel or Makhiang. This is concerned as the place where all the Naga tribes lived together before a major dispersal took place. Most likely, Makhiang is the original home of the Nagas. The Liangmai people left the Makhel and came to a deep gorge called Ramting Kaben which is now identified in the North-West Senapati district.

The ancestors of Liangmai left their abode in Makhel and with their belongings and moved to the South. They crossed many mountains and survived hostile conditions. After long time they reached Ramting Kaben where they were comparatively safe. It is said that nothing could be seen from the outside and those who are living inside the gorge did not have a view of the outside world except the moon and the star at night and the sun during the day. The Ramting Kaben was located at Makuilongdi, which was commonly called Guangphungning (*Chawangphungning*) somewhere near the present Oklong village, in Senapati district of Manipur.

The people of Makuilongdi were seldom sick and the deaths were uncommon. Families increased in numbers over the years. There was no shortage of food. Hunters and fishermen never returned empty handed from their trips. They had dances and festivals which they celebrated with pomp and grandeur. They domesticated animals and fowls. They developed their code of ritual and worship. They began to worship god for good harvest and also for the protection of their lives and general well-being. They were animists and believed in the highest god or the supreme god was 'Charawang' which literally means 'God King'. He is the creator of everything. All norms and styles of cultivation were developed at Makuilongdi. In course of this sojourning the inherited ancient traditions were improved which became a rich distinct custom, culture and religion compared to those of other brethren. Mention may be made that Liangmai community lived there happily without outside interference. It is generally believed that the total number of houses in Makuilongdi village is 7777 and if it is true, then it is the largest village not only in Manipur but in entire North-east India. Due to increase in population the administration became out of control. People in groups with dear and near ones started parting from other groups in different groups in different directions according to their own will, some to the North West, some to the North East, and some to the South. They proceeded in these directions without knowing anything about their destination.

The trails of those people who left Makuilongdi and proceeded to different directions were untraceable. Because of this people had isolated from each other forgetting dear and near ones, father, mother, daughter, brother and sister. It was difficult to visit and be in touch with each other even in the time of troubles due to bad communication and other reasons such as big rivers, big jungles abounded with wild animals and ferocious animals were the obstacles for free movement of people. They left Makuilongdi and established many villages in Manipur and Nagaland.

ALTERNATIVE NAMES

There are other names for the language available including: Lyiang, Liangmei, Liyang, Liyangmay⁴. They are also known as Zeliang. Liangmai and Zeme are referred to collectively as Zeliang in Nagaland whereas in Manipur, they are recognised as Liangmai and Zeme Naga tribes.

⁴ Grierson 1903 pointed out different names of Liangmai.

OFFICIAL STATUS OF LIANGMAI

English are the official languages and Nagamese is the lingua-franca in Nagaland. Liangmai (Zeliang) both as a language and scheduled tribe is officially recognized in the state of Nagaland. Liangmai is taught in primary school as a subject but not as a medium of instruction. A few religious books like the *Holy Bible* and *Hymns* are translated into the language. Some modern gospels and rock songs are available in audio-visual forms in various mediums. Apart from these books, Zeliang program is also broadcasted everyday by the All India Radio station at Kohima and the traditional knowledge system are well preserved by AIR.

MYTH OF THE LIANGMAI COMMUNITY

The Liangmai's allude about Sinluang - this distant place. In one of their folk songs, children in the villages sing even today "SinluangSinluang Nap Birutio... tio". When the song finishes, the boy or the girl comes towards the front of the leader and says, *Apeh! Akinatek bung kabuina kabamija akina tek bung leng pilo sua* which means "Grandma! A Mithun has broken my little brother/sister bowl, so give me once again".

This folk song talks about a place of abundance. There is no chronicle to prove this Singluang has any reference to the present Sinlung in China. These folk songs and folk stories transmitted from generation to generation orally. After the prolonged migration movement when they had to encounter hostile people and had to cross many rivers and mountain ranges, they arrived at the place somewhere near a sea in the east. Their penchant for conch, shell and beads which are found only in the proximity of the sea is an indication to their intimate but distant relationship with the sea. Therefore, it is not hard to believe that they once lived near the sea shore. Their fancy for marine shell may point to a bygone home by the sea shore. From there, they shifted towards Makhel.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Liangmai people are exceptionally simple and very hospitable. They maintain very cordial relationship with one another by strengthening each other in various ways. They love to work and enjoy working together in groups in the paddy field. The very foundation of Liangmai society is based on lineage and clan system. Their social structure is patriarchal and patrilineal like all other Naga communities. The father is the supreme lord of the family and he is empowered to interfere in the social activities. The joint family system is not favored by the Liangmai society. The general practice is that after one or two years of a son's marriage, he becomes the head of his own small family and he must leave his father's home to set up a home of his own. The Liangmai community has a very rich cultural heritage which is reflected in the forms of traditional festivals, folk dances and songs and costumes including dresses and ornaments and other activities such traditional games and sports. Even today, the Liangmai people like to keep themselves engaged all throughout the year in different sports and cultural activities.

TRADITIONAL ATTIRE

The traditionally preserved and cherished costume of Liangmais is one of their prime cultural heritages. Mostly, the traditional attires are hand-woven. Some of popular clothes of the community are the *Ngumthuaphai* which is the most common among shawls, *Maranpan*, a shawl for both men and women, *henglannina*, girdle to wrap around the waist for women and *Tarehphai*, a shawl for men. The Liangmai community wear different attires for different

occasions. Each piece of cloth has a specific connotation attached to it. For example, there are attires which are meant only for married women and some others are meant only for unmarried girls. Also, they have different types of attires to be worn to funerals, to weddings and to celebrations etc.

FOOD HABIT

The staple foods of the Liangmai are rice, meat and green vegetables etc. Some typical traditional food items include *jiangdui*, a taste maker extracted from the juice of mustard leaves, *tasun*, potted bamboo shoot and *tasang*, processed or fermented soyabean.

LIVELIHOOD

The Liangmais culture is primarily agrarian though in this day and age they are also engaged in different occupations and professions. The most preferred style of their cultivation is *jhum* or shifting cultivation. Farming and domestication of animals is also a major part of their livelihood. The educated Liangmais serve in the Government sector and in trade and industries; some others also work as social workers.

RELIGION

Like other Naga tribes, the Liangmai Nagas also have their own traditional indigenous religion which they call *Kampai*. It is a practice of Animism where they worship natural objects such as tree, stone, sun etc. They also have totems and beliefs. They do not build any place for worship like temples. *Kampai* is more than just animism as there are some other elements of practice such as lycanthropy, shamanism, supematuralism and superstition etc. The Liangmai Naga believes in the supreme God known as *Charawang*⁵. He is perceived to be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. They believe in supernatural existence and supernatural power. The Liangmais believe that the Supreme God is the creator of the world who reigns with limitless power in both heaven and earth. They also have explicit ideas about gods, goddesses and other spiritual beings and believe that their deities control their lives.

There are several reasons why Liangmai Nagas could be converted to Christianity. Though they have enormous knowledge of practices of rites and rituals transcended through generations, they have no traditional structure for worshipping their deities. Therefore, they could easily adopt Christianity when the missionaries taught them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They were taught that Christianity is the only way of life. Christian missionaries point out that any non-Christian societies were under darkness and hence, they have to be empowered to come into the light of the world through Jesus Christ. From this perspective, the Naga in general and the Liangmai in particular were under the darkness. They were considered as people who have been possessed by the evil spirits. The Liangmai Nagas converted Christianity rather late as compared to other Naga tribes.

Birth Ceremony

In Liangmai society, a pregnant woman is free to do her usual daily household chores. They believe that mild physical activity during pregnancy makes the woman stay healthy as well as it makes the childbirth easier. In the past, there were some ladies in every village who were professional in carrying out normal childbirths at home. They were known as traditional local nurse, in other words a mid-wife.. At that time, all the

⁵Liangmai called God as Charawang but after conversion of Christianity they call their God as Tingwang.

childbirths were only through normal delivery carried out by the local nurse. There were no facilities of delivery at the local primary health centre. As a result, in certain circumstances there were misfortunes that had happened either to the mother or to the child. The presence of a mid-wife was crucial in a child birth and she was hired normally..

Just two days after the childbirth, *father* (papiu) would bury child placenta (pala riang) at the rear side of the house usually dug by the father of the child following which they would name the child. In this ceremony, chicken offered as a sacrifice was served only to the *naipi* and the family members. This practice is still followed but others among Liangmai prefer Biblical principles and values.

Marriage Ceremony

Liangmai practices three different types of marriage viz. (a) marriage love(a) Holy marriage, and(b)marriage by service. In Liangmai society forced marriage was not practiced. When the bride to be refused to marry the groom the society respected her wish. It was culturally not accepted to force the girl when she refuses to marry someone.

Love marriage is the most common mode of marriage in Liangmai community. It is practiced either with or without the consent of the parents when the soulmates have readily accepted each other. On the other hand, holy marriage is one of the most accepted mode of marriage in the community. In Liangmai society, this marriage is also commonly termed as Masanbo Magiang in the church. In this case, the bride and the groom are forbidden from sexual relationship until they are united in the wedlock.

Marriage by service was the most decent way of marriage in Liangmai society in the past. In marriage by service, the boy had to stay at his to-be in-law's family (family of the girl he likes) and work for three years. The boy has no sexual right over the girl during this period. He had to work hard and sincerely less his in-laws would be dissatisfied to betroth their daughter to him. After he successfully accomplished the years of service, he would be united with the girl in marriage.However, this culture is also not practiced anymore nowadays.

In the past, same clan marriage was forbidden in Liangmai society.It was punishable by customary law in the society. But nowadays, after coming to christianity this marriage is allowed in the society.

Death Ceremony

In the past, death ceremonies in Liangmai slightly vary from one another owing to the nature of death and the age of the dead person. Unnatural deaths (murder, suicide, accident etc) were not equally treated like natural deaths (deaths due to diseases or old age). The dead body of an unnatural death was not allowed to be brought into the village or buried in the village cemetery. They were buried outside the village area. It was a taboo in Liangmai society to perform funeral of an unnatural death in the village. They used to believe that by disallowing this, such unnatural deaths will never happen again in the future. On the other hand, all due respect were given to the

departed soul on the funeral of a natural death. They used to perform proper rituals on the funeral and burial of a natural death. But nowadays, equal reverence is given to both the natural and unnatural deaths. Such taboo in funeral is not believed or followed anymore.

