

**Tribal Polity; Understanding the Power and Function of the Tangkhul Chief in Pre-Colonial Manipur.**

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***Abstract;** Settlement of many ethnic groups in the inaccessible mountainous region of Manipur, with a high degree of isolation from each other, was the natural phenomena in the Pre-colonial period. The highly civilized Meitei Kingdom which flourished in the middle of the valley exerted little influence on the surrounding tribal village due to its scattered pattern of settlement. The Tangkhul ethnic groups though remains isolated from the influence of civilized world developed their own customs, law and system of administration for the smooth functioning of their day to day life. The Traditional village council, which was a council of tribal chief headed by the Village Chief/Awunga were vested with absolute authority to strictly enforce the unwritten law or to enact new laws according to the requirement of time. The constituent unit of village, its system of functioning and the changes it underwent in governance are discussed in detail, while underscoring the factors which effect the changes.*

***Keyword;** Tribal chieftaincies, Awunga, Shang Piba, Hanga, Longshim.*

**Introduction**

Manipur is home for many tribal people who migrated here in different historical period. The Tangkhuls who are dominantly found in the North-Eastern hills of Manipur are the earliest settler, believed to have settled before the coronation of Pakhangba to the Kangla throne. The population of Tangkhul had increased in extended time. But despite their long history of settlement and expansion of their influence, the political system of Tangkhul remained unchanged following their traditional tribal system. The change was a snail pace despite their contact with outside world. A revolutionary changed in the religious sphere were affected with the introduction of Christianity the region by the Europeans in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century A.D. such changes also affected the power and function of the Village chief/Awunga, as it completely segregated his religious and secular function. The paper is an attempt to understand the functioning of Tangkhul Village before the arrival of the British in the region.

**Narratives**

The history of human settlement in the present state of Manipur had been pushed back to antiquity with the publication of O. Kumar Singh works. Numerous stone tools parallel to Choukoutien (a prehistoric site in China) which date back to Paleolithic period were discovered at Khangkhui mangsor (mangsor=cave), the present habitat of the Tangkhul, indicating the

existence of mankind during the period. The works lend credence to the tradition of the Tangkhul people who claims that their ancestors emerged from a hole and have been living here from time immemorial.<sup>1</sup> However there is no evidence/tradition to relate this Pleistocene man who lived in Khangkhui cave to the proto Tangkhul society except one tradition of the Shinglai clan, one of the Tangkhul clan (like that of the Angom clan of Meitei community) which claimed that the Khangkhui cave was the place where their ancestors settled before they went down to the lowland areas.

Besides, the cave tradition, the Tangkhuls has other tradition which narrates their migration and settlement in the Trans Chindwin country/region like Samsok, Hakwang valley (in the Shan province of Myanmar) and other areas. Thus it is difficult to relate the Paleolithic cave man with the proto-Tangkhul society. But it can be said with certainty that the Tangkhul are the earliest settler in Manipur as inferred from the mentioned of the Tangkhul in Manipuri literature “Numit Kappa”<sup>2</sup>, the text which reflects the socio-political and economic life of the valley people of Manipur before the formation of the seven clan systems in the valley. As the formation of the seven clan system of the Meitei is credited to Pakhangba, who was coronated to the throne of Kangla in 33 A.D. The text referred to the period which can be dated back to the first century A.D. The text did not mention about socio-economic and political system of the Tangkhul during that period but from tradition/folksongs which give account of their migration, it is quite obvious that the migrating hordes had brought with them institution of governance, cultural tradition, ideas on polity, economy and social organization which they implanted on their new habitat. The folksong which is still current among the Hungphun folk is a pointer.

(in Tangkhul dialect)

Oh, khili tunglo?  
 Oh, Ava Samsokli tung  
 Oh, Makanna Oh, ili phungshok  
 Oh, Makunga ...oh ili pangthang  
 Oh, ngakangana .....Oh, safa, kazei, mala singsinglaga  
 Oh, ili rai phamiya  
 Oh, Khamalanli...oh, I shokngavao  
 Oh, Ngachang chihuili Oh, rom unngaphei  
 Oh, Mavalungli... Oh, mei tungngayar  
 Oh, Hunphun ava khararwo... I yala yangamkhaya  
 Oh, Lonpi kachuipavao, Ronravo!  
 Oh, nava iwui shimzunna  
 Oh, iwui shumzuno  
 Oh, Marem, Kanhang... oh inaomasen  
 Oh, ngason ngason.. oh Thisom-rala apeiya.

<sup>1</sup> Singh O Kumar, Stone Age Archaeology of Manipur, Amusana Institute of Antiquarian Studies, Manipur, 1977, p131.

<sup>2</sup> Devi Pramodini, Numit Kappa and Panthoibi Khongkun: A Study of Socio-Economic and Politico-Religious aspect of early Manipur, Times Printer Publishing Home, Kakching, 1988, p.15.

