

**INDIGENOUS RELIGION OF THE CHOTHE  
OF MANIPUR: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

By:

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**DECLARATION**

I, **Yuhlung Cheithou Charles** hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis is the record work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research award in any University/ Institute.

This thesis is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

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## 1. GLOSSARY

- Abai jek* – prohibition of yam plantation, a taboo observed on *Lamleh thoipa* ritual day.  
*Achoi* – yeast. Often use in fermenting rice-beers or liquor.  
*Achui rin* – post harvest festival (festival meant for the youths).  
*Ahang-Yuishom* - black praying mantis, the totem of *Mareem* or *Marim*'s clan.  
*Ahom rui* – the rope of a creeper plant, known as *heingang mare* in Meitei.  
*Ahu Lungsuk bung* - historical ancient settlement near Leimatak.  
*Ahu Saishakung* - abandon settlement of Chothe near Kangla, Imphal.  
*Ahu Tuisarung* – abandon settlement of Chothe around Tipaimuk area. Lit. ‘hot running water’.  
*Ahu Yangpalkung* - abandon settlement of Chothe, south of Imphal.  
*Ai-ari jan* - divination of chicken intestine.  
*Aihung* - the cock’s crow.  
*Aike /arke jan* - divination chicken’s leg.  
*Aire kung lam* - peacocks’ dance, performed during *Innampei rin* festival.  
*Ai-ring thapa lethoi* – exchange of soul ritual with a fowl.  
*Aishan* – turmeric, lit. red colour for the chicken.  
*Aithing* – ginger, lit. pure wood for the chicken.  
*Aithing jan* - ginger divination.  
*Ajong-pa* – male monkey.  
*Aju aek* - rat’s stool.  
*Akae aek* - goat’s stool.  
*Aku* – nine.  
*Amot* – banana.  
*Anam kokna lethoi* - purification ritual for the bad ominous sign. Casting of the smell to relief from the suppression.  
*Anliphon* – a kind of herb plant (*Spe. Sentila Asiatica*).  
*Annajek* – any vegetable.  
*Antui* - fermented bamboo shoot (*soibum* in Meitei) used as a delicacy in food items.  
*Angou* – white colour.  
*Apa* – man or male or father.  
*Apate /atun* – younger paternal uncle  
*Apu* – grandfather.  
*Apute* - younger maternal uncle.  
*Areng* – king.  
*Arrang* – paternal aunty’s husband.  
*Arrow (Airow) lethoi* - rite of roasting a fowl/chicken.  
*Arshrah jan* - dog or pig’s spleen divination.  
*Artui jan* - egg divination.  
*Arung* – stone.  
*Arung junpa* - shot put or stone throw (also known as *Tanghung lungthong*).  
*Asan* – red colour.  
*Asha-arung* - animal’s stone.  
*Ashai* - the singer or vocalist.  
*Ashang* - the respondent.  
*Ashei-asi* – taboo, forbidden from doing evil or death or wrong things.  
*Assain or Ashei* - assistant priest, one who guide in any ceremony.  
*Ashiem* or *tokana* - some money given to a priest/priestess for rendering his/her service.

*Asheipa* – prohibition or announcement of taboo on any village purification rituals.  
*Ashina sikan-ongpa* - the dismantling sitting ceremony of the youth or *Nungak-luthei bungkung*.  
*Ata sari* - seven brothers, related to a folktale of seven brothers.  
*Atan chom* - high jump.  
*Ateirpa* - elder paternal uncle.  
*Athem* – the appeaser, one who propitiates the deities.  
*Athi* – dead.  
*Athi-amang tampa* - offerings for the dead or ancestors.  
*Athi-chup ngei* – blood sucker or vampire, refers to witches.  
*Athi-la* - dead / funeral song.  
*Athi-lam* - land of dead, signifying Hell.  
*Athi tokana* - death's token or gift.  
*Athi tongthin* – instruction for the dead.  
*A-tun / a-pate* - younger lineage/clan's uncle (of paternal).  
*Aun-phui bu* – a herbal leave believed to reduce the High Blood Pressure (hBP) if eaten by boiling.  
*A-van or leihu arung* - heavenly or god's stone considered a talisman stone too.  
*Awa-ampi pun* – the main traditional shawl of the Chothe, meaning, 'bright motif'.

***Bakton*** – a long bean plant that have high medicinal values, known as *shamba* in Meitei.  
*Bakuk* - pieces of broken earthen pot.  
*Baibek* – a bird of Koel family.  
*Balei* - the most common winnows, having diameter of 2-2 ½ ft. in circumferences.  
*Bampui jairik hongpa* - youth coming to whole the night.  
*Bampui likhongni* - the guest or the proposal coming to stay.  
*Barei* – flat winnow.  
*Bhoot* - ghost or spirits.  
*Bu* – rice or food.  
*Buhu* - largest tray basket, generally having diameter of 5-6 ft.  
*Bulum* – a handful of cooked rice rolled.  
*Bambu* - deities of village gates or gods of four directions.  
*Bumoupa* - lit. loss of appetite or allergic to food.  
*Bungpi (abung)* - the pipal /peepul tree.  
*Butoi rin* - bread festival.