Death ceremony in Liangmai community involves certain important rites to be performed before and after the burial *Charou-chumai tu alang kheboand Nchun kakheng Thiu Aruangbo* are the undeniable rituals performed in death ceremonies in Liangmai. These rituals descended from the pre-Christian era and are still practiced after Christianity. *Chaphai thap khaibo* is an act of covering the corpse or coffin with Liangmai shawl along with all his/her dresses and a certain amount of money of the dead person. Similarly, *Kanui Khaibo* is also an act of covering the corpse with Liangmai shawl and flowers performed by the family members and close relatives of the dead person. This is followed by paying homage by laying flowers on the corpse by the village chief, pastor and other society leaders of the village and finally a funeral message by the pastor. The evening of this ritual is observed as the last condolence service for the bereaved family led by the pastor. After performing these rites, the corpse is carried towards the graveyard by youths of the village. They carry it by laying the head forward. The burial takes place after singing a funeral song and a prayer. Three/ four days including the funeral are observed by the family of the deceased during which they are not allowed to do any of their occupational works. During these few days, youths of the village sing and comfort the bereaved family at night.

KHANGCHUUKY OR YOUTH DORMITORY

According to Dongre (2015), the dormitories of the youth, under many forms and innumerable names have existed in a very wide region of the world extending from the Himalaya and the Formosa in the North to Australia and New Zealand in the south; and from the eastern pacific and Marquesas to the west coast of Africa. Thus, this social institution is found among diverse ethnic groups classified under Dravidians, Indo-Mongols, Malays, Papuans, Polynesians, Australians, and Africans. The dormitory is called *Khangchiuky* in Liangmai society. This is one of the most significant social customs in traditional Liangmai society. They can be categorized as the *Khangchiu* (boys' dormitory) and the *Liuchiu* (girls' dormitory). However, modern boys and girls are not attending the dormitory system now a day and most probably; it is due to the influence of the westernization and practices of Christianity in the society.

KHANGCHIU (BOYS DORMITORY)

All the boys who attain the period of teenage automatically become the members of dormitory. It is compulsory for all the boys and girls to join in the dormitory. They have to attend this school (dormitory) usually at the night to enjoy till their marriages. Liangmai village was never considered as a complete village without having a dormitory. In the dormitory system the new members were imparted practical education by the seniors in the dormitory to evolve as capable adults of their community. Dormitory plays a vital role in the grooming of the personality of a Liangmai youth. Social, religious and cultural practices are taught in these dormitories. The seniors or *Khangpi* teach the younger ones to respect and obey elders, learn to become punctual about time etc., They are also trained in making handicrafts such as basket making, wood carving, bamboo and cane crafts, carpentry and

embroidery works. They become skilled at singing, dancing and all other cultural activities. The objective of such a dormitory is to groom and preach every youth the purpose of corporate living and oneness of spirit. One most outstanding feature for the boys is to learn 'Out Cry with Ho-ho'. The voice of this Ho-ho is a process of long chorus by a group of men folk uttering one after another in successive tunes of high and higher pitch and alternately with low voice. This is one of the most unique characteristics of the Nagas. This chorus (Ho-ho) is performed in a specific manner during occasions of festivals or during fights.

LIUCHIU (GIRLS DORMITORY)

Like the Liangmai boys, girls also have to attend dormitory which is also called *Liuchiuky*. All the girls who attend the age of puberty have to compulsorily join this dormitory system. Married girls were not allowed to join the dormitory. It is the place where they learn the art of weaving, household works, moral conduct and discipline and all cultural activities. From here the Liangmai girls become efficient and self-sufficient in making hand woven clothes for their entire family. During festivals, they stay together and spend time with all girls in this dormitory. There used to be competition between the *Khangchiu* and *Liuchiu*, the cultural activities of which keep the society alert, active and entertaining.

TABOO

In the pre-Christian era, taboo⁶ occupied a central figure in the religious and social life of the Nagas. The word taboo is referred to *inniubo* in Liangmai. In fact, taboo acted as a strong force of social control in the past. Taboo can simply be understood as prohibition or abstention from doing certain activities. It creates just a temporary halt of normal activities such as going to field, hunting, fishing or crossing the village gate, etc. Taboos are observed individually as well as collectively. Individual taboos are observed by families, whereas sometimes the members of a particular clan or the whole village observe taboos collectively. Individual taboos or family taboos are usually observed during pregnancy, child birth, child naming, death, piercing of ears and first hair cutting. During such auspicious occasions, the family members are expected to perform certain rituals and offer sacrifice. They are not expected to go and work in the field. Moreover, visitors, especially strangers are not allowed to enter the house. This is because they believe that visitors might bring diseases which may affect the family. They also do not allow people to come because even enemies with a motif to harm the villagers may also come in the pretence of visitors.

The community or village taboos mostly revolve around agricultural activities such as selection of field sites, sowing and reaping, and also during festivals, deaths, wars, diseases and natural calamities. With such taboos, all the members of the village would observe total closure of work except for the priest or priestess who performs the rituals. Animals such as pigs, *mithun*, fowls, etc., are sacrificed in order to appease the deities or gods. It is believed that obeying such taboos would invite diseases, death, natural calamities, crop failure, etc., in a particular family or even in the village. It is also observed during unnatural deaths, disease, child birth, earthquake, eclipse, sowing of seeds, etc. During such taboo, the villagers are prohibited from working in the field and couples are prohibited from any physical intimacy. Visitors from other villages are not allowed to enter the village during such observance.

⁶The term 'Taboo' is originated from the Polynesian term 'tabu' first noted by captain James Cook during his visit to Tonga in 1777 who later introduced the English translation as 'taboo' (Nshoga 2009: 209-210).

FESTIVALS

The Liangmaishave various types of dance such as *Charengleng* (horn dance), *Khuigiunaleng* (bee dance) and *Charilang* (war dance) etc. There are different kinds of festivals which are celebrated during different times for various purposes. Festivals are celebrated according to the lunar calendar and cultivation and harvest seasons throughout the year. The Liangmai Nagas evolved from purely agriculturist occupation to the contemporary ways of making livelihood through different professions after adopting the modern education system. During conversion-into-Christianity period, many some traditional customs have been swept away as they stopped practising their age-old practices of such belief. However, their traditional customs got well-blended with that of Christianity. For example, their traditional festivals with the same intense vigour and enthusiasm are still being celebrated even after religious conversion. Some of their prime festivals are: *Chagangee*, *Miukengkibo*, *Kariudungbo*, *Karing gen gibo* and *Tadiabo*.

CHAGANGEE

Chaga means the month of October and *Ngee* means festival. Thus, *Chaga ngee* literally means a festival celebrated in October. It is a festival of purification and rededication. This is the biggest and most important festival of the Liangmai community. According to the ancient account, *Chaga ngee* was used to be celebrated after a war where victorious warriors are honoured on the day. The occasion is also a day to sanctify the men folk for the next assignment. However, in the modern context the prime reason of observing this occasion is to sustain the rich culture and tradition of the tribe. Colourful cultural programs, ethnic cuisines as well as traditional attires are the main features of the festival. The old and the young of the Liangmai community come out in large numbers to participate in the *Chaga ngee* in every year. The youngest generation including grandsons and granddaughters of every household are to wear the traditional shawls for the occasion. Previously, the festival usually lasted for five days and observed very cautiously.

The first day: It begins with *Chamimalapbo* (making fire), the Priest goes to the main gate of the village to lit new fire to use during the festival and the males are given blessings. After that they yell signifying that they have been sanctified. The head of the family comes and collects the fire to start their hearth with fresh firewood for cooking. As per the traditions, the womenfolk are prohibited to touch cups and plates during the festival. On this very night they are to prepare and eat food of their own choice. During this festival men have to use their own hearth to prepare dishes in order to purify themselves, because it is a taboo to touch women or even eat food prepared by women till the festival is over.

The second day: It is the day of *Npengphenbo* (shooting arrow), early in the morning the selfless boys voluntarily go to the jungle to cut the *adding* or *maram* (a typical reed found in the hills) for *Npeng*. *Npeng* is cut by those whose parents are still alive and those who live a pure and holy life. They are to go for cutting only after being blessed by their parents. *Npeng* has to be made in resemblance to human being. It sketches like as human being at *Npeng*, draws the head, eye, nose, mouth, ear, neck, heart and chest have to be marked with black colour by charcoal. After everything is done, *Npeng* is tied on the top of the post. Keeping themselves away from sexual impurity and with a loud 'ho-hoing' proclaiming their forefather's name, *Npeng* is shot with an arrow. *Peng* is divided into five parts and hitting a particular part has its own significance: 1) *Papi* (head) is called *Charibung* (bull's eye for warrior) whoever hit it with his dart will be successful in war.2) *Pawang* (neck) called *Tathiubung* (bull's eye for hunter) whoever hit it with his dart will be a great hunter.3) *Pagah*

(chest) called *Aliubung* (bulls for girl or damsel) whoever hit it will have many lovers.4) *Chabum* (stomach) called *Chamiubung* (bull for grain) whoever hit it will have a rich harvest in the New Year.5) *Parun* (anus or below stomach) is called *Majiubung* (bull for adversity) whoever hits it will fall prey to sickness, injury, death etc. Therefore, whoever hits the *Majiubung* performs various rituals to set free from this ill-fated omen with the help of the Priest after the *Chaga*.

The third day: It is called *Gaadi* sharing of meals- foods and drinks. The following day is a day of sharing of knowledge blended with eating, drinking and merry-making traditional songs, dances, games and sports as well. After that, the entire men folk gather at the main ground of the village and various competitions are held viz. long-jump, high-jump, shot put, wrestling, *Kabuijimajapbo*, cock-fights of the men folk etc. Later the high Priest would declare the completion of all.

The fourth day: It is called *Chagapabo*. On this day, all the leftover food items and drinks are distributed to the elderly people. The festival is so fascinating that young boys and girls reluctant to end-up the festival would sing: “Chaga bam ni ye” (Don’t want to end up Chaga festival; we want to continue Chaga.)