(Free English translation)

From, where thou comes?  
We come from Ava (Burma) Samsok  
Makan lead us through  
Makunga carried me  
Armed with bow and arrow, spears and dogs  
Ngakang protected us  
On top of the hill I call out for our kindred groups  
And on the vale we rest to eat our food  
We light fire at Mavalung  
Oh Hunphun! Abode of our forefather thy fame spread far and wide  
Oh people of Longpi and Ronra, you are my kinsmen  
Marem, Kanhang my descendant  
My descendant spread to Thisom.<sup>3</sup>

The folksong of Hunphun, which gives account of migration from Samshok (Thangdut erstwhile Burma) reveals that their leader/chief was carried by Makunga clan and protected by Ngakan clan indicating that they have attained some level of socio-cultural system and that chief ship was not developed in the present habitat but brought by the migrating hordes.<sup>4</sup> According to Stephen Angkang, the institution of chieftainship/chiefship and the practice of megalithic culture were established while the Tangkhul were settling in Vahukong valley.<sup>5</sup> In the course of their migration, they erected a stone monolith while temporarily settling at Aiyinllung (identified at present Kangeibung) before their migration to the northern hills.<sup>6</sup> This tradition clearly indicates that the Tangkhuls have migrated to the present state before the Meitei kingdom was properly organized.

Stray references in Manipur chronicles reflects the nature of the geo-political relationship between the Meiteis and the Tangkhuls; an indication to show that the Tangkhul have no significant role to play in Meitei political history and vice versa. Until the British domination/occupation, no tremendous/revolutionary changes has ever taken place in the tribal society of Manipur as no power had control over the hills people particularly the Tangkhul owing to the nature of settlement. They are settled in disbursed manner in the mountainous ridges with no accessible road (though influence of Meitei- Hindu cannot be ruled out in the low lying Tangkhul village situated in the periphery of the Meitei kingdom). The influence of the dominant Meitei-Hindu culture on neighbouring hilly people was quite negligible as Hinduism being a regulated religion meant only for the Meitei community alone, the privileges to practice Hinduism was denied even to the Loi community of the plain dwellers. Moreover the Meitei are

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<sup>3</sup> Hunphun Awo ayi laa, Hunphun literature Research centre, Ukhrul,p.2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid,p.2

<sup>5</sup> Angkang Stephen, Hau (Tangkhul) customary law, Ukhrul Development of Hao Ancient Custom and Research Organisation, 2000, p.78.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid,p.78

not interested in the affair of the hill people as it does not give economic benefit to them rather mingling in their affairs was a drain of economy.<sup>7</sup> Uninterrupted the Tangkhul led an isolated independent and republic village life following their own traditional customs. In the light of this fact, the traditional customs of Tangkhul had not seen much change until the arrival and domination of British in the hills district of Manipur.

### **Custom of the Tangkhul**

The Tangkhuls in the past share not only an environment and ecological condition but also a cultural pattern –which may be considered as typical Tangkhul. But with the passage of time, solidarity among the Tangkhul in political aspects widen/began to loosen as increasing population led to further bifurcation of the parent village into numerous smaller villages. Each village grew out to be an autonomous unit pursuing an independent policy and implements its own customary laws pertaining to their life in the village. Dr. Horam comment, whether or not the village was always a social, political and religious unit, the facts remain that it was an independent unit.<sup>8</sup> Unintelligibility of dialect/language between different villages came as an obstacle in the solidarity amongst different Tangkhul village. Almost every village speaks its own dialect with few exceptions. R Luikham broadly divided Tangkhul society into four division base on dialect spoken.

- a. Raphei, comprising of Hunphun, Ukhrul headquarter and the area toward the north and portion of the east upto Myanmar border.
- b. Kharao, the entire villages settled in the west adjoining Senapati district and Imphal east district.
- c. Kathur from Humbum (Hungdung) toward eastward and southward.
- d. Kamo, the remaining villages in the south and south east.<sup>9</sup>

The division of the whole Tangkhul in different longphang (socio-political body of villages) is also based on intelligibility of language. R Luikham however concedes that all the dialect spoken by the Tangkhul community in all regions can be understand without much effort.

Despite the lack of solidarity due to its distribution pattern and unintelligibility of dialect, a similar custom prevailed in all the villages, which makes them distinct from other groups.

The Tangkhul polity is based on the territorial principle; as such the founder of the village became the chief of the village so founded by him. And unlike the Indian Vedic tribal society, where kingship was confined to the Kshatriya caste, the Tangkhul has no such system of restriction, on any clan from becoming a chief. According to custom, any person irrespective of his clan who founded a village becomes it chief. However a person desirous of becoming a chief should be physically and mentally fitted and should not violate *shiyen chikan*. According to

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<sup>7</sup> See Ningreishim Kashung shimray, Hills and Valley: Relationship of People in Pre-Colonial Manipur, Ph.d Thesis (unpublished), Dept. of History and culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. p.121.

<sup>8</sup> Horam M, *Naga Polity*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, N. Delhi, 1975, p.67.