***Cacharis*** – refers to Bodo-Cacharis of Vaishnavists faith, who are locally known as *Mayang (Bengali)* meaning, 'black or dark face'.  
*Chaang/chang* – it means, matured or ripe or right side or odd number.  
*Cham pupa* - sword bearer, who acts as the god's child/son or guardian angel.  
*Chamtun* - hilt sword.  
*Chamtun lam* - sword dance, signifying victory dance perform during *Innampei rin* festival  
*Changchou* - a music instrument made of bamboo like harmonica a mouth piece.  
*Changrui* or *Hachari-noupong* or *Petai* - junior supervisor or information secretary among the council of elders units  
*Chapan thapa* - appeasement rite for minor illnesses. It means, sending a message in advance to gods.  
*Chawte - Shote - Zote - Chote - Chothe* derive from '*Kachokte* or *Kachoite* meaning, 'my Stirred / holding child.

*Cheiche* - the V-shaped bamboo stick placed along with meat chutney (*mashipoi*).  
*Cheijunpa* - the spirits or ghosts that throws a stick from a bushy place.  
*Cheitharol Kumpaba (Ch.K)* – the Court chronicles of Manipur (ancient manuscript)  
*Chiru* – an old-kuki tribe of Manipur, believed to have derived from the term *Chi-ngu* meaning, ‘salt thief’ initially referred by the Chothe.

*Ching leihu* - hill gods

*Ching-ngan/lang* – thatch plant, tall-stalked very woolly mullein with densely packed yellow flowers

*Chisai* – uncooked rice.

*Chithou* – sticky rice

*Chithou-ahang* - black sticky rice.

*Chithou-angou* - white sticky rice.

*Chithou-asan* - red sticky rice.

*Chongtak lak* - long jump.

*Chote munpi* – abandon settlement near Leimatak, Henglep sub-division Churhandpur district now occupied by new-kuki the Thadou speaking group.

*Chunpathin* - Almighty god or the God of the above.

***Dai*** – cymbal.

*Daishin* – mother of Pakhangpa, the elder daughter of the great Chothe chief Surou (Tarang or Nungkarakpa or Sanarakpa and wife Lenghoinu. She is also known as Kamlangtaopi or Thamoilempi or *Leinung Yabirok Yakha Channu* by the meitei.

*Deir* - longyi or dhoti (traditionally black in colour).

*Doi-ai* - placing or burying of a fowl. May be term as ‘imitative magic’. It means ‘someone has buried or placed or positioned or drop something imitative like image by sacrificing a fowl’ the objective being to dupe or deceived or inflict the targeted person with magical power.

***Fho*** – shield.

*Fho lam* - shield dance of a warrior in defense.

*Fho-parakpa* - shield movement or war dance.

***Ghalim*** - a headman appointed by every village themselves among Old-Kukis, an old term used by outsiders.

***Hachari-noupong*** or *Changrui* or *Petai* - junior supervisor or information secretary among the council of elders.

*Hachari-ull.in* or *Changrui* - senior supervisor among the council of elders unit.

*Haihru / laihu* – god.

*Hancha* – intermediate leader among the *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* (matured adults unit).

*Hau* – tribal or any hill people or tribes commonly refer by the Meitei or valley people.

*Heiruk keipa* - ‘to purchase gods fruits and sweets.

*Heloi* – witches or spirits considered elves of the seven sisters’ whose face and feet turns in opposite direction.

*Hikkai leiwa/mahei* – magic for splitting spell lovers or couple.

*Hithang* – junior leader among the *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* (matured adults unit).

*Hloukal* or *Phamnei-gei* – the ruling party or the village council members among the Christians villages.

*Hu-bungkung* - village council.

*Huipithoranga* – mythical Chothe cave, meaning, ‘the cave where the five men come out’.

*Huisem* - flute.

*Hulak* – Village chief.

*Hung* – drum.

*Hungchong lam* - the dance by holding the drum, performed during the *Theilhong* the merit or coronation feast.

*Hungdoi rin* (*Kriton* in Meitei) - special dead commemoration ceremonies, observed in memory of their ancestors.

*Hung matheipa* - tuning the drums.

*Hushapa* - village constructors, refers to the village deities of the four directions gods that guards the village.

***Ichang / ire-chang*** - a peacock’s feather.

*Idou* - wild turmeric.

*Imphal* – capital of Manipur, believed to have derived from tribal dialect “Inn-phai” meaning, big house in the plain or palace in the valley, subsequently it became as “Yumphai to Imphal” implying the same meaning.

*Innku / inku* – lineage.

*Innampei rin* – pre-harvest festival (festival for elders).

*Inn-chung ar-row* – roasting of chicken on the roof.

*Inn-ku la / Yaifuna la* - lineage song.

*Inn-thingkpa* - house purification ceremony.

*I-phung* - wild-ginger species.

*Iring thapa* – a ritual meaning, exchange of the soul with a fowl.

*Ishan jek* – prohibitions of turmeric plantation.

*Ishantui inpa* - drinking the turmeric juice.

*Ithing jek* – prohibitions of ginger plantation.