The fifth day: This last day is particularly celebrated for the elderly people who continue to drink and eat the leftover food and drinks which were called *ganjung kalumtiubo* (eating leftover). The elders and women folk enjoy the leftover food. Men are not allowed to do any domestic works until leftover food is finished. During this festival couples are not allowed to sleep together and men are prohibited to touch women to maintain discipline. If men fail, bad luck follows them which may even lead to a war.

References

- Fought, Carmen, 2006. *Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Giles, H. ,R.Y. Bourhis, and D.M. Taylor. 1977. ‘Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations’. In *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup relations*, H. Giles, 307-48. London: Academic Press
- Giles, H. and Johnson, P. 1987. Ehnolinguistic identity theory: A Social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68:69-99.

ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF BIATE

Introduction

Ethnolinguistic identity theory draws heavily on the influential theory of intergroup behavior by Tajfel and Turner (1979) called, 'social identity theory'. We categorize the social world and hence, perceive ourselves as members of various groups. Such knowledge of ourselves as group members is defined as our social identity, and it may be positive or negative according to how our in groups fare in social comparison with relevant outgroups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that social competition (which by implication would embrace ethnolinguistic differentiations) comes about when people

(a) Strongly identify with their social group and

(b) Make insecure social comparisons between the positions of their group socially and that of the out group.

Giles et al. (1977) suggested that ethnic groups could be compared in terms of 'ethnolinguistic vitality' toward which three main groups of factors contribute:

Status factors (such as economic, political and linguistic prestige)

Demographic factors (such as absolute numbers, birth rate, geographical concentration)

Institutional support (such as recognition of the group and its language in the media, education, government).

Groups with the vitality are the ones most likely to thrive and remain distinct (Allard and Landry 1985).

Giles and Johnson (1981) suggested that a high level of perceived vitality increases the salience of group identity for members and then intensifies their inclination to accentuate group speech markers in order to establish favourable psycholinguistic distinctiveness.

Five major propositions relating to ethnolinguistic identity theory are:

Identify themselves subjectively and strongly as members of a group which considers language an important symbol of their identity;

Make insecure social comparisons with the outgroup (for example, regard their group's status as potentially changeable);

Perceive their own group's vitality to be high;

Perceive their in group boundaries to be hard and closed; and Identify strongly with few other social categories

Biate community

Origin of the term 'Biate' is derived from Biete 'worshippers' after a group of people known as Koilom (Kawilam) once worshipped a large python at a village, Rulchawm in Mizoram. Number of speakers: 19000 (SIL Ethnologue 2016) in Northeast, India. The

level of endangerment of the Biате language, as mentioned in the UNESCO report is *definitely endangered*.

Socio-economic position of Biates:

Agrarian Society

The Biате population is concentrated mainly in remote rural villages with poor infrastructure. Shifting cultivation is their main occupation and they are highly dependent on herbs, vegetables, cane and wood found near their settlement areas. They do not have proper access o government schemes and facilities for agriculture. They make use of traditional manure in their cultivation. The land area is infertile due to deforestation and frequent burning of the jungles. Irrigation facilities are inadequate which makes the community dependent on monsoon rain for agriculture. About 85 to 90 percent are cultivators. Very few are the government employee and they always tend to settle in the town area mainly Haflong.



Area for jhum cultivation



Biате village at Mualdam

Kalim Kabur (Traditional Institution)

The Kalim Kabur system of administration was adopted by the Biates while they were in Rengram (Tripura) living together with other communities like Hrangkhoh, Sakachep and other Halam communities. Kalim is the head of the Biате Halam or customary laws and of the whole affairs of the Biате tribe. The Kabur is the Deputy to Kalim. It was the highest traditional court where judgements and compromises over quarrel and fights, land and matrimonial disputes etc are settled.

Patriarchal society

Naming of humans, nature and universe is remarkably based on the social hierarchy of the Biате, which is highly patriarchal in nature. For instance,

1a.	pa-t ^h ian	1b.pa-t ^h ian-nu
	Father-MASC	Father-MASC-FEM
	‘God’	‘Goddess’

Example (1b) clearly indicates that the feminine marker -nu is preceded by the masculine naming suffix -t^hian, where it takes help of the root word pa ‘father’ to refer to the

‘supreme goddess’. *nu-t^hian, *nu-t^hian-nu and *nu-nu will be, therefore, ungrammatical since pa-t^hian-nu refers to the lineage of male authority over women rather than women naming as a linguistic evidence in understanding the social hierarchy of the Biata society.

Gender

Gender is morphologically marked for both +Human, +Animate and –Animate based on the size, shape and vastness of objects in nature. Examples from (2) and (3) which are –Animate, illustrate the correlation of gender and shapes of water bodies:

2a	tui-k ^h aŋ-lian water-body-big.MASC ‘ocean’	2b	tui-pui water-small.FEM ‘sea’
3a.	baduŋ- u lian river-big.MASC ‘big river’	3b	baduŋ- i tʃin river-small.FEM ‘small river’

Examples in (4) indicate the earth/land in static form as masculine while in motion/process or growth as feminine:

4a	ram-pui land-FEM (small?) ‘dense forest’	4b	ram-nu-ai land-FEM- ‘jungle’
4c	ram-ual land-MASC ‘earth/world’	4d	ni-nu shake-fem ‘earthquake’

Compounding of the terms related to body parts also derives new names, which can be divisible into some of these ways: *i-* (upper portions above the hip), *ke-* (lower portion below the leg) and *ban-* (related to arms) and *kut-* (related to hand) which are sideways and external.

i- (upper portions above the hip kəŋ-)	ke- (lower portion below the leg)	kut- (related to hand)	ban-(related to arms)
i-luŋ ‘heart’	ke-p ^h a ‘foot’	kut-idza ‘palm’	ban-puam ‘arm’
i-biaŋ ‘cheek’	ke-dil ‘leg’	kut-rim ‘hand finger’	ban-dzaŋ ‘forearm’

Counting system in Biate is decimal and the generic numeral classifier *-ka* can be optionally dropped in counting the numerals such as *k^hat-ka* ‘one’, *ini-ka* ‘two’ and so on, since the suffix *-ka* is alienable in relation to body parts, which is used as a traditional means of counting with the help of hands and toes in several Tibeto-Burman languages. Kinship in Biate is mostly based on marking gender of male and female relatives as terms of address and reference. *-pa* is marked for male and father and *-nu* is marked for female and mother in *e-pa* and *e-nu*. *e-* is prefixed to address ‘father’ and ‘mother’. However, there is a certain restriction in the use of terms of reference for both the genders. For instance, though the address term is *e-u* ‘elder brother’ by both the genders, reference term for male to male is *ulian-pa* while female to male is *tra-pa*.

4. Festival and feasts:

Most of the festivals in Biate are connected to their agricultural life. There are 4 main festivals they are:

- i. Pamchar kut
- ii. Chichoi kut
- iii. Lebang kut
- iv. Nuldung kut.

5. Status of Biate language:

Lewis, Simons and Fennig (2017) in the SIL Ethnologue following Burling (1983), classifies Biate as a Northern Kuki-Chin language of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Biate language spoken in Fiangpui, shares areal affinities with the Kuki-Chin languages spoken in Dima Hasao such as, Mizo, Thadou Kuki, Hmar, Hrangkhawl, Khelma, and the other languages such as, Dimasa (Bodo-Garo), Bengali (Indo-Aryan), Zeme (Naga), Pnar (Khasi) and the local variety of Hindi, Haflong Hindi, of the region. Biate constitutes one dialect only, and the same dialect is spoken in Assam and Meghalaya, though it has some variation in the parts of Manipur and Mizoram, which, are more influenced from the languages, Hmar and Mizo. Roman script is adopted for the Biate language. It has been implemented till the upper primary level of mother tongue education as an additional subject at Haflong. Few eminent writers like Mr. Ramdina Lalsim and Rev. Lalsangloma Thiaite have been currently working on the language and literature of the Biate. UNESCO report shows that the Biate is a *Definitely Endangered Language* in North-Eastern India.

6. Conclusion

The Biате people have two interpretations of their origin: *Khurpui* and *Sinlung*. The cosmos of the Biате is entirely based on the interplay of gender in both human (naming and kinship) and objects of nature, where male authority overpowers women. Alienable and inalienable possession of body parts play a vital role in several lexemes in Biате language of which, counting numerals is exemplified here. As observed from the culture related terms, the language is highly monosyllabic and compounding of these syllables can increase to quadrisyllables.

References:

- Embree F. John (1999) *A "testing Frame" for Language and Culture*. Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Forth, Gregory (2017) *Folk-Intermediates and Folk-Generics*. University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Lasim, Ramdina. (2010). *Folktales of the Biates*. Published by Pauramduing Zeme at Haflong, Assam. Printed at Bhabani Offset & Imaging Systems Pvt. Ltd.
- Lalsim, Ramdina. (1995). *Biате Pipu Toisong (Culture and Historical Backgrounds of the Biате)*. Assam: Directorate of Cultural Affairs
- Ngamlai, Remsiama. (2014). *The Status of the Biате Tribe in Northeast India: A Study on Ethnic Minority Rights*. MA Unpublished Dissertation, Department of Political Science, Indira Gandhi National Open Universit

ETHNOLINGUISTIC DESCRIPTION OF KHELMA

1 INTRODUCTION

The Khelmas are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the Kuki-Chin community in North-East India. Sakachep is alternatively known as Khelma in Assam, a term which is believed to be a British invention during their encounters with them when they administered North Cachar Hills, Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and the Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. The language of the Sakachep (Khelma) is known by the same ethnic name Sakachep (Khelma). Sakachep (Khelma) (The language code according to Ethnologue is ISO 639-3 sch) is an unclassified language belongs to Sino-Tibetan family. It is believed that the term 'Sakachep' is derived from two words, namely *Sak* and *Chep*. *Sak* means 'upper side' and *Chep* means 'using of chopstick' i.e., *people residing in upper direction who use bamboo chopsticks to eat*.

According to the SIL Ethnologue (2003), the total population of this community is 25000 (approx.). They mainly inhabit in the areas of Dima Hasao, Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. Small numbers of Sakacheps also live in Hailakandi District, Karimganj District of Assam and neighbouring states like Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. It is believed that they have migrated from Tripura. 90% of the population are Christians today. Most of them are entirely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. It includes both terrace (dry and wet cultivation) and Jhum (slash and burn cultivation).