<sup>9</sup> Luikham R, Tangkhul Traditional Land use system and related custom, UDCRMS, Ukhrul, 2006, p.3

Stephen Angkang a chief should not be a murdered, should not violate marriage law, and should not steal other property.<sup>10</sup>

Selection of new village site involved proper survey and divine affirmation on the chosen site. Three important factors are considered while selecting a village site. In the times, when head hunting/village feud was frequent among the villages or tribes, it was necessary to keep a constant vigil over the invading enemies. So a site, which provided a commanding view over the areas, was considered a suitable one. Besides strategic position, the easy availability of water is also given due consideration while selecting the site for village establishment. So isolated hill with sloping descents to the water points were selected as a suitable site for village establishment. R. Brown comments 'the *Murring (Maring Naga)* construct their villages on the slopes of the higher hills, but with regard to the convenient situation of their water supply.'<sup>11</sup> The third important feature was the availability of suitable cultivable land as agriculture was their main source for sustaining life, so 'sites, therefore, otherwise suitable were not favored, if agricultural land was not available to suffice the need of the villager'.<sup>12</sup> So each village, possesses a well-defined area of territory, not only of cultivated and terrace land but of *jhum* and waste land as well.<sup>13</sup>

After careful selection of new village site, divination *Kapa khayang* was observed for divine affirmation. If it is affirmative, a suitable place is selected for conducting ceremonial rites. The leader then cut down a tree in the middle, sacrifices a fowl, set fire and shots arrow in the four directions indicating that the place where each arrow falls is the extent of his territory. In some case divination was observed after they have selected a suitable site. In such case divination was observe by sowing some seeds by their leader, if the grains germinate properly he can become their chief but if the grain fails to germinate, they give the post to the person whose grain germinate successfully.<sup>14</sup>

Each and every village, whether big or small, has its own fixed boundary. The boundaries of each village were generally demarcated by natural rivers, streams, and ridges and sometimes by planting boundary stones. Boundary rules are strictly observed by each village and trespassing in other village area even during hunting expedition were not allowed because hunting rights were exclusively meant for that villages only. Infringement of such rights (hunting in other village area) often cause serious disputes.<sup>15</sup>

A village is divided into a number of units, one clan comprised one unit. A clan constitutes a smaller unit within the village. As the law of clan exogamy obliges marriages outside clan, a

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<sup>10</sup> Angkang Stephen, Op. Cit,p.p.82,83

<sup>11</sup> R. Brown, *Statiscal Account of Manipur and the hill territory under its rule*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1874,p.p.45

<sup>12</sup>Khushim Ruivah, *Social Changes among the Naga (Tangkhuls)*, Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.141

<sup>13</sup> T. C Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, B. R Publication, Delhi,1911,p.73

<sup>14</sup> Luikham T., *Wung Naga okthot Mayonza*, Ukhurul,1961.,p.16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*,p74

Tangkhul Naga village generally consists of two or more clans. Commenting on this, *T. C Hodson* writes, a Naga village consists of, at least, two clans, and in rare case there are as many as ten clans.<sup>16</sup> Traditionally seven different clans are pre requisite for establishing a new standard Naga village.<sup>17</sup> **Meiteis, Zeilianrong and the Angamis have seven clans.** However, there are many cases of villages having less than seven clans and in some cases many villages have more than seven clans. There are two probable reasons for villages having less than the pre-requisite clan number. Despite the fact that, seven clans was the pre-requisite for establishing a new village, many adventurous and ambitious parties who could not garner members from seven clans while establishing a new village ended up with less clans. Establishing a new village involve a lot of risk so inhabitants of the old village were reluctant to face such problems if they were secure and content in their own habitat. The other probable is that, people or groups who migrated from other far off place hardly came with members of seven clans.<sup>18</sup> So we find many Naga villages with less than the requisite clan number.

*E.W. Dun* records many dozen of Naga village having less than 10 houses. At the same time he also mentions many villages having more than 100 houses, even with 500 houses.<sup>19</sup> There are many instances where two or three small villages merged together for security and other reasons to form a single village and the chief of the village which possessed the maximum population became the chief of the newly found village.<sup>20</sup> There are other cases where groups or individuals left their parent village and joined the bigger village. The Tangkhul have certain provisions in their custom for incorporating other social groups to their villages and clans through the process of ‘Ramzan’ (enrolling in the village) and ‘Shangzan’ (enrolling in a clan). When an individual wanted to migrate to a village, he should through Ramzan; where he pay a certain fee, in terms of meat called “*Ramzansa*”, meaning village enrolment meat to the village chief, which was distributed to all the villagers as a declaration of his membership of that village. Similar provision was there for clan’s. If a clan being very small in number found it difficult to exist independently, they (clan members) could affiliate to a stronger clan and participate in the affairs of the big clan to which they had affiliated. This was possible subject to the payment of “*Shangzansa*” (enrolment meat) to the chief of the bigger clan by the later. The chief of the big clan would then take the assent of the village chief and after necessary enquiry; the village chief would affiliate him or the group to that clan. Thus in the Naga villages there exist so many village with less or more than the requisite seven clans.