***Jai or yai*** – means, talisman or magical charm objects.

*Jai anpa* – divination, lit. consulting the talisman stone or crystal ball.

*Jairik hongpa* – staying for the night.

*Jaiitha* – sound sleep, meaning pre-scheduled of working in the field in rotation by turns.

*Jai sha-junpa* – divination, lit. looking at the talisman animal stone.

*Jangzu* - dried bark of a climber plant (*wangle*) used in making yeast (*achoi*).

***Kamhao*** - Sukte-chin group.

*Kamkeirang /akei* - Tiger.

*Kam-sabut* - an indigenous herb commonly use in treatment of malaria, gastroenteritis diabetes and cancer diseases.

*Kangshet* – woman’s waist strap.

*Kansuh Kanrung* – son of Makan man, who led out Chothe people from the cave.

*Kehom* – pineapples.

*Keirou thou* - rite for the purification of the family (for ancestors).

*Keirung-ulin* - senior rice manager or treasurer of the council of elder’s unit/house.

*Khaba-nganba* - probably Maring or Fhulum.

*Khamlang-Taopi* – Pakhangpa’s mother known before her marriage referred by valley people as a lady from the Kham or khampat area.

*Kharai* - package of a cooked meat curry.

*Kharam Leishok anganba* – the beautiful red flower given to Sunurembi by Pakhangpa as a

Token of his love, plucked from the abandon Kharam village gate during his expedition. The flower is now commonly known as *Sunurembi Toukhamlei* meaning, the forbidden flower of *Sunurembi* after a decree was announced prohibiting any commoner from wearing it.

*Khiyang/Khiang/Hiyang* – a clan, meaning, relief after parturition.

*Khok* – a kind of indigenous tree with small leaves.

*Khomnoubi lai* – appeasement rite for the immature young mother breast.

*Khongkap* - means, ‘foot pace or steps’ subsequently it became known as *Khongkhang*.

*Khongsai* – one of the clan of Thadou speaking group also commonly known as *Khongjai*.

*Khuman* – one of the royal clans of Meitei, predominantly found in Moirang.

*Khut chai* – means, witches with ‘stretching her hand/finger’.

*Khutchai mit or khutshei mit* – means, a witch with the ‘the eyes of a long hand’.

*Khutchei jum* – means, witches with a ‘pointed index finger’.

*Khut tang* – the length of a man’s elbow from the tip of middle finger.

*Khut-shei* - witches identified by ‘long hands’.

*Koi* - bangles (lit. round).

*Koikung* – means, centre of the universe (epicenter).

*Kom* – a tribe of Manipur.

*Konjai jaicheipa* - divination performed at the valedictory ceremony as a closing part of the festival.

*Konjai junpa* - coin or lead divination.

*Konjin Tuthokpa* or *Sentreng* – the Meitei mythical name for *Pakhangpa*.

*Korpa* – brass bowl man.

*Kuchu-leiham* - a kind of wild herb plant used as incense to dispel evil spirit.

*Kuki* – believed to have derived from DZO (Lushai) word, ‘Tui-Kuk’, for Tipperah (Sakchip) Tribe (Shaw 1929: 11).

*Kui-git* - piercing of the ear, a ceremony performed by the members of council of elders.

*Kum* – year.

*Kum tepa* - counting of the years.

*Kuptreng* or *Ashiba* – a Meitei mythical name for *Sanamahi*.

*Kwai* - beetle or areca nuts.

***La or laa*** – song or folksong.

*Laan* - carrying basket.

*Laander* - semi-hole basket.

*Laan-wang* - haversack basket.

*Lai /lei* – gods.

*Lai/rai* - navel cord.

*Lajek* – prohibition of weaving or starting a loom for a new cloth.

*Lam / Ram* - area/land, *lang* - bright, *hupi* - main village) which literally means, ‘the main/parent village on a bright area.

*Laimaton* – peak of *Loiching* or *Loijing* hills of the south western hill ranges.

*Laisana* – another name for *Pakhangpa*’s wife often referred by the Imphal people, meaning, queen (lit. god’s gold).

*La-lui angou* - white stream of thread.

*Laman* – dancing ground or open space in front of the sacred-grove or deities’ site.

*Lambu tupu* - means, ‘geographical or tourist guide’ or ‘officer-in-charge.

*Lamchel* – race.

*Lamkang* – a indigenous tribe of Manipur in the south side.

*Lamlanglon* – Ancient Chothe village meaning, ‘bright frontier land mound’.

*Lamleh thoipa or Panthong iratpa* – special ritual of the main entrance gate/ village road.

*Lamta* – month of February- March of Lunar calendar.

*Lamhel* - forest spirits that guard a particular forest area, commonly known as *Sarui-lamhel*.

*Lam-meithanpi* - fireball spirits.

*Lamthi* - means, died outside the village or in wildernesses.

*Lamthing lethoi* – means, purification rite of an area.

*Langkum* - a kind of porch or cache of a small basket where the small bamboo scrolls/sticks are kept hung.

*Langpan* – September in Meitei.

*Leibak* - comprises all the boys above 14/15 years who have already performed the initiation ceremony and inducted to the *Nungak-luthei bungkung*.