1.1 History

It is very difficult to trace back the history due to the lack of written historical records or evidences. Orally, it is said that when the Great Wall of China was built, the Sakachep came from China and settled in Chin state in Myanmar. Then some groups came out from that place and they entered to the North East India. The Sakachep were believed to have lived in Agartala (in Tripura). Then they moved from there 300 years ago. It is narrated that later on, the Sakachep migrated from Tripura in the early 19th century. According to Sakachep folklore, there once lived a king (Vaireng) in Tripura who subdued the Sakachep into suzerainty. He subsequently ill-treated, punished and loathed them. This was to the extent that the Sakacheps felt compelled to turn their backs on him and their native land and searched for greener pastures, which they found in Meghalaya. Another narrative which accounts for their migration to Meghalaya points to the British colonisation of India. It is narrated that during those days the Sakachep fiercely defended their land but were eventually overpowered by British forces and they scattered to different parts of the North Eastern states except for Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

1.2 Clan

There are twelve clans in the Sakachep community. They are 1.Neibom 2.Saithuvai 3.Sumtinkha 4.Thirsu 5.Vaichai 6.Kholum 7.Telengsing 8.Langkai 9.Kelphung 10.Thingphun 11.Nisatarai and 12.Zeite.

2.0 Geographical distribution of the area and demographic description of Khelmas

Dima Hasao district is one of the hilliest and undulated districts of Assam. Dima Hasao district lies in 24⁰⁵⁷//00// to 25⁰⁴³//00// north latitude and 92⁰³²//00// to 93⁰²⁸//00// east longitude with its headquarter at Haflong. The district has four Revenue Circles. The district has two subdivisions namely Halfong and Maibong subdivisions. Haflong subdivision is formed with three Revenue Circles- (1) Umrangso (2) Haflong and (3) Mahur. Maibong

subdivision is formed with Maibong Revenue Circle. The district has an area of 4888.0 sq. kms (Rural: 4866.23 sq.kms and Urban: 21.77sq.kms). The total number of villages that existed in 2001 was 638 as against 695 villages in 2011 Census. In respect of area, the district occupies the third place among the districts of Assam.

The Dima Hasao district has common boundaries with three North-Eastern States and three other Districts of Assam. On its eastern side are the States of Nagaland and Manipur. On its south the Cachar District of Assam. On the western side is the State of Meghalaya. On its north are Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam.



Map 1.0- Showing location of Umrangso circle, Dima Hasao⁷

The fieldwork was conducted among the Khelma (Sakachep) community under Umrangso circle, Dima Hasao, Assam. The field work was carried out in different phases. The initial exploratory visit to the Khelma villages and the bulk of the data collection, took place during four separate time periods: the first being the two weeks period of 16 June 2016 to 28 June 2016, the second being the three weeks period of 24 October 2016 to 14 November 2016 and the third being the three weeks period of 18Feb. 2017 to 05 March 2017 and fourth field trip for two weeks from Aug.4 to Aug.18,2017. Total number of ten (10) villages viz, Kekrangsip, New Kekrangsip, Tuisnanthuan, Tuijonte, Dorbin, Langlut(H), Langlut(Ch), Bangphiri(H), Bangphiri(Ch) and Baigaon were undertaken which come under New Sangbar Community Development Block. Following is a brief demographic data of these ten villages collected from District Census Handbook: Dima Hasao, 2011, Series-19, Part XII-B,(p.61-64).

⁷Image source: Assam Panchayat Portal (Google maps)

Sl. No.	Location Code No.	Name of village	No. of House-Holds	Total population			Population in the age group 0-6			Literates		
				P	M	F	P	M	f	P	M	F
1	298309	Kekrangsip	18	98	55	43	26	17	9	54	36	18
2	298312	New Kekrangsip	4	21	11	10	4	3	1	4	3	1
3	298313	Tuisnanthun	9	38	22	16	8	4	4	20	13	7
4	298320	Tuijonte	30	146	80	66	31	17	14	74	49	25
5	298328	Dorbin	33	183	90	93	24	11	13	129	72	57
6	298378	Langlut (H)	11	64	37	27	8	5	3	14	10	4
7	298379	Langlut (Ch)	42	239	110	129	47	19	28	77	44	33
8	298380	Bangphiri (H)	32	159	84	75	29	16	13	31	19	12
9	298381	Bangphiri (Ch)	38	183	90	93	32	16	16	112	60	52
10	298382	Baigaon	31	154	86	68	32	19	13	82	47	35

Many villages of the district does not the basic amenities viz. medical aid through primary health centre, electrification, safe drinking water supply, sanitation facility etc. Road is one of the basic means of transport which requires to be developed in the Dima Hasao District with top most priority.

3.0 Education

The overall literacy percentage among the Khelma is around 55% in which male percentage is higher than its counterpart female. So far as literature is concerned, the Khelmas have no script of their own but they have adopted the Roman script for any documentation and writings. With the advent of Christianity education is spreading in the area. Now the missionaries are trying to write down Bible, primer etc. in Sakachep. The number of matriculate person is very few. Most of them are school dropouts and had their education up to standard four or five. Every village has one L.P. and one M.E. school but the number of students are very few i.e., around 13-23.

4.0 Economy

The Khelmas followed patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal systems. Apart from privately owned land, there are community lands where every individual has equal rights but which are neither heritable nor transferable. Like most tribal populations, the mainstay of the people is agriculture. They practise both settled and shifting forms of cultivation. The agricultural produce includes Rice, Maize, Yam, Ginger, Turmeric, Chillies, Vegetables and Cotton etc. What is not consumed is taken to weekly markets in neighbouring villages and merchandised. More than 60% of the population is presently involved, in one way or the other, in agriculture and sericulture. A handful of Khelmas are engaged in the government sector and some have opted for small-scale business, carpentry, poultry and cattle rearing. Economic condition of

the common people of the community is not encouraging. Some of the villages have solar electricity generators but other than that they have no experience with electricity.

5.0 Handlooms and Handicrafts

The traditional attire and ornaments of the Khelmas are very unique. Traditional ornaments for women include earrings known as *kuarbet/toiah*, hairpins and combs called *lington*. The women wear strings of different beads and coins around their neck called *sumrui*. The women wrap around called *puanbom* which is fastened around the waist by a belt known as *kongkhit* and a breast cloth for the torso called *ropbom*. Black and white colours seem to be used most in their clothing. The men wear called *kaipereng*, a kind of dhoti called *diar*, *kherem* or wooden sandals and simple earrings. The traditional headgear or turban is called *lukom*. Today, majority of the young boys and girls of the villages wear pants, shirts etc. Rice is cooked in a vessel called *bepphil*, curry is cooked in a piece of bamboo called *langkhan*. Other utensils used in the kitchen like *makhe* 'big spoon', *bukoi* 'small spoon' etc.

Bamboo, cane and wood constitute indispensable raw materials for household utilisation. Strips of bamboo are woven into sieves, winnowers, baskets and a host of other items. Blocks of wood are carved to make pounders, ploughs, weaving implements and mortars. On the other hand, scores of agricultural implements (like hoe, sickle, axe, spike, etc.), hunting tools (like bow and arrow, spear, fishing rod, etc.) and crockery are made of metal.

6.0 Housing

The house is termed as 'in' in Khelma. The houses are made of wooden posts, bamboo mats are used for walls and thatch. A kind of palm leaves called *ngaidi* (son), *laisarabuo* and the bamboo leaves called *thopte* are used for roofing. Nails are not used. The houses are generally rectangular in shape and the sizes vary from 10 feet to 20 feet in breath and 30 feet to 50 feet in length. Generally the direction of the house is north to south.



Image1.0- Showing picture of Khelma house.

7.0 Religion

The Khelmas, too, practiced a fusion of naturalism and animism. The main traditional Gods and deities of the Khelmas are *Angera*, *Debi Maka*, *Saichkri Rajaram Mokolraja*, *Enu Devi* etc. The villagers followed the Hindu religion but later converted to Christianity and their traditional religious beliefs have dwindled to a large extent. In some cases, traditional influences are found interwoven with Christian beliefs and practices. The existing denominations in the villages consist of Roman Catholic, Evangelical Free Church of India, Baptist and Presbyterian.

8.0 Festivals

The Khelmas also observe different rituals and celebrate various festivals which are connected with the worshiping of different gods and goddess during the year. *Saakthar* (rituals for new production from jhum), *Buchil* (Harvest festival), *Aruthuan* (Fish festival), *Rampathian* (worshiping of forest god), *Rubu-khat* (worshiping of domestic animals), *Parsem kut* (flower distributing festival), *Inmuthung* (worshiping the back bone of the house) and *Rubunthum* are such festivals. Rubunthum is the most important of all the ceremonies of the Khelmas during the time when they used to worship nature. It is believed that one has to perform the ceremony to bring peace in the family. Parsem Kut is one of the biggest festivals they celebrate in the month of April.

9.0 Games and Sports

Khelmas are expert in hunting. Hunting is also another process of food gathering. It is not only an economic activity but also a sport. They used to hunt many kinds of animals like tiger, boar, wild pig, mithun, hares, wolf, deer and birds etc. The weapons used in hunting are country guns, spears, bows and arrows. Every member must have his own *sailitak* (jevalline), lung (stone), *chempai* (bag made of cane), *chem* (chopper) with him. In addition trap which is termed as *chang* is also used as another way of hunting.

The Khelmas have some traditional games which are played by both boys and girls, e.g., *ankai* 'tug of war', *anthup andai* 'hide and seek' etc. Sports like *ruphellim* 'high jump', *rui an kai* 'tug of war', *atanansiak* 'racing competition', *chomphilit* 'skipping jump', *lungavor* 'shot-put', *tuong andai* 'top', *kek andai*, *tui anliei* 'swimming', *kut anbuon* 'armrestling', *anbuon* 'wrestling', *rulpui anding* (standing with bending the head), *thalkhiak* (breaking of arrow), *vaak tui nek* (drinking water like a crow), *thithosong an kai* (pulling with a small hoe stick), *lumphia anbuon* (playing with a broom), *arkhuong anbuon* (cock fighting), *sumpin andam* (lifting up a person to the top of the shoulder), *darchung chuong* (a type of gymnastic, standing on one's shoulder), *thaltuilak* (to take water by mouth from the opposite direction), *sukmun anchu* (chair game), *mit hip puma khuong suk* (to beat the drum by closing eyes) etc.