Each clan had its own chief or *piba* and its inheritance was hereditary. Normally the eldest son of the *piba* inherits the *piba* ship. In a village where the number of each clan has become huge, each clan occupies a definite area within the village. The boundary of the clan is fixed and in the old days there were walls separating one clan from another. The gates in the walls were shut at night.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid,p73

<sup>17</sup> Puyiba Kashung of Kabongram (Tangkhul Hundung); Stefen Angkang, *Hau shiyen chikan*,p.89.

<sup>18</sup> one should note that almost every villages was formed by migrants from near and far off place.

<sup>19</sup> E.W Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi,1975,pp.69-235.

<sup>20</sup> Angkang Stephen, OP. Cit.p.89.

Thus, the unit was clans within a village.”<sup>21</sup> The main function of the clan is to keep its members united and strong. Member of a family discusses all his problems with the other family members and the matters beyond its jurisdiction are referred to the lineage and the lineage refers bigger problems to the clan. In the Tangkhul society, there is none who does not belong to one or the other clan, which constitute village and in turn goes to form tribe.<sup>22</sup> Within a clan each unit has its focus on unity and identity differentiated from other groups of the same order in the hierarchal organized set of clan.<sup>23</sup> The solidarity of a clan is maintained through the co-operation of its constituent units. In every problem or matter of the clan viz in the events death or famine befalling upon member of the clan or when a clan member give feast on the occasion of marriage or inauguration of house, all the members of the clan extend their co-operation in all affairs. Moreover, since it is believed that they are the descendants of the same ancestor, they consider themselves as brother and sister within the clan. The solidarity of a clan is also manifested in maintaining strict sex taboos in the clan; marriage within the same clan is prohibited, marriage should be between two different clans.

Every Tangkhul Naga village whether big or small was an independent autonomous unit. Each village pursued its own independent policy and implemented its own unwritten customary laws in all walks of life. *R. Brown* comments, each village has its own chief and peculiar government apart from the others, there being no central authority among them to whom they owe allegiance.<sup>24</sup> However, there is a case where small villages seek the protection of bigger village by paying certain tribute (shai).

### **Traditional Village Council/ Hanga**

Each and every village of the Tangkhul Naga was ruled by a chief called Awunga and assisted by a council of elders called Hanga in the affairs of the village administration. The chief was associated with almost all the institutions\festivals\social, political and economic activities of the village. His function was dual in character; both religious and secular. As the administrative head of the village, he enjoyed and exercised enormous powers. He summoned and presided over the meeting of the village council and gave the final decision on all matters of the villages. His house served as the office of Hanga/ court of the village. Among the Zeiliangrong Naga, the house of a respectable elderly man with influence and reputation in the village is selected as Peikai, the office of Pei (office of the councilor). He decided on the site for cultivation of a particular year and also parceled out cultivable land to the village in consultation with the village council. At the time of head hunting, his primary concern was for the defense and security of the village. He was responsible for the general well-being of his subjects and it was in his interest to keep them content and happy. It was his first and foremost duty to help them in times of need and difficulties, and also punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or for infringement

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<sup>21</sup> Horam M, *Social and Cultural life of the Nagas*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 197, p.67.

<sup>22</sup> Horam M, *Nagas : Old ways and New Trends* , Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1988, p. 34

<sup>23</sup> Khushim Ruivah, *Social Change Among the Nagas (Tangkhul)*, Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.40.

<sup>24</sup> R.Brown, *Op. Cit.*, p.26.

of established customs. It was for the chief to see that social tradition and customs are honored, preserved and observed.<sup>25</sup>

The village chief enjoyed special position and privileges in the form of precedence in all matters. He was the first in the village to sow seeds, the first to plant, and the first to harvest and inaugurate the village festivals. No other villager could precede the chief.

The village chief received no revenue or tax from his subject. But as a token of respect for his high status, he was entitled to a portion of meat of the animals killed during festivals.<sup>26</sup> R. Brown writes, these headmen are not entitled to any settled revenue, but receive a share of flesh at the feast and a portion of the drink made by the villages.<sup>27</sup> In the olden days, the villagers offered their free labour to him when his fields were cultivated and when his house was constructed.

Though vested with extensive power, the village chief could not, however, exercise unlimited powers because any decision he made had to be supported by the majority of Hangva and such decisions had to be based on the customary laws. In fact, the real power of the village administration rested with the village council/Hanga. Therefore, in spite of his high position and vast power, a village could not act like a dictator or an autocrat. So the village council/Hanga was not only the body, which assisted the chief, but also a governing body itself.