*Leibak manpa* - teenage or adolescence initiation ceremony.

*Leihu lamjai* – middle World or middle path on the way to the god’s land.

*Leihu mit* – witches synonymously identified as an ‘evil-eyes’.

*Leihu pottampa (Heiruk keipa)* - veneration of the village deity (Pu Lungchungpa).

*Leining* – woman’s headgear.

*Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chanu* - Pakhangba’s mother as commonly referred by the Meitei of Imphal area.

*Leirema (Leimaren)*- god of fertility, wealth and prosperity (house god).

*Leirum* – woman’s earrings.

*Lei-shei* - a typical witch that sticks out her red tongue beyond its length in her sleep.

*Lei-zu* – country liquor, used for commercial wine brewed by distillation process.

*Linglut* – woman’s blouse.

*Loh* – it has several meaning and it is use according to verb forms of the sentences. It means visit, gatherings or going in groups or burn.

*Lohchou-maichou* – merit feast. Lit. big gathering - big face, means, feast of status.

*Lomjui* – following the working group.

*Lomjui jaima* - middle group leader.

*Lomjui noupong* - junior group leader.

*Lomjui ulin* - senior group leader.

*Lomrui* – means, going together with the working group.

*Lomtun* – the family who host the festive.

*Loukhatpa* – a ceremony of complete acceptance of the marriage after giving the bride price by the boy.

*Lou-houpa* – a offering rite for the four directions gods of village deities, meaning, ‘throwing away of the medicine’.

*Loumi* – opposition party or farmers among the Christian villages.

*Lubak* – storage basket in Meitei.

*Lui-jand* - committing suicide by hanging.

*Luje* - man’s headgear.

*Lungchungpa* – refers to *Pakhangpa* the rain god or Dragon-python god, as the term, “Lu or Ru” means, ‘rain’, and “chung or van”, means ‘above’ and “pa” means, ‘father or man’ in Chothe. The layman also refers the Dragon-python as *Ruipi Shantai*.

*Lung-kang* – stone bed.

*Lungni* – this/that day.

*Lungnik* - tightly knitted winnow, has smaller holes compared to *Wai-wang*.

*Lungleh waishu* – Chothe historic settlement at Lungleh in Mizoram. *Lungleh* means, ‘plenty of rocks or stones’, and *Waishu* or *Warshu* means, ‘let it shine or prosper’.

*Lung-pi* - huge rocks.

*Luplak* - Assitant-chief.

*Luwang* – royal clan of Meitei, synonymous with Chothe *Thao* clan.

***Maan-loh*** – demand of bride price.

*Maan shipa* – giving of the bride price.

*Machampa* - neutralized.

*Maharani* – Queen in Meitei or Bishnupriya.

*Mahei jadu* - magical charm, lit. ‘fruitful or productive’.

*Mahei leiwa* - magical spell, lit. ‘Spell word by tongue’.

*Mai/ma* - north or front side.

*Maiba* – Meitei priest.

*Maibee* - Meitei priestess.

*Maichoupi* – one kind of merit feast, but identified with a ancient settlement.

*Makan* – a clan, meaning, one who stops the fight.

*Maksa* – means, ‘alliance or compatriot’, especially referred only by the wife’s lineage or clan’s brother or son-in-laws.

*Mamashi* - Human beings.

*Manrung* meaning, ‘payback the earnings.

*Mansum* – traditional term for bride price or dowry type.

*Mao* – a indigenous tribe of Manipur in the north.

*Mapi* – his/her grandmother.

*Mapu* – his/her grandfather.

*Maraampa* - the lot’s charm for the first selected name of the child.

*Mareem/Marim* – a clan, meaning, merry or happy.

*Maring* - a tribe in eastern side of Manipur, also known in olden days as *Poi* and *Fhalum*.

*Mashi* – chilly.

*May-tum* - meat chutney.

*Mee* - man or ordinary lay man.

*Meebo la* – song in commemoration of their ancestor’s name.

*Meekhut sem* - meaning, ‘magic prepared by someone else hands.

*Mei* - means ‘fire’ or ‘tail’.

*Mei-aek* – charcoal.

*Meingai* – *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* childhood’s nick name, commonly referred by only Chothe people.

*Meitei* – inhabitants of the valley of Manipur, as conglomeration of various tribes living in the valley Imphal (see endnotes of Chapter 3).

*Meishei* – fire/ torch stick (usually thatch stalks are bind and used as torch in olden days).

*Meishei huppa* – binding the fire/torch stick for the festival and other purposes.

*Mibola* - commemoration song for the head of the clan or the lineage’s i.e. ancestors, sung only during *Innampei* festival.

*Ming bohpa* - meaning, ‘naming of the child’.

*Mithun* – bison.

*Mit-trang* – magic, meaning, ‘fallacy in the eye’.

*Moipung* – big sea shell.

*Moirang* – one of the ancient principalities of Manipur, earlier known as *Kege-Moirang* (Chinese stock) dominated by Khuman clan.

*Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* – Literary accounts of the kings of Moirang.

*Moonah/kum* = ancient term for year in Chothe.