10.0 Customs and Traditions

The Khelmas follow the patrilineal line of descent. Traditionally the Khelma names are of the combination of three syllables e.g., *Suomneithang*, *Hoichunglien*, *Thangchungvong* the first one is the name of the person's grandfather and the second or the third one is the person's name and the rest one is the person's grandmother's name. Among the Khelmas, both extended families and nuclear families are found, but presently it appears that the nuclear family is increasingly preferred while the traditional extended family appears to be a dying institution. Kinship ties are used to define many kinds of social relationships, particularly

relationships between owner, heir and successor. Clan exogamy is followed and whoever breaches these customs are liable to be punished or even excommunicated from both the clan and the village. Monogamy is the accepted norm. In the past, it was mandatory for a Khelma groom to offer 4 years of service to his father-in-law, before he is allowed to take his wife home. The system is called *ma:ksa*. Once *ma:ksa* was completed, the father-in-law organises a feast where the groom's family gifts a pig to the bride's family, while its two hind legs are given to the bride's grandfather or maternal uncle. The whole day is celebrated with pomp and splendour and at dusk the couple goes to the groom's home where a ceremony, including a feast called *moiruoi*, was organised to welcome the bride. Nowadays, Christian marriages prevail but at the same time, traces of their age-old tradition continue to underscore their marriage system.

6.13 Village Administration

The traditional social administration of the Khelmas is known as the Khelma Halam, it is headed by a *Kalim* (head) assisted by *Kabur* (assistant of the head) and *Puanpu or Tangva* (bearer/peon). The selection of *Kalim* was hereditary in nature and only males were entitled to this post. He was expected to be acquainted with the traditional customs, laws and culture, and it was his responsibility to solve cases which were related to customary laws.

6.14 Food Habits

Rice beer, which is termed as *zu* plays an important role in the life of the Khelma society. It can be said that *zu* is a part of the Khelma culture and is inseparable from their society. To entertain friends, neighbours, relatives and guests, *zu* is compulsory. There can be no ritual ceremonies, feasts, festivals and worship without *zu*. Yeast which is used to prepare *zu* is termed as *chol*. Rice is their staple food. They like vegetables, meat, fish and eggs with rice. They used to prepare alkalized water for preparing curry. Some tender wood are burnt and the ashes are collected. The burnt ashes are put in the bamboo jar called *changalsor*. The *changalsor* is hanged from a higher place and a pot is placed under the *changalsor*. Some water is poured into the jar where the ashes are already put for filtration. The filtered water becomes alkaline and is termed as *changal*. It is used for preparing curry and also used for washing clothes.

Smoking tobacco is a part of the Khelma culture and tradition. The mixture of tobacco is called *dumatui*. This tobacco is smoked by a simple instrument called *tuibu:r*. There is no social bar in smoking. Smoking tobacco is practiced by male, female and even the children together. Traditionally, guests who visit a Khelma house are offered tobacco for smoking.

6.15 Language, script and literature

The Khelmas can speak Haflong Hindi and few can understand English and speak English. They are remarkably multilingual. The Khelma language is not used in schools, and the language has no written form. The language is non-standardized and in vigorous use among all generation. The language is used by all generations in spoken form. The Khelmas do not have script of their own. They borrowed from the Roman script for any documentation and writings. The Khelma language did not possess a written form until the Christian society recently started to document the language and created a roughly phonetic transcription of Khelma using the Roman alphabet. There are two dialects found in the language- Hanle and Hante. Following are few given examples-

Table 6.1- Words in Hanle and Hante

Sl. no.	Hanle	Hante	English
1.	<i>sungkola</i>	<i>thi:rtuii:m</i>	‘pot’
2.	<i>langsa:n</i>	<i>thangtha:n</i>	‘mosquito’
3.	<i>Kelei</i>	<i>thelei</i>	‘squirrel’
4.	<i>chalangchi:t</i>	<i>changcha:l</i>	‘earthworm’
5.	<i>Akei</i>	<i>ekei</i>	‘lion’
6.	<i>Upa</i>	<i>Voi</i>	‘brother’
7.	<i>maru:l</i>	<i>murul</i>	‘snake’
8.	<i>makhui</i>	<i>samthi</i>	‘comb’
9.	<i>vaini:m</i>	<i>vaimi:m</i>	‘maize’
10.	<i>ramil</i>	<i>rimil</i>	‘shadow’

Following are examples of these two varieties in Khelma sentences.

Sentences in Hanle and Hante

Sl.No.	Hanle	Hante	English
1.	<i>ka pa ahong</i>	<i>ka pa ahong</i>	My father is coming.
2.	<i>ka kut ana</i>	<i>ku kut ana</i>	My hand is paining.
3.	<i>hi lekhabu hi kata</i>	<i>hi lekhabu hi kata</i>	This book is mine.
4.	<i>ka pu in lungkham nimu</i>	<i>ku pu in lungkham nimu</i>	My grandfather loves me.
5.	<i>mahi ka lekhabu</i>	<i>mahi ke lekhabu</i>	This is my book.

The Khelmas use many borrowed words from Hindi and English in their day-to-day lives.

The Khelmas have a rich oral tradition through which the traditional knowledge transfer has taken place within Khelma society for many years. Khelma proverbs, lullabies, folksongs and folktales play a crucial role as oral traditional culture in the Khelm society, through which cultural beliefs, values, and practices are taught and advice is delivered indirectly to the Khelmas. There are two number system found in the language - singular and plural. The suffix-*nei* is used when it is necessary to mark the plural. e.g., *pa* ‘father’ *pajei* ‘fathers’, *nga* ‘fish’ *ngangei* ‘fishes’ means. The language exhibits two genders – masculine and feminine. Gender is only distinguished in the case of animate beings. In the case of human beings suppletive forms are used e.g., *pasal* ‘boy’, *nupanj* ‘girl’. In case of nonhuman beings

the gender is distinguished by means of suffixes like *pa* for male or *nu* for female, e.g., *ŋa pa (sal) ank^hat* ‘one male fish’, *ŋa anu(pang) ank^hat* ‘one female fish.’

6.16 Endangerment Level

The status of Khelma (Sakachep) is vulnerable (level 4) according to UNESCO’s scales of language endangerment (2003) based on intergenerational transmission. The language is used among all generations. Children speak their mother tongue in the home domain.

References

- Fought, Carmen, 2006. *Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Giles, H., R.Y. Bourhis, and D.M. Taylor. 1977. ‘Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations’. In *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup relations*, H. Giles, 307-48. London: Academic Press
- Giles, H. and Johnson, P. 1987. Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A Social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68:69-99.

ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF ONAEME

Introduction

The word ‘Oinam’, which is officially recorded by the Government of Manipur, seems to be derived from the word ‘Onaeme’. The term ‘Onaeme’ means ‘people smelling like mud’, which is probably related to their expertise in pottery. Thus, the language is also called ‘Onaemila’ i.e. ‘the language of the people smelling like mud’. Though the language is considered unclassified, the data and their ethnic identity show that it is rather closely related to the Southern Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman family.

Migration

Due to an increase in population and an increasing pressure on land in the Oinam village, some of the villagers migrated and established new villages, i.e. the villages of Ngamju, Tingsong, Sorbung and Taphou. There is a myth about how the Ngamju village was created. The Oinam village which was originally called the Ngimai village, was located at the top of the hill. The villagers would come down every morning to cultivate in the foot hills. In the evening, they would return home by climbing the hill. It was very tiresome, yet they could not avoid it because their ancestors buried to the ground the skin of huge elephant as a bridge between the Oinam village and the foothills. However, in the course of time, some villagers decided to live in the foothills and the Ngamju village was thus created. But because of the skin of the elephant connecting the Oinam village and the foothills, the villagers of the new Ngamju village did not have a separate language. They remained speakers of the same Onaeme language.



An aerial view of Ngamju village

Social and Economic Life

Oinam has a particular society in the sense that only the male members of the family inherit the ancestral property. This does not mean, however, that the status of the woman in the Oinam society is low. Rather, they play a vital role in the household. Every family has their own land for cultivation, which is their main source of livelihood. The unoccupied land in the village is a common property of all, irrespective of their economic position. Apart from rice, they cultivate millet, maize, potatoes, pulse, cabbage, garlic and so on.

In addition to farming, every male adult is expected to make baskets, mats, wooden plates and other types of furniture for the household as well as for trading. Pottery is also another good source of income for the villagers. All the female members of the family can spin and weave on their looms and make clothes for the entire family. However, with the advent of westernization, the young generation now prefers western clothes.



Traditional weaving by a village girl at Oinam village, Senapati, Manipur

Marriage and Death

Almost all the people of the Oinam village have converted to Christianity. Only three households still follow the indigenous customs and rituals. However, the indigenous marriage and death rituals have almost died. Thus, almost all the rituals are now carried out in the Christian way.

Pottery

The story of Oinam village and Oinam people remains incomplete without a mention of the Oinam pottery. The Oinam people have had a monopoly on pottery since the time immemorial. Every woman in the village is an expert in pottery; the men, however, are forbidden to learn the craft. The tools used in pottery making are wooden and old types yet they can easily make ten to fifteen pots a day.



Pottery by womenfolk in Oinam

The tradition of pottery making is age old. As already mentioned, the word 'Oinam' means 'people smelling like mud'. As reported in the Onaeme folktales, the ancestral mother gave a

ball of clay to the progenitor of the Oinam village on her deathbed and advised him to make earthen pots from the ball of the clay to be used as kitchen utensils and in ceremonial rites. She also told him that no ritual would be complete without the use of the earthen pots. Therefore, till date, the earthen pots have been used in different rituals like ceremonies of a new born baby, construction of new houses, harvesting, merry making feasts and so on.

Agriculture

From the very beginning agriculture is the most important occupation of the people of Oinam village. Every household has their own share of land to cultivate. They grow paddy, millet, maize etc. for their food. Paddy is the most important among them. They also grow potato, cabbage, chilly etc. as cash crop.