Hanga is the most powerful body in the village polity. Its existence was based on age old customs and tradition of the Tangkhul people. Each Village is administered by Hanga which is a council of elders of the village. Hanga is not only a council of elders but also the collective supreme body representing all the chief of the village clans. **Normally piba/chief of the clan is inducted as Hangva/ councilor as he is occupy the highest position in the clan hierarchy, who can best represents the view and opinion of his clan/the respective clan.** Hanga/Village Council consist of the village chief and all the chief/piba of the village clan. Traditionally Hanga/Village Council have eight members as seven different clans are pre requisite for establishing a new standard Naga village.<sup>28</sup> However the number of Hangva/Councilor in the Village Council/Hanga differs from village to village as there are many villages which have less than seven clans and there are many villages which have more than seven clans.

There are many instances where two or three small villages merged to form bigger village eg. Lunghar, Shirui. In such cases, the chief of the village with a larger population became the chief of the newly merged village, and chief of the village with lesser population was either inducted as *Hangva* or as *wungleng*, a position higher than councilor. The elders of Hanga worked in an honorary capacity and as such they do not receive any regular salary. However they received a portion of meat of any sacrificial animals of the village and rice bear.

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<sup>25</sup> Khashim Ruivah, *Social Change among the Nagas (Tangkhuls)*, Cosmo Publication, 1993, p.149

<sup>26</sup> M. Horam, *Social and Culture life of the Nagas*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1977, p.76

<sup>27</sup> R.Brown, *Op.Cit.* p.45.

<sup>28</sup> In an interview with Puyiba Kashung of Kabongram (Tangkhul Hundung); Stefen Angkang, *Hau shiyen chikan*, p.89.

Although caste system was unknown in the Tangkhul Naga society, they had some sort of hierarchy in society. The village chief/Awunga, Hangva (all the chief of each clan) and their eldest sons were in the higher echelons of society. Even houses manifested the difference between respected families and commoners. The socially respected built Lungchenshim, houses generally constructed with a wooden horn called Lungchenkui placed on the top front of the house and those of the commoner stay in ngashishim.<sup>29</sup> **(To elaborate)**

In course of time, certain changes were affected in traditional system representation in the village Council/Hanga. This change was affected as a resultant impact of population growth caused by natural birth and migration. As stated before the Tangkhul have provision for entry into a clan or village through the process of Shangzan and Ramzan. So migrants from other places could be assimilated in the village through this traditional process. Assimilation of new migrants enlarged the population of the village where such processed had taken place. The increase in population resulted in increasing the number of councilor/Hangva as the newly assimilated migrants were allowed to send their representative in the Hanga/Village council. Growth of population beyond the limit has negative impact as it can lead to bifurcation of a village. In most villages where shifting cultivation was solely practiced (it required a lot of lands) so increase in population led to exhaustion of resources in the parent village thereby forcing villagers to migrate to new areas and establish a new village. But in a village where terrace farming could be done extensively along with jhuming cultivation, increasing population did not led to bifurcation of the village unlike those villages where only shifting/jhuming cultivation was practiced. There was dramatic change in the economy of Manipur consequent upon the introduction of new improved techniques of cultivation, plough and wet paddy transplantation which were brought by the Muslim migrants in the first half of seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup> Introduction of wet paddy transplantation in the hill areas could foster population growth in the village. Application of improved technique (wet paddy transplantation) in the hilly terrace increases the yield, where they feed more hungry stomach. The new technique thus enable the village to retained more population and averted the possible bifurcation of the village due to population explosion. Thus the explosion of population in the village does not led to migration for greener pasture rather the village became political more vibrant with increased population. Increases in population in the village bring forth the question of proper representation in the Hanga/Village council in proportion to their population. This change required the clans with larger population to send one more representation in the village council besides the Hangva. Thus the clans which have larger population have more than one representative in the Hanga, as representation in Hanga was done in proportion to its population of that particular clan. So unlike it customary practices, not only the piba but any married member of the clan can be inducted in the Hanga, unmarried person are

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<sup>29</sup> A.W. Zamngai Khamrang, Hao Tangkhul Naga Rampan Thotchan, Amen House Corporation, Ukhrul,2001,p.17.

<sup>30</sup> Salam Irene, Genesis,Migration and settlement of Muslim in Manipur in Jacob Luiram and Chungmeijai Mathew MK (ed) 34<sup>th</sup> NEIHA Commenmorative Volume Published by Dept. of History,MU, p.20.

not eligible. Among the Zeiliangrong, eligibility is based on age, only those person who are in between the age group of 55- 65years are eligible to be member of Pei (Village Council).<sup>31</sup>