*Mouhulon* – an old name for Khongkhang village, derived from a bamboo species *Moupi*.  
*Mou-rui* - taking of the bride or a girl.  
*Mou-shem* – arrangement marriage /of a bride or a girl.  
*Muithidang/ Yuithidang* - tying and hanging the small bundles of each dog's meat according to the number of youths in a string.  
*Muithoi (artui)* – means, 'waking up the hairs', another method of egg divination.  
*Muipa zuron* – to tame with the wine.

***Nachung / nuku*** – chest/ breast.  
***Nashu*** - east (lit. direction in which the sun rises).  
*Nashu (Huru) Bambu* - the village deity of the east direction.  
*Nata* - west (lit. direction in which the sun sets).  
*Nata Bambu* - the village deity of the west direction.  
*Najui lam* - women folk dance, only girl dance in *bampui* or *Innampei rin* festival.  
*Neemjek* – prohibition of *Neem* (a kind of yeast plant) plantation.  
*Ngaibek* - winter bird.  
*Ngakha /maha* - small silvery fishes.  
*Ngaparum-Chingjin* - new-Cachar road near Kangpokpi.  
*Ngavok* – fish (dog fish), (*Sp.Channa punctatus*)  
*Ngoupok* - dried germinating seeds of the paddy used in making yeast (*achoi*).  
*Ni* - the Sun.  
*Nik* - a girl a traditional girl's longy or sarong.  
*Ni-nu* - the mother Sun (mythically symbolized the Sun as female).  
*Nimok-la* - devotional songs of Sun worship.  
*Ningthoujas* - royal clans of Meitei.  
*Nom-nompa* - limping ghost.  
*Numei* – woman.  
*Nu-ngak Luthei or Luther bungkung* - council of girls and boys/youths.  
*Nunghai laan* - back swinging carrier basket.  
*Nu-ngak loh* – serving three years marriage labour services in girl house.  
*Noupham* = placenta.  
*Noupham phumpa* - burying placenta.  
*Noukham butha/chathak* - food for the gods that block the placenta) to the Sun and Moon gods at the earliest.

***Ouk / ok*** – pig.  
*Ouk/ok manpa* - catching pig (meaning, hunting).

***Pai*** - haversack basket.  
*Pakhanglakpa* - *Tang-ngarinta* member chief in-charge of the youths.  
*Pamheide/Pamheiba* - 'forbidden to embraced or hold onto one's lap', in Meitei because he was considered an illegitimate child.  
*Pangal* - Meitei-Muslim.  
*Parpa* – a clan of Chothe, meaning, 'blooming'.  
*Pasek* - deep scar or mole.  
*Pena* - violin or sarinda.  
*Phei* - bow and arrows.  
*Phiren-lamta* - February-March.  
*Phambakpa* – the feast of coronation.

*Phamkeipa* - promotion ceremony designated to the *Urinta* and *Tang-ngarinta bungkungs* members.  
*Phamtakpa* – designating the political position of the newly appointee.  
*Phumpa* – buried.  
*Phung* – clan (not lineage).  
*Phungtanglam* - fine imposed against the breach of prescriptive marriage rules.  
*Pheiroi khapa* – ritual basket made on the ground for offerings, used on *Lamleh thoipa* ritual.  
*Phuirang* - hornbill, the totem of *Khiyang* or *Hiyang*'s clan.  
*Phiyung* – broom.  
*Pipa* - the eldest male member or head of the family or lineage's (*inku*) or clan's (*phung*).  
*Pingprou* - the swallow bird, considered as the totem of *Rangshai/Riangshai*.  
*Piepei* - a miniature of bamboo basket.  
*Pot-shem* - may be equated as 'contagious magic' meaning, 'things prepared'. It refers to any kind of object or edible things prepared by the priest or the desired person by spelling the magical charm on it for personal reasons.  
*Potshempa* – bride sending off ceremony.  
*Pumningpa* - ritual for the exchange of a soul. Lit. worship for the body, meaning, baptism.  
*Pun-junpa* - casting the cloth, a term used at the time of child naming ceremony.

***Ral-la*** - war song.

*Ral-thouna la* - the song to begin the war.

*Ral lu chouna la* – the song how one chop off an enemy's head during the war.

*Ral-rulna la* - meaning, the closing or finishing of the war.

*Rangi* - thatch grasses.

*Rangshai / Riangshai* – one of the Chothe clan.

*Rashi* - personality or charisma.

*Rengchangnu* = Cicada girl (*Hangi-ngorang* in Meitei).

*Rengchang* - one in charge of music and its instruments.

*Reng-lei* – king's flower, a herbal plant known as *langtharei* in Meitei.

*Rongmei* - Zeliangrong (especially refers to Kabui of southern Zeliangrong group).

*Rotcham* – bagpipe.

*Rui* – followers among the council of village elders.

*Ruicham* – bagpiper.

*Ruihong* – lit. bring in, a term used for the first initiation ceremony among any of the units.

*Ruishang* or *loishang* – bachelor's house or dormitory, where the followers or caretakers of the deities stayed.

*Ruikai* or *Luikai* -Tug-of-war.

*Ruipi lam* (python dance, a criss-cross circular group dance of the *Innampei rin*).

*Ruipi* – layman term for Dragon-python.