The people of Oinam mainly depend on cultivation. They practice both terrace and jhum cultivation. They depend on seasonal rainfall as there is no facility of irrigation. Usually ploughing is less practiced in their cultivation; instead they practice community digging with *pho* (spade). Sometimes people who have buffalo are tilling the field by using *laopho* (plough).



pho (spade)*laopho* (plough)

Use of modern farming techniques is in its nascent stage. They work in groups from dawn till sunset. They start with the clearance of the forest from the early part of the year. After digging the soil only by using the spade called *pho* they prepare the field to plant paddy. Before that they have sown the paddy to a small area of a well-prepared field for making sapling after which they can be transplanted.

References

Fought, Carmen, 2006. *Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

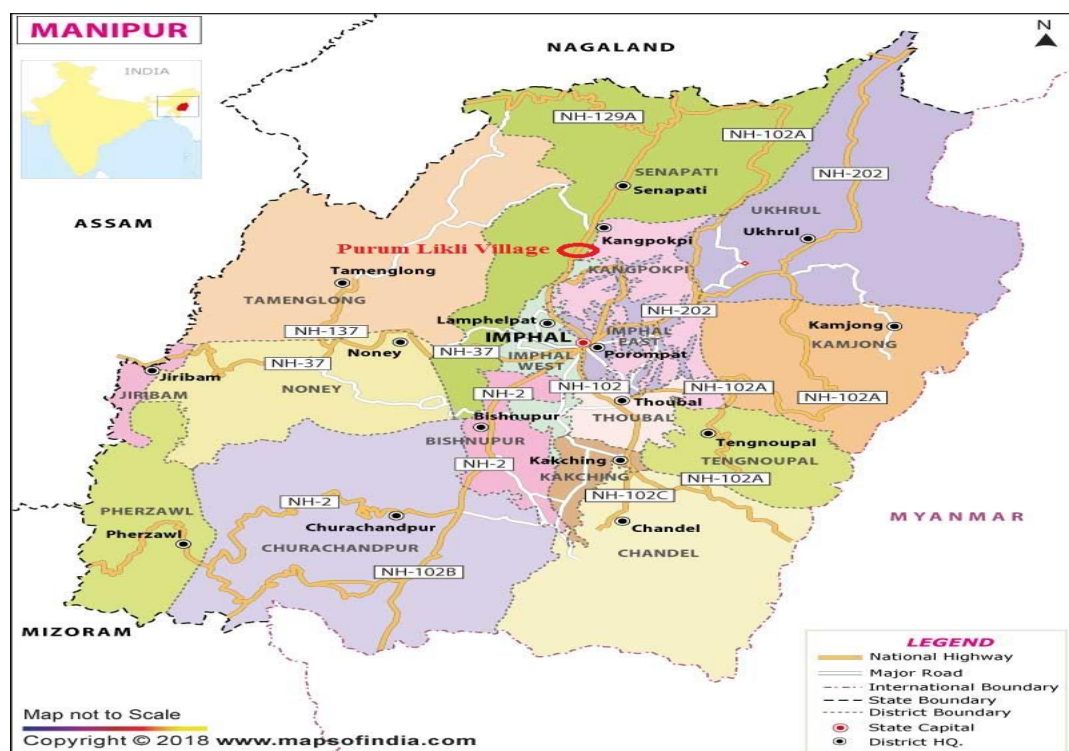
Giles, H., R.Y. Bourhis, and D.M. Taylor. 1977. 'Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations'. In *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup relations*, H. Giles, 307-48. London: Academic Press

Giles, H. and Johnson, P. 1987. Ehnolinguistic identity theory: A Social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68:69-99.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS OF PURUM COMMUNITY: AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

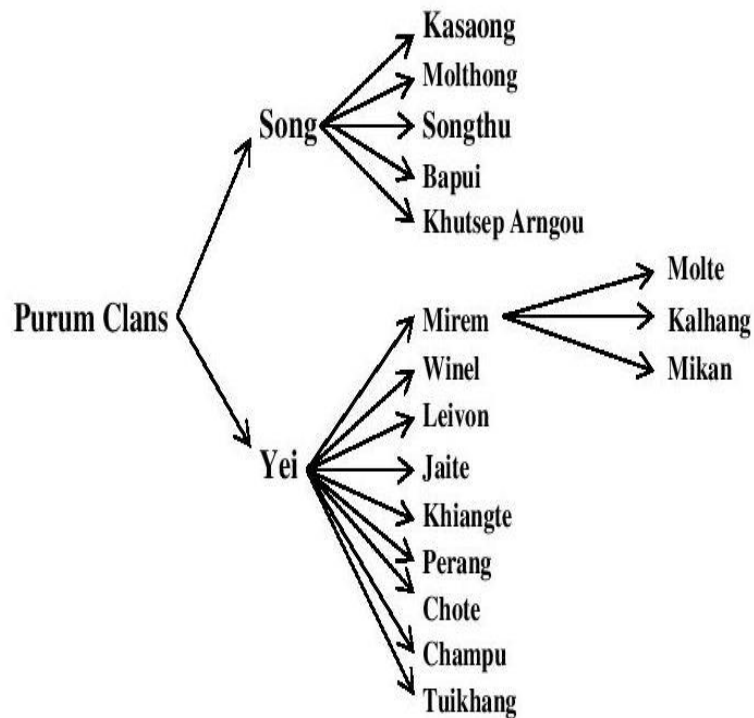
Life cycle rituals are the most important part of an ethno-linguistic study. Every stage in life conveys certain cultural forms, as people travel through these stages—births, adolescence, youth, adulthood, maturity and death. Religion and myth hold important positions in these rituals, as every religion has remarkable soul-changing encounters appended to both natural and sociological events that epitomize life. According to “Cultural Anthropology, A Perspective on the Human Condition” by Emily Shultz and Robert Lavenda, life cycle rituals fit into four categories. These four categories are that the ritual must be a repetitive social practice, it must be set off from the routines of day-to-day life, it must follow some sort of ritual schema, and it must be encoded in myth. The most common rituals are religious rituals, birth ceremonies/naming rituals, marriage rituals and death/ burial rituals.



Purum has lots of religious, cultural and traditional rituals. They have been practicing important rituals till now. They practice ancestor worship and believe in supreme deity who controls the universe. They worship the traditional house God *kachopuikacholai* ‘Sanamahi (household deities) and Leimarel of the Meeteis’. They also worship their traditional deity Ningjomba.. After the advent of Christianity in this region in the late 1800s or early 1900s, the area was under the control of Christian religion. There were many changes in their culture that were brought about with the change of religion.

In Purum, Khullakpa that is the Chief, is the head of the community. Only the members belonging to Molthong and Songthu clans can become a Khullakpa. He can make decisions in any dispute. When a Khullakpa retired or died his second brother would hold the post. If

there were no brothers the eldest son of the Khullakpa would become the Khullakpa. As such the post of Chief ship is hereditary.



ORIGIN OF PURUM

Purum is the name of the community as well as the language. They are believed to have originated from Tripura. Some of the areas which they believed to be inhabited in Tripura are- Achep, Rankhol, Khomdok, Sa-ek. Afterwards they migrated to Manipur. The Purums are a nomadic tribe and used to move from one place to another in search of fertile land and water conducive to peace and comfortable living.



Purum Likli Village, Manipur

It may be around 250 years back that the Purums inhabited at Purum Chumbang and Purum Tampak of Tengnoupal District (now Chandel District) of Manipur. They were staying close with the Chothes and Lamkangs. Compared to the Chothes, the population of the Purums are less. There were frequent fights between the two tribes- Chothes and Purums. As the Chothes were stronger and larger in number they defeated the Purums resulting in the migration of the Purum to the Nongmaiching Hill, northward of Manipur and their old abandoned villages were occupied by the Chothes, who retained the village names of the Purum. This may be one of the reasons why previous researchers viewed Chothes as Purums. The Purums and Chothes are two different communities of Manipur because their languages are mutually unintelligible. They use Meeteilon, the lingua franca of the state for communication. Now Purum Likli and Purum Khullen are the only two villages of the Purum people.

LANGUAGE

The language spoken by the Purum is known as the Purum language. It is spoken in some parts of Manipur only. G.A. Grierson, in his book "Linguistic Survey of India" Vol III, Part III (1908), Purum s included in the Old Kuki-Naga group. The language is classified under old Kuki branch of Kukish section of Burmic Division as according to Robert Shafer's "Introduction to Sino-Tibetan" (1974).

The language is not used in schools or in mass media. The Purum Likli and Purum Khullen are surrounded by the Meeteis, Kukis, Koms and Nepalis. Manipuri language which is the dominant language has influenced the Purum language in a considerable way. Today, most of the Purums are competent in Manipuri. They used Roman scripts for writing.

PREGNANCY

They believe that the pregnant women are not allowed to go outside and if the pregnant women need to go outside the house, they have to cover their head with a cloth. During their pregnancy period, they were highly restricted to go under the hanger made of bamboo because they believe that if they fall down while going under the hanger, their baby is supposed to be dead while giving birth. Their visiting to graveyard and to any ill person's house is also not allowed.

BIRTH

In olden days, the birth of a child was at home with the help of a local midwife called *Thempi*. But nowadays, child birth is mainly carried out at hospitals or primary health sub-centres. In Purum society, the birth ceremony is called *naitolsok*. The ceremony of the birth of a female child is carried out on the third day whereas that of the male child is on the sixth day after birth. The traditional practice of such birth ceremony is carried out by the eldest paternal aunt of the child and if there is no aunt of the child, one of the closest aunts of the kin can perform it. She puts the child in *lalai* 'winnowing fan' and whirls it around. Within a period of forty days after birth, the child is brought to the church to take blessings from God. The parents offer prayers for long life, good health and success in life. A ceremony called *naikokbit* takes place where wearing of ear ring is performed when the child attains the age of one year. A cock is offered for a male child and a hen is for a female child. A domestic fowl or a wild fowl of the appropriate sex can be offered. It is offered by the maternal uncle of the child. There is no restriction of the colour of the fowls to be offered for *naikokbit* ceremony. The ritual fowls are dressed, boiled and pounded with ginger. The chicken is eaten only by

the male and female members who are of the lineage of the child. Other invitees who are not members of the lineage of the child are served with bread and *andang* 'a raw vegetable mixture'.