The changes affected in representative system as a resultant impact of population growth brought about differentiation among the councilor. The members of the Village Council/Hanga are now graded as Parek, Hangva, Saroi and Yangroi.<sup>32</sup> Parek are close associate who accompanied the chief when he established the village and they are in the higher echelon of village council. *Parek* assisted the priest in religious matter especially in sacrificial activities. Among the Councilor there is a person who holds a position called Saroi. *Saroi* according to *Ningyon* is military leader as well as the one who tame the spirit of wild animals. There are no proper rules for appointment or selection of the *Saroi*, the chief chooses *Saroi*s according to his will.<sup>33</sup> Stephen Angkang however had different opinion, he used Hanga synonymously for both Village council and its member. According to him Hangva were the close associate of the village Chief who accompanied him when he established the village. The position of Hangva can be given to the earliest seven clans who accompanied and settled with the village Chief. Whereas Hanga though representative of their clan in the Village Council were relegated to a status lower than the Hangva as they migrated to the village after it was properly settled.<sup>34</sup> The gradation in the Village Council is based mainly on the period of their migration and proximity with the Village chief; earlier migrants occupy lower echelon in the village council then the later migrants. In extended time, the village chief also relegated different post and responsibilities to the village councilors who were closely associated with him, the existence of the post of parek and saroi is one such example chief relegating his power. Relegation/Devolution of power and responsibilities to the Councilor is the sole prerogative of the Chief. There is no custom which may compel him to share responsibilities with his councilor. Relegation was common in such village which were formed by merging two or more smaller village; in such case the village chief his power and responsibilities with the chief whose territories had been amalgamated. Apart from these Hangva and Hanga, the village chief also appointed Yangroi at his own will depending size/population of his village. Their primary function is to serve the councilor, however their opinion was also when the village was confronted with difficult situation.<sup>35</sup> Thus beside the village councilors, there are other persons who assisted the village councilor in the day to day administration of the villages.

The hierarchy in the village council can be discerned from the portion of meat which a councilor/Hangva received in the festivals and other occasions; the portion of meat indicate ones position in the council hierarchy. The animal so killed has to be cut up part wise as each part signifies a particular position and responsibility. The animals parts arrange in hierarchical order

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<sup>31</sup> Kamei Budha, Traditional village Administration to the Zeiliangrong, article published in "The Sangai Express" date-15<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> march,2014.

<sup>32</sup> Ningyon Awungshi, Kabongram Thotchan, Kabong Mitun Long, Imphal, 1995pp 13-15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp.13-15.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Angkang, Op.Cit,pp.89-90.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid,pp.91

are akui or head, agahung or neck, yaphei or right hind leg, ui pheii or left hind leg, yapang or right front leg, ui pang or left front leg and ameikung or tail bone. The head of the animal so slaughtered is always reserved for Awunga (village chief), symbolizing that he is the chief of the Village, Council and Administrative Head of the village. The right hind leg for *wungaleng*, there are instances where Wungaleng share head of the animal slaughtered with the village chief indicating that they are equal in status. The portion of neck is the share of Awunga mathun or person who acts on behalf of the chief. The left hind leg is the share of the senior most councilor (senior most here refers to the person who accompanied the chief when he founded the new settlement), right front leg for the next senior Hangva/councilor, left front leg next senior Hangva/councilor.<sup>36</sup> Each part is given to councilor base on their seniority in the village council. In southern Tangkhul region, Ameikung or the tail bone is given to that councilor who held the portfolio of publicity. This councilor who held portfolio of publicity had many tasks- his duty includes informing all the councilors personally about any meeting of the village council, and to publicize the decision of the village council to the whole village.

### **Power and Function of the Village Council/Hanga**

Hanga is the supreme body for the entire village administration. It maintained peace and social cohesion among the villagers. Hanga had elaborate functions and duties to perform. The main functions of Hanga were civil administration as also military, religious and judicial and it regulated economic activities. The legislative functions of the Hanga were less because there were already a set of unwritten customary laws which seldom required amendment. The authority of Hanga is based on the customs and it puts into effect the customary laws. When Hanga are face with a situation which had no reference in the customary law, Hanga has the authority to make a decision on the subject and the decision turns into law in the village.<sup>37</sup> The decision given by Hanga which is the apex body of the village administration is final. Once decided it cannot be repealed. No members of the village can go against the decision of the Hanga. No other village also has the right to interfere in the internal affairs and decision of Hanga.

In olden days, head hunting was a common practice amongst the hill tribes of Manipur. So the defense and security of the village were of primary importance. The Tangkhul selected village sites on the slopes of the highest hills and not far from the top and occasionally on a ridge, which was flat and could be used to build the village. They constructed village gates and fortified the village with wooden palisades under the supervision of village elders. Hanga as a supreme military body had command over the fighting forces of the village. According to Ningyon, Saroi a person who held a '*salung*', magical stone which controlled spirits of animal was the military

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Angkang, op.cit, p.164.

<sup>37</sup> Awungshi Ningyon, Op.Cit.p.48.

chief.<sup>38</sup> The fighting force of the village included all males of the dormitory but the actual warfare was participated in by senior members of the boy's dormitory.