*Ru kokna lethoi* - rain invoking rite.

***Saamthanu*** – a lady with a beautiful hair.

*Sachou* – otter, the totem of the *Thao*'s clan.

*Sae-kup konjai* - small coins divination.

*Sakma lethoi* - cucumber or evil eye rite.

*Sakting* – northern side.

*Sala-atheir rin* - dead invocation ritual.

*Salam sari* - seven meat shares *samtrok* or *samtok* (spe. *Solanum Kurjii*).

*Sana* – gold.

*Sanamahi* - god of wealth.  
*Sanpan-lei* - leaves (plant of red fencing flower).  
*Saphei* – on the veranda side.  
*Sapu* - one in - charge of decoration).  
*Sarrnu /sheinu* – lineage younger sister.  
*Saram-ngaram* – the socio-religious custom of cutting the meat / fish in accordance to the formula and distributed equally as per the norms among the seven council of elders members.  
*Sataipa* – Hunting.  
*Sawai-zu* - husk rice beer (means prepared by adding paddy husk).  
*Selungpa* or *Keirung-noupong* - junior rice treasurer or accountant.  
*Sentreng* or *Konjin Tuthokpa* – the Meitei mythical name of *Pakhangpa* .  
*Shamla ming-shing* – the ritual to signify that the child’s hair has grown and his name is Cleanses.  
*Shang* – paddy.  
*Shanghong lethoi* – a ritual performed to accumulate paddy.  
*Shang-jaire* – paddy/rice of good health.  
*Shangjek* - a taboo, prohibiting rice plantation on *lamleh thoipa* ritualistic day.  
*Shang-koinu* - curve paddy.  
*Shang kokpa (Sabuhung)* - rite for the paddy/good harvest (agricultural ritual).  
*Shang-likte* - tiny paddy/rice.  
*Shang-maichamnu* - wrinkle paddy/rice.  
*Shang-ningshiton* – sweet fragrance /oily paddy.  
*Shang-phou-la* - paddy drying song.  
*Shang-rung* – a talisman stone that is believed to accumulate paddy (lit. paddy’s stone).  
*Sharu sipa* - lit. bone washing, or the ‘assimilation ceremony’ to be a valid permanent member /citizen of Chothe.  
*Shawai-zu* - fermented husk rice beer.  
*Shei* – a spear.  
*Shiam lethoi* - rite for malnutrition child.  
*Shimlenu* – Queen of the mother Earth.  
*Shirsim*, a kind of wild vegetable grown in the forest is considered the totem of Parpa clan’s.  
*Shomareng* – locust (locust king) the big and huge one.  
*Shuk* – pasta.  
*Shuk / Shei junpa* - javelin throw (in olden days Chothe used pasta for a javelin throw).  
*Shuksoi* – snail.  
*Shum* – gong.  
*Si* or *waie* - means, decay or death, or left side or even number.  
*Sire* or *Leikoi lam* - hand twisting dance of the boys normally around a bon-fire.  
*Sikan chei* – a special cane stick or baton meant to punished and beat the disobedient youth.  
*Sikang-la* – punishment song meaning the bench song.  
*Sikan-ongpa* - three boys showing their respect and gratitude (*thoukeipa*) at the end of the festival to their host and village chief for the sponsorship of the feast.  
*Siki* – horn.  
*Siki lam* – mithun (bison) horn dance, held during *Shanghong* festival signifying ploughing.  
*Soraren* – means, the Lion king. signifying the Sky or Sun god, in an ancient term.  
*Sumphai adon* - cloud shoots or dews.  
*Sunurembi/pi* – Pakhangpa’s wife address by the Moirang people.  
*Suttrai* - spirits of a woman or a child who died during parturition, means, crazy vagina.

**Tabun** – wrestling.

*Tai* - Storing basket.

*Tai-don* - plinth basket.

*Tairen* – a kind of plant.

*Tai-ten* - ‘farm hut or tent’. It derived from the ancient practice of making a basket (*tai*) in such farm huts.

*Tai-wang* - large holes basket.

*Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou* – Pakhangpa’s treaty in the south with Thokchao the eldest Angom prince near Bishnupur town.

*Tanghung-chang* - a leader among the leibaks who is in charge of sports.

*Tangkip* - the eldest son of *Zurung/yuhlung*, considered as the first chief or *Hulak* of Chothe.

*Tanglai-chang* – a leader among the leibaks who is in charge of decoration.

*Tang-ngarinta bungkung* - council of matured adults.

*Tangsha* – the senior leader amongst the *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* (matured adults unit).  
*Nungak-Luthei bungkung* (youth).

*Ta-shan* - bamboo strap divination.

*Tastepata* - Cinnamomum tamala.

*Thamoilempi* – Pakhangpa mother’s name after her marriage, often referred by the Moirang people instead of Khamlang taopi.

*Thanidam* – the mythical wife of *Kachokte/Kachoitte*. Lit. ‘the moon and the sun are alright’.

*Thangwai atengba* – means, ‘the aided man of King Thangwai Kongding, a common name of Pakhangpa referred by Moirang people before he became the king.

*Thangvan-rengpa* - Heavenly King/ God.