NAMING

In Purum society, the naming system of a child is important and interesting too. The first born male child takes the last syllable from the name of his grandfather e.g *Chong-leng*. Similarly, the first born female child takes the last syllable of her grandmother's name e.g *War-neihoi*. This system is religiously followed among other cognate tribe too. The subsequent male and female children born in the family can take their name from other near relatives.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is one of the most important ceremonies for Purum tribe. Inter-marriage within the same clan or group is prohibited. Incestuous relation is not tolerated and is censured with a fine and severe ostracism. The violators cannot be buried in the common cemetery of the village after their death and they are debarred from participating in any ritual ceremonies of their lineage group. There are two types of marriage, arranged marriage and marriage by elopement.

Arranged marriage is an ideal type of marriage. It is a love marriage and the marriage itself is arranged by the parents of both sides. It is a holy marriage in Biblical term. This type of marriage is well accepted and considered prestigious in Purum society. It entails a lengthy process of negotiation through exchange of gifts culminating in a Christian marriage officiated by the pastor in a church. Among the Purums, different clans have different style of marriage but the processes of wedding in the Church is the same. For example, the Songthu clan which is considered as the most prominent clan of the community, when a girl of this clan gets married she will wear a red wrap around and a parrot green velvet blouse. On leaving her parent's house the bride treads an egg of a domestic fowl just near the threshold of their house. From there she rides on a palanquin up to the gate of the house. Again from the gate of the house she rides on a horse up to the house of the groom.

Marriage by elopement is very uncommon. It is not an ideal type of marriage. This type of marriage cannot be performed in the church. But it is carried out in some other places, like community hall etc. However, the ceremony is the same as that of a holy marriage and is carried out by the priest of the village church. In such marriage the bridegroom should offer two pigs of five *wais* 'fists', one to the bride's parents and another to the villagers. Besides, the groom's parents have to give a *yorkhampon* 'cloth used by the village chief' to the bride's parents as a penalty. Later this cloth will be offered to the village chief. Nowadays such type of marriage is absolutely prohibited because it breaks the rules of Christianity.



PURUM TRADITIONAL ATTIRE

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The Purum tribe practices patriarchy. The father is considered to be the head that exercises power over family matters whereas the mother is confined only to household tasks or activities. Among the Purums, the smallest social unit is the nuclear family with husband and wife and their children. Joint family is rare among the Purums. The constitution of the Purum family is influenced by the law of inheritance and also by marriage customs. They have a patrilineal social system. The husband or wife never addresses each other by their respective names. They use to call their eldest son's or daughter's name like Englenpa (husband) or Englenu (wife).

DEATH

A dead body is buried in the Purum culture. There are two burial grounds - *sorthan* and *phulthan*. *Sorthan* is a burial place for those persons who died of unnatural death. Those persons who died an unnatural death cannot be buried in *phulthan* graveyard. Corpses of unnatural death cannot be buried inside a village.



A PHOTO OF MONUMENTS

All normal or natural death is buried at phul than graveyard. The family of the deceased offer meals to the mourners on the occasion of funeral functions. Two small huts called *Rainga* and *Thantrai* will be constructed in the graveyard whenever a corpse is to be buried in the phul than graveyard. *Rainga* is a hut with roof while *Thantrai* is roofless. A cross made of a wooden pillar from the house of the deceased family will also be erected on the grave if the deceased is a male and head of the family but no cross is made in case of female and children. Offering of food by members of the family of the deceased is made to the spirit of the corpse for three months in the house of deceased. One month to the front door and two months in the kitchen. The offering of food to the corpse is once in a month continuing for three months at the burial place. Two food packets will also be hanged on both arms of the cross on the grave. Besides these food items offered to the corpse, drinking water in *Rainga* and food items in *Thantrai* are also offered. It is done in the sense of supplying food and drink to the deceased soul. This is known as *Bukok* in the Purum language. Every family of the village has different burial places. All the members of the same family are buried at the same common graveyard.

CONCLUSION

Life cycle rituals are the most important part of an ethno-linguistic study. Every stage in life conveys certain cultural forms, as people travel through these stages-births, adolescence, youth, adulthood, maturity and death. Purum has lots of religious, cultural and traditional rituals. They have been practicing important rituals till now. The most important rituals for them are birth ceremonies/naming rituals, marriage rituals and death/ burial rituals.

REFERENCES

- Jourdan Christine and Tuite Kevin (Edited). 2006. Language, Culture and Society: Key Topics In Linguistics Anthropology. Cambridge University Press. New York
- Numan David and Choi Julie (Edited). 2010. Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives and Emergence of identity. Routledge, New York.
- Riley Philip. 2007. Language, Culture and Identity: An Ethnolinguistics Perspective. Athenaeum Press Ltd, New York.
- Shultz Emily and Lavenda Robert. 2013. Cultrual Anthropology, A perspective on the human condition. Oxford University Press. Cambridge.

A BRIEF ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF YIMKHIUNG

1.0 Introduction

Ethnolinguistics studies the interaction of linguistic, ethno-cultural and ethno-psychological factors in the functioning and development of the language. von Humboldt (1973) believed that every language is the carrier of culture and identity of the people who speak this language. Therefore, culture is linked to the identity of the indigenous people, their traditional knowledge, and their experiences with the natural environment so it is their cultural right. Over the course of generations, indigenous peoples have developed rich sets of knowledge about the natural world, health, rites and rituals and other cultural expressions. Cultural practices, traditions, and values of indigenous peoples – as long as they are in line with human rights principles – can play a critical and positive role in advancing and promoting gender equality and human rights.

However, today the indigenous cultures are threatened with extinction in many parts of the world, they are being subjected to processes of domination and discrimination. Their cultures have been viewed as being inferior, primitive, irrelevant, something to be transformed or eradicated. Traditional knowledge and traditional resources have been managed by indigenous and local communities since time immemorial, using customary law embedded in spiritual cosmology. Nevertheless, a great deal of traditional knowledge, including customary laws and folklore has been undermined and destroyed by colonizers and post-colonial states who imposed their own systems of law knowledge and worldview on indigenous people. Indigenous people today stand at the crossroads of globalization and it has huge impact on their culture and language. Language is not only a communication tool but is also an essential component of one's collective and individual identity and therefore provides a sense of belongingness and community. When language dies, that sense of community is damaged. Therefore, it is very important to preserve and promote one's language and culture.

2.0 Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) proposed the model of ethnolinguistic vitality as a framework for integrating the role of sociostructural variables in intergroup relations, cross-cultural communication, second language learning, mother tongue maintenance, language shift and loss. Ethnolinguistic vitality theory asserts that Status, Demographic, Institutional support, and Control factors make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. An assessment of a group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these dimensions provides a rough classification of ethnolinguistic groups into those having low, medium, or high vitality. (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Low vitality groups are most likely to go through linguistic assimilation and may not be considered a distinctive collective group (Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981). On the other hand, high vitality groups are likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings.

The key prediction of Ethnolinguistic vitality theory (henceforth EVT) is that community languages with high ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) will be retained, while those with low EV will tend to be replaced by the mainstream language. In the light of the above theory, we will examine the ethnolinguistic vitality status of Yimkhiung language.

3.0 Name and the people

Yimkhiung is one of the sixteen major tribes of Nagaland. It is located in the eastern most part of the state in the two districts of Tuensang and Kiphire. The name Yimkhiung is derived from two words: Yim meaning ‘search’ or ‘to seek’ and ‘chungrü’ or ‘khiungrü’ meaning ‘the one who has searched and reached. Another interpretation of the name is “those who have come back having searched their own land after they had left it”⁸. ‘Yimchungrü Tribe’ is one of the unique tribes in Nagaland with a conglomeration of six sub-tribes viz. Chirr, Langa, Longfürr, Mükury, Phelungri, and Tikhir, each speaking their own home dialect which has similarities to a great extent. Langa dialect, being the most common one functions as a lingua-franca and is used in Yimchungrü literature and for all the official purposes. According to Burling (2003), Yimkhiung language belongs to the Ao group of Kuki-Naga subgroup of Tibeto-Burman Language Family. According to Yimchungrü Tribal Council (YTC) their population is 1,15,000 (One Lakh Fifteen Thousand) as of 2005. Ethnologue (2011) reports the total number of Yimkhiung speakers at 92,100 and Census Report (2011), India at 83,259.

4.0 Historical Background: Origin and Migration

According to the Yimchungrü Tribal Council (YTC), the Yimchungru Nagas migrated along with the rest of the Nagas from the South-East Asia through the mountains and basins of China, Thailand and to the present location through Burma (Myanmar) along Irrawady and Chindwin rivers. In the course of migration, the Yimkhiungs crossed over covering the present Saramati area along the Patkai Range on the banks of Tizu and then the Zungki rivers. Initially the Yimkhiungs settled at a place called Tongkhun/Mih-Bokpung which is located on the banks of Zungki (also known as Thu-rak-ke) river. This ancient settlement is between the present Sikiur and Anatongre villages on the banks of Zungki river. From here, they moved on and established the legendary village called Ke-mi-phu with 999 households which are also considered the parental village of the Yimkhiung tribe. Geographically, this place was climatically covered with cloud and mist, with heavy dew drops, and often wet and moist where sunlight always shone late. In the harsh winters, the houses and the surroundings of the village were covered with heavy dew and moist, especially in the morning. This difficult climate was one of the major factor for further migrations apart from the ever expanding population.

From Kemi-phu, several ancient villages/settlements were established across the Zungki river, which expanded and migrated in all directions in which some of the prominent and ancient villages and settlements among them are ‘Ying-phu and Tong-khun’. In the later stages and generations, another ancient and parental village called Yimkhiung Awun was established by the very descendants of the early settlers and inhabitants of the ancient and legendary Kemi-phu village, situated in North-West of the Zungki river. Yim-khiung literally means- “Searched, Arrived and Found” that is for the establishment and settlement of the Yimkhiung village, where members of all home speaking dialects and clans were represented from the beginning. From the ancient Yimkhiung Awun, some of them migrated further and settled in Langa village across the Hiruppong mountain range and then continued to spread in all directions far and wide, crossing and expanding even beyond the Dikhu river.