Regarding the security of the village, two members of Hanga were selected to keep watch over the village, one in the rainy season and the other during the dry season. They did not actually work but stayed at home and keep vigil over the village.<sup>39</sup>

In Tangkhul villages, there are social institutions based on sex and age gradation. Social institutions such as Morung or dormitory for both boys and girls which plays a vital role in shaping young people's life are supervised by the Hanga. Hanga fixed the age of both boys and girls for entry in their respective dormitories and appointed responsible person to look after this institution. There is no separate house for the social institution. Hanga therefore appointed an owner with a large house to host the social institution. All the members of the dormitory have to give two days labour in a year for the owner of the house where the dormitory is located. As stated above, all the boys and girls of the village who had attained puberty must join their respective dormitories till the time of marriage. All the newly admitted youth were imparted various traditional handicrafts such as weaving, making mats, baskets, wooden spoons, spinning cotton thread, weaving clothes. The Dormitory shaped and built the moral character of the young people, taught social etiquette and it imbued the youth with a sense of social responsibility. At the morung or dormitory, stories, folksong, folktales and traditional lore's are taught and passed on to the juniors by their seniors. The institution of boy's dormitory occupies a central position in the village so that it could provide adequate village defense. It also acted as an institution of cultural learning which passed on the custom and tradition of the tribe. It is the responsibility of the hanga to maintain peaceful co-existence and harmony in the functioning of these institutions. And it can be stated with certainty the dormitory was the crucible to change boys and girls into responsible adults.

The village council decided all the disputes of the village and punished the culprits according to the customs. It was the duty of the village council to see that all the decisions taken by it were carried out accordingly. It was also their duty to see that all the traditional laws, customs and usages, were properly observed by the people and violation of the customary laws were punished accordingly.

Judicial administration was one of the most important functions of the village council. The village chief and councilors constituted the village court, which was the highest court of justice of the villages settled all the disputes and punished the culprits according to customs. The elders of the concerned clan could settle disputes and differences between families or individuals belonging to the same clan. To quote M Horam, all disputes and differences between families belonging to the same clan are, as far as possible, decided by the clan elders. Those cases, which could not be settled by the elders of the clans, were referred to the village court. In the attempts

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<sup>38</sup> Ningyon, p.13

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.51

of the clan elders to settle cases amicably, the village court could not interfere with it. However a dispute with people of a different village could not be settled by such a tribunal, for it involved the village's prestige. Hence, the village court used to settle such disputes. All the cases that were brought before the village court were settled by the village chief in consultation with his councilors. The village chief introduced the topic and opened it for discussion amongst the councilors, when all the councilor had given or shared their opinion, the chief gave the final verdict. And once decided or settled it could not be appealed again. It was the duty of the village council to see that all the decisions taken by it were carried out accordingly.

Among the punishments and penalty for the offender were imposition of fines, imprisonment, and exile from the village and debarring them from communication. According to T. Luikham, as money was not known, fines were in the form of properties, such as spades, dao, axe, spear, rope, shawls, domestic animal and paddy fields. To quote M Horam, fines cover most of the offences. An offender, besides paying compensation for damage to his victims often pays a fine to the village councilors. It was usually in the form of a live pig or it could also be rice beer or a cow.<sup>40</sup> The amount of the fine differed according to the severity of the crime committed. Banishment from the villages was imposed upon those who committed severe crimes like murder, or who did not comply with the orders of the village council and to those couples who violated the customary rules of marriage.

There was a strange judicial practice among them that when certain case or dispute could not be settled satisfactorily or amicably between the two groups by the courts, the two disputing parties were made to fight with arms (usually sticks) before the councilors. In such a fight, the party who received injury first was adjudged to be guilty.<sup>41</sup> Dispute between villages, which could not be settled amicably often caused war and head hunting. Disputes were also sometimes settled by swearing in the name of gods by the disputing person at their own risk. This was usually done by eating half of a chicken's intestine, animal liver and by biting earth (in case of dispute related to land) by each on the condition that the one who dies earlier within the stipulated time would be the loser. M Horam observes that land disputes were mostly settled by oaths. The oaths are taken at the scene of disputes usually by biting or eating a small piece of land under dispute. The person swearing falsely, run the risk of either dying before reaping a harvest from the land or his body swell up and dying. Thus, such types of cases were solved by invoking God. Ordeal by water was another form of solving a dispute.<sup>42</sup>

The Tangkhul village was not only a social and political unit but also an economic unit. It functions as a unit in achieving the economic objectives, from pastoralism to settled agricultural practice and also hunting, in which all able-bodied men co-operate.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid,p.85

<sup>41</sup> Angkang Stephen, Op.Cit,p.181.

<sup>42</sup> T.C Hodson, Op.Cit.,p.110.