*Thangting* – south or back side (*santhong* in Meitei).

*Thangvan lam* – Land of God, signifying Heaven.

*Thawai* - soul / spirits.

*Thawai kokpa* – a ritual of calling of the soul /spirits.

*Tha-tepa* - counting of the months.

*Thakna* – tobacco.

*Thangting* or *Hute Bambu* – village deity of the southern direction.

*Tha-pa* - the Moon (often mythically taken as a male).

*Thao* – a clan, meaning, fats or oily.

*Thao-lum* - oil manufacturer.

*Theel-hongpa* - a merit feast thrown by a rich villager in order to attain social position and status in the society by erecting monolith as a sign of posterity and God’s blessing.

*Theichang* - fig fruit.

*Thei-chura* or *shuru* - goose-berry.

*Theilhong* - dead commemoration ceremony.

*Theimpi* – priestess.

*Theimpu* – priest.

*Theimrui* - followers of the priest.

*Theinompa* - the ghost who hurl granule or shakes fruit trees.

*Theinou* – mango.

*Theipi mashipoi* - chutney of wild apple leaves.

*Theipong* – jack fruit.

*Theiru* - beads of a rare fruit seed wore as necklace.

*Theirang ampa* – gastric or gastritis.

*Theirupok* - a kind of apple like fruit an extremely sour.

*Theithui* – lemon.  
*Theithum* - mandarin oranges.  
*Thi-duh* - ‘remembrance of the dead.’  
*Think* – sticks.  
*Think-bompa* - literally ‘assemblage of the scrolls or sticks.’  
*Think keirui tamae* - shall we roll up the scroll sticks back.  
*Think-tumpa think-tepa* ceremony meaning, taking down and counting the scrolls sticks i.e. the assignment of council’s political portfolios.  
*Thirsu* – blacksmith.  
*Thlan* – cemetery.  
*Thoipithoi (Thi-duh)* – a ritual for the ancestors.  
*Thong-git* - piercing of the spinal cord, a ceremony among the *Urinta bungkung* (council of elders) members.  
*Thoukeipa* - formal courtesy act of saying thanks giving to the village chief and assistant-chief or host of a feast by the *Tang-ngarinta* and *Nungak-Luthei bungkung* members.  
*Tingtricknu* - elf or witch that lived around thick bushy or stream areas.  
*Tlaan-chom neilah* – marriage by elopement.  
*Tokana* - fee for the service rendered.  
*Tolaihong* – carrying of the palanquin to the new appointed king or chief.  
*Tongjei Maril* – an old-Cachar road in Bishnupur area leading to Tripura and Bangladesh.  
*Tongkaipa* – a simple rite or prayer, meaning, stretch or pull the words or spell the word.  
*Tong-theina* – means, ‘to develop speaking’ a part of the child naming ceremony.  
*Tongthi gitpa* – a ceremony of inserting the wine pipes just before the festival begins.  
*Tongthi-lashukpa* - removing the wine or bamboo pipes from the jar/pot after the festivals.  
*Toukhamlei* - the beautiful red flower of Kharam commonly known as *Sunurembi*  
*Toukhamlei* (the forbidden flower) after a decree was announced by Pakhangpa prohibiting any commoner from wearing it in honour of his love for Sunurembi.  
*Tui* – water.  
*Tuichum loipa* – Lit. Visiting houses where the water (meaning rice beer/wine) is filtered. A custom of visiting each member of council’s house to relish or taste their rice-beers or wine and acknowledge the best wine of the year during *Innampei* festival.  
*Tuihumpa lethoi* – water purification ritual, a ritual performed when a man died unnaturally.  
*Tui leihu* - water gods/deities.  
*Tui-pathein* - water god.  
*Tuishak-chang* - a leader among the leibaks who is in charge of water.  
*Tui-thoipa (Tuikuk- thingkuk)* - rite for the water/river gods and goddesses.  
*Tuituk lethoi* - the water discovery rite.

***U-chikte*** - a kind of small brown bird is considered as the totem of Yuhlung’s clan.  
*Umang lai* - forest god.  
*U-marok* - king chilly in Meitei.  
*Ui chup lethoi* - rite for physical retardation or dog sacrifice.  
*Ui or Ok athin jan* - dog or pig’s liver divination.  
*Urinta bungkung* - council of elders.  
*U-sil lethoi* - exchange of the soul with a fish (dog fish = *ngamu*).  
*U-sil lethoi* – a ritual meaning, exchange of the soul with dogfish’ performed in the water.  
*U-tang* – a kind of bamboo plant species, meaning, ‘matured wood’.  
*Utong* - long bamboo pipe or cup with one side open.  
*U-um* – a bottle gourd.

**Wai-wang** - loosely knitted winnow.

*Wanchei* – refers to Meitei, an ancient term of Chothe to mean foreigners or outsiders.

*Wangle zu* – liquor brewed by yeast made of wangle bark, from a creeper plant.

*Wari* – story or tales.

**Yaifuna la / Inn-ku la** - lineage song.

*Yairitha rin* – post harvest festival known as *Achui rin* or *chultuk rin* or *butoi rin*.