From Yimkhiung Awun, several villages and settlements were also established just as on the other side of the Zungki river. One such village is the ‘Yahko Awun’ before the famous mass exodus of the great Langa village. Some of the settlers of the Yahko Awun were Thsan,

Yimsokhiung, Mukhe, Rangkhu, Alo, Resumong and others. Incidentally, the forest at Yahko was thick with plenty of wild animals. In one of the areas, there was a salt-water hole which was called Alo and Rangkhu Shih-Ye: where many wild animals came to drink the salt water from the water hole, located between present Sangphur and Kuthur villages. In one of the hunting expeditions, a wild boar was shot at with a crossbow by Thsan. However, the animal did not die on the spot. Thsan and other hunters went after the wounded animal and searched its tracts for six days. On the sixth day, the wild boar was found dead in the jungle down south by some other hunters from the neighbouring villages namely, Yamshu and Yousang, who found the dead boar before Thsan and Alo group. Thsan indicated to the above hunters that it was him who killed the boar. In order to prove his point, Thsan who had earlier picked up a piece of shattered liver of the wounded boar along the tract, that was puffed out from the wounded hole of the arrowhead (Yinchitung Ku) decided to slice open the animal and checked its liver, which had bled to death from the wound caused by Thsan.

They dissected the dead animal and compared the liver which matched the size and the mark of the missing piece of liver shot off by the arrowhead of Thsan. Since they could not understand each other's languages, they only made sign languages and gestures. After the verifications and agreeing that Thsan had indeed shot the animal, they decided to divide the animal equally. There were six of them; four from the Thsan group and Yamshu and Yousang- the other group. While dividing the meat equally, a seventh piece was left over. After seeing this, they tried to equally divide it into six shares only. They repeated this again still, one piece remained (seventh one). After this incident, they took it as a blessing of plenty and abundance. They became acquainted and decided to establish a new village within that location which was geographically under Kemi-phu territory. Thereafter, they fixed a date for meeting to establish the proposed village by tying knots of the number of days from a slit cane rope.

On the fixed date, Thsan's group led by Zhelo from neighbouring Sangphur village (which was then established at a location called Shih-khun) along with a Mithun headed for the fixed location. However, due to the slow movement of the Mithun which had to be led through mountainous slopes, they arrived late at sunset. By then, Yamshu and Yousang group had already arrived. They wondered if Thsan's group had kept their word and were impatient. They decided to go up the hill to see if they were on the way and gave a yelling call. By then, Thsan's group had already advanced and neared the fixed location. They heard the call and answered back in Yimkhiung language.

Finally, they met and made sign languages and gestures of a Mithun being brought as decided for the feast during the establishment of the proposed village. Thus, they established another ancestral village called "Tukhean Kiulong- Tukhian khup" within Kemi-phu area. Zhelo who led Thsan's group returned to Sangphur village. The group inhabitants were also thus known as "Tukheanru" from where the word "Tikhir" was derived. Tukhean means 'when two or more groups get together in an understanding socially and geographically' – which is also known as "Tukhen Aarih".

It is historically said, as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, that the village of Kemiphu has a legend where the morning hours were always wet with mist and fog; whose inhabitants would get covered with dew from the moist and fog on their heads and body after going out to the nearby jungles and returning to the village from collecting their daily needs from the forest resources. It was also said to be the same at Tukhean Kiulong/Tukhean Akhup.

Like many other fellow Naga tribes, the Yimkhiung Naga tribe is also composed of several sub-dialects/home dialects such as Langa, Chirr, Makory, Tikhir, Longphur, and Phununger, who are settled from the foot hills of Saramati mountain of Patkai range in the south to the foot hills of Hiruppong mountain in the north. Further, the existence of multiple sub-dialects/home-dialects is not exclusive to the Yimkhiung Nagas alone, but also exist within other Naga tribes of the state. Hence, socio-culturally, the Nagas in general are gifted and blessed with multiple linguistic heritages.

5.0 The Village Polity

The nature of Yimkhiung village administration system is democratic. The administrators consist the founder of the village and representatives from each clan. “The ranking of the leadership is determined on the ground of what each leader has offered during the formation of the village. The leader who offers a cow for ritual act is the chief, and next to him, the one who offers a dog is made deputy. Interestingly, this kind of offering has never been according to one’s wishes, but it has been in accordance with the decision being carried out by the clan members on the ground of their status and merit.

The village is divided into *khiang* ‘*khels*’ which is administered by the *khel* authorities, and which in turn are subject to the village authority. The number of *khels* is determined by the size of the village. Every village consists of different clans which is sub-unit to the village. The citizens of the village are bound together by social, political, and religious ties. For purpose of war and defence, league of villagers were formed.

6.0 Khiang Yapping: *Khel* Dormitory

Khiang Yapping is a dormitory for bachelors. It is one of the most important social institutions of village life. It is the centre of village social life where young people were trained, disciplined, and give instructions. Older folks would narrate to the youngsters the stories, myths, and the great deeds of the past.

7.0 The Morung

The Morung, considered as a traditional temple, plays a vital role in the social and religious life of the people. It is a place where sacrifices were performed by the high priest during ceremonies. It is also a place for guarding and protecting the village from the attacks of enemies. Guards are appointed to keep, watch, and protect the village and to alert the people in any kind of events. A Log-drum at the Morung served as an instrument of information (beating sound of the log) in the village and as a signal of warning in times of war and other calamities. These practices are no longer perform after they converted to Christianity in most of the places except for meeting of the Goanburas, village chief and village elders.



Pic.1 The Morung



Pic.2 The Log-drum

8.0 Head-hunting

Head-hunting was the most prestigious sport in the life of the Yimkhiungs. It had been a determining factor of their social status. Might and force were inevitable for them. The warriors were highly honoured by the people, and those who brought more trophies that were human heads of the enemies were respected and recognized by the society and even by their enemies, who dared not to attack the village. Thus, the presence of great warriors was a help to the villagers in terms of protection and security

Livelihood

For livelihood, the community depends mostly on agriculture besides trade, herding, fishing, and hunting. Jhum is the most common method of cultivation. Apart from agriculture, Yimkhiungs also practiced black-smithy, sorcery (traditional magic) and making of salt (from blackish

9.0 Religion

The whole population of Yimkhiungs are Christian since 1980s but before that they had a concept that there was someone greater and higher than human beings, a Supreme Being beyond the ephemerality of this life. This Supreme Being was known by the name 'Arimpuh', considered and understood to be a male deity. As far as the Yimkhiung belief was concern, 'Arimpuh' was the creator, sustainer and controller of the universe, beyond limits of time and space, yet an omnipresent Being who was involved in the everyday affairs of the people and knowing the hearts of the people.

They worshipped the Supreme Being but as he is invisible, people believed that he dwells or is personified in nature, so trees, stones or other objects were worshipped as and when they felt the presence of the Supreme Being in that place or object. Worship of the Supreme Being could not be neglected during festivals and other important events.

There are two types of sacrifices – Community and individual sacrifices. The first was done usually during festivals and prayer meetings known as *gennas*. The second type was performed by an individual (male) as when necessary for various reasons. The most common and important practice was the animal sacrifice. Usually, a pig was taken to the field which it was supposedly occupied by the malevolent spirits so sacrifice used to be offered in the very spot. Every year when the fields were cultivated, it was the obligation for the owner of the field to offer a sacrifice. This was done with the concept of appeasing the malevolent spirits lest they harm the owner of the crops. Another significant sacrifice was, when a warrior, a rich man, an expert hunter or a renowned person passed away, a dog was sacrificed. The belief was that the dog would escort the person on his way to the place of the dead "Asherü-kiulung" by chasing away i.e., by barking at the persons or animals that the deceased had hunted during his lifetime.

10.0 Festivals

There are two important festivals among Yimkhiungs. The first and of course the biggest festival which is observed throughout the Yimkhiung community is the Metümneo. It falls in the first part of the month of August. Some of the characteristics of Metümneo festival are:

- (i) Kiuzhikhi: Announcement.
- (ii) Khungarü metümkhi: Purification of children.
- (iii) Thüyam khiak mükdung sangkhiak sütbah dapabahkhi: Ritually sticking of a branch of a tree on every house.
- (iv) Jimso tsühphit khi: Eating of new harvest rice.

(v) Yamkhün thsüpü lakhi: Marriage proposals In this festive season people call back the soul of the dead of the family members. They predict the number of people who are going to die the next year. They celebrate the harvest of millet and worship rice, spade, dao and the fireplace. They also dry the animal liver above the fireplace in a basket for whole night. The next day they would check spot in the liver. If the spot is on the right side some unwanted events will occur amongst relatives, if it is on the left side, unwanted events will be on outsiders, if the spot is on the middle, unwanted events is going to happen within the family and if there is no spot, they will have a good year ahead. ⁹

The second important festival is Tsüngkamneo which falls in mid-January usually on the 16th of January. The term literally means ‘Winter Festival’. This festival is associated with the accomplishment of agricultural work throughout the year, and when their agricultural work is over for that current year, they rest for some days

Significances of this festival are:

- (i) The name of the festival month is Yongphu (January) which means drinking, eating, merry making, singing, and sleeping etc.
- (ii) Rich people host a grand feast and invite all the Khel male members, usually a pig either in full or in half is sent as a gift to his best friend. In return, his friend will gift him the same in the next festival. ¹⁰



Pic.3 Pulling of Log-drum



Pic.4 Celebrating Tsüngkamnio

11.0 Marriage

Inter-marriage between the same clan is strictly prohibited in Yimkhiung. Defaulters were ostracized from the village. Polygamy is not acceptable in Yimkhiung society. On the wedding day, the groom's parents would provide feast of Mithun, pigs and other animals, where relatives and villagers join the party. The occasion is a time of fun, merry-making and feasting. Divorce and re-marriage are very rare.

⁹Narrated by S. neajichung.2nd GB Kuthur village.

¹⁰Narrated by S. Neajichung.2nd GB Kuthur village.

When a child is born, naming takes place on the sixth day for a male child and fifth day for female signifying that a male has six strengths (muscle) and female five.

References

- Clement.R & Norton B. (2021). Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Identity and Power: Investment in SLA, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0261927X20966734>. Canada
- M. KhalenmewYim (2010) *TheYimchungrü& Christianity. A brief History*.Shamator: Kiussorü Baptist Church.Shamator. Nagaland
- Yimkhiung, T. L. (2003)*The Traditional Beliefs and Practices of Yimkhiung Nagas*. Shamator: Kiussorü Baptist Church. Shamator. Nagaland