Both terrace and shifting or *Jhuming* system of rice cultivation was practiced. Terrace cultivation was not practiced everywhere since it needed water for irrigation. *Jhuming* or shifting cultivation provided the bulk of the Naga tribal's sustenance. In this system of cultivation, certain areas of land were used for cultivation for a year and shifted to other areas the following year, leaving the previous one to remain fallow for fifteen to twenty years or so to recover its fertility. However an individual does not have the freedom to choose the site for cultivation, it involved the chief and village council. Chief along with the Hanga regulated the economic activities of the village and decides the dates, days of agricultural process such as selection of site for cultivation, felling trees, burning the fields etc. They fixed the date, days for festivals, the day for mass hunting and fishing, also announced the gennas in the village and strictly enforced them. Awunga was the functionary in charge of the agricultural rites of the village. Agricultural process beginning from seed sowing till the harvest was gathered in granary evolves rituals which were to be performed by the Awunga. As per custom, Awunga is the first person to sow seeds in the village to invoke Phunghui (goddess of crops) to grant bountiful harvest. In the process, a fowl was killed and its blood smeared on the seeds and the entrails (liver) of the chicken was offered for sacrifice. A person from each household gave their labour to assist in the seed sowing of the chief. The whole village sowed seeds after the chief had done so. Likewise, Awunga is the first to begin harvesting and even after grain was stored in the granary, he was the first to perform chumphaphanit or granary rituals. **One important feature which is practiced in Kabongram village is that any household who needs help for cultivation seek it through the Hanga by offering a pot full of rice beer. After the payment, Hanga directed all the village to assist that household in their agricultural work.**<sup>43</sup>

The village council was the custodian of the village fund. Every village had a common pool of grain collected from each household after the harvest. Each family was to make a voluntary contribution of one third of its paddy. The paddy so collected was kept in the village granary. This grain collected was kept for use in the rainy season to be distributed among the poor families who might not have sufficient food due to crop failure in a particular year.<sup>44</sup> The village council as the only administrative organ of the village, maintained village paths, ponds and also repaired them from time to time, constructed new paths, made bridges across streams or rivers. Moreover, the village council was also responsible for the maintenance of the grazing ground of the village and they also saw to it that no other villagers encroached on the village land. Maintenance of grave yard of the village was another notable feature of civic administration of the Hanga.

### **Tribal confederacies**

A village organization in the days of yore-when head hunting was practiced did exist. T.C Hodson writes about the organization in his book "The Naga Tribes of Manipur", From the

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<sup>43</sup>Awunshi Ningyon, Op. Cit,p.17.

<sup>44</sup> Horam M, *Social and Cultural life of the Nagas*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1977.p 82

evidence for the period immediately and approximately preceding British rule in Manipur, it is clear that the tribes in this area were in a state of constant hostility, but it is notable that there is no evidence of any tribal organization or of a combination except among the Luhupas or Tangkhuls who sent contingents from subject villages at the behest of the dominant villages.<sup>45</sup> However, it is not known when and how this came about. But it is believed to have been organized after experiencing a great and long hardship due to head hunting war amongst themselves, with the objective to prevent such troubles by establishing laws on head hunting war. It is clearly known that in their early days, life was very unsecure; there was always fear of losing one's life while in the paddy field, in the forest or on the way home. In fact the prevailing head hunting practice among them had been a great hindrance in the way of their being, particularly in economic life, for there could be no free movement anywhere outside the village gate. The result was that famines and starvation were heard of in these days. So after painful experience, they came together to organize some kind of body.

Such village organizations are known as Long in Tangkhul dialect. According to R.R. Shimray, there was no permanent secretariat; the general assembly (the Long) and the council of representatives consisting of a warrior from each village, are the only two organs of it.<sup>46</sup> Each village sent its representative to the Long, where important matters concerning inter-village relation, border dispute, extension of safe zone, raising of tribute from the smaller villages, head hunting laws etc. were discussed and decisions taken.

The most important function of the Long was the demarcation of the land by lines following natural ridges and streams around each village indicating war zones and safe zones. The war zones were known as "NGALEI KHAMOR" and safe zone as "LUIYAN LEIRAT".<sup>47</sup> In the war zone human heads could be hunted under the laws of the Long but in safe zones chopping of human heads was a crime, the breaker of such law was liable to be punished. The laws were strictly enforce. Anybody chased by enemies could not be killed once he entered a safe zone and if a head was taken from a safe zone, the individual or the village concerned was punished usually by declarations of general war by the combined forces of the neighbouring village. For the convenience of administration, the whole administrative area of the Long was divided into three administrative zones or units or Longphang, these were; Kasomkong, Shongva and Vara.<sup>48</sup> All these zones were responsible for judicial administration of their respective areas. Those matters usually inter-village disputes, which could not be settled by the zonal council, were referred to the combined Long called Longrei, whose decision was final. M. Horam writes, when a joint meeting of the three Longs settles disputes no village could refuse to abide by the decision or to re-open the matter.<sup>49</sup> Thus the combined Long (Longrei) was the supreme Long of the organization.

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<sup>45</sup> T.C Hodson, *The Naga Tribe of Manipur*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, Reprinted 1974, p.113

<sup>46</sup> Shimray R.R, *Origin and Culture of the Nagas*, Samsok Publication, New Delhi, 1985,p.100.

<sup>47</sup> T.Luikham, *Wung (Tangkhul) Okthot Mayonza*, Ukhrul, Manipur, 1961,p.113.

<sup>48</sup> Shmray R.R, *Op.Cit*,pp.102,103.

<sup>49</sup> Horam M, *Social and Cultural life of the Nagas*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1977,p.75.

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