*Yangpal kung* - cactus plant.

*Yulung/Yuhlung /Zurung/Zulung* – a clan, meaning, intoxicated with wine.

**Zu** - wine, it refers to any kind of wine or rice-beers.

*Zuchom leizu* – bottle gourd used as wine pot.

*Zuchom lakpa* - snatching the wine pot from a pole.

*Zujong ulin* - senior wine in-charge.

*Zujon noupong* - junior wine in-charge.

*Zu-ngou* - white rice beer.

*Zurung/Zulung/Yulung/Yuhlung* – a clan, meaning, intoxicated with wine.

*Zurum* – a tradition of serving wine after each *tongkaipa* or a prayer or simple rite.

*Zupai* - Wine manager.

*Zupai* - wine manager.

*Zu-ting* - fermented cooked rice beer.

*Zutui shutpa* - extraction of wine.

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## 2. CHOTHE CALENDAR

### 2.i Chothe Sakap or Lunar calendar of Manipur (Meitei)

Sl.n o	English	Chothe tha/thla (moon)	Meitei tha (moon)	Periods of Sakabda calendar in English months
1	January	<i>Kumthou tha</i>	Phairen	Jan. 21 – Feb. 18
2	February	<i>Aoal tha</i>	Lamta	Feb. 19 - March 20
3	March	<i>Tuitum (first month)</i>	Sajibu (first month)	March 21 - April 20
4	April	<i>Sangphun</i>	Kalen	April 21- May 21
5	May	<i>Lou tha</i>	Innga	May 22 - June 21
6	June	<i>Shangpum tha</i>	Yingen	June 22 - July 22
7	July	<i>Wan tha</i>	Thawan	July 23 – Aug. 23
8	August	<i>Ahom tha</i>	Langpan	Aug. 24 – Sept. 22
9	September	<i>Shirkal tha</i>	Mera	Sept. 23 – Oct. 23
10	October	<i>Asik/ Asek tha</i>	Hiyangei	Oct. 24- Nov. 22
11	November	<i>Abo tha</i>	Poinu	Nov. 23 – Dec. 21
12	December	<i>Achan tha</i>	Wakching	Dec. 22 – Jan. 20

*Note: The months of March – April is generally considered as the first month of the year because this is the spring season where new leaves sprout and flower began to bloom indicating a new life. There is also a particular indigenous flower associated with it. But the*

actual counting of the first day of the year or spring season began from the first full moon night subsequently following the lunar calendar or the Sakap-da.

## 2.ii Days of week in Chothe

Sl.no	English	Chothe	Meitei
1	Sunday	<i>Thimni / Solhakni</i>	<i>Nongmaijing</i>
2	Monday	<i>Athouni</i>	<i>Ningthoukaba</i>
3	Tuesday	<i>Leishemni</i>	<i>Leibakpokpa</i>
4	Wednesday	<i>Insakni / Insemni</i>	<i>Yamsageisa</i>
5	Thursday	<i>Ahaini / aseipa</i> (forbidden day)	<i>Sagolsen</i>
6	Friday	<i>Tuiti (Tui atiya)</i>	<i>Irai</i>
7	Saturday	<i>Asuni / Thinsu (asuni).</i>	<i>Thangja</i>

## 2.iii Seasons in Chothe

English	Chothe
Spring	<i>Noudon tha</i>
Summer	<i>Asha tha/ Kalen</i>
Autumn	<i>Buken tha</i>
Winter	<i>Phirbi/adai tha</i>
Rainy season	<i>Tuituk tha</i>

## 3 Directions in Chothe

Sl.no	English	Chothe	Meitei
1	East	<i>Nasu</i>	<i>Nongpok</i>
2	West	<i>Nata</i>	<i>Nongchup</i>
3	North	<i>Sakting</i>	<i>Awang</i>
4	South	<i>Thangting</i>	<i>Kha</i>

## 4 Equivalent nomenclature terms of clans in Chothe with Meitei

Sl.no	Chothe clan/ lineages	Meitei clan/ Salai
1	<i>Khiyang / Hiyang</i>	<i>Ningthouja</i>
2	<i>Yuhlung/Yulung</i>	<i>Mangang</i>
3	<i>Makan</i>	<i>Angom</i>
4	<i>Mareem/ Marim</i>	<i>Khuman</i>
5	<i>Thao</i>	<i>Luwang</i>
6	<i>Parpa</i>	<i>Kha-nganba</i>
7	<i>Rangshai</i>	<i>Sarang-Leisangthem (Chenglei)</i>

## 5 Name of the colour in Chothe

English	Chothe	Meitei
Red	<i>Ashan</i>	<i>Angangba</i>
Blue	<i>Adum</i>	<i>Hegouk</i>
Green	<i>Adik</i>	<i>Ashanba</i>
Yellow	<i>Aeng</i>	<i>Hangampal</i>
Black	<i>Ahang</i>	<i>Amuba</i>
White	<i>Angou</i>	<i>Angouba</i>

Light green	<i>Dikchom</i>	<i>Sang</i>
Maroon	<i>Shandor (ashan-ahang)</i>	<i>Ei -machu</i>
Grey	<i>Thimdo</i>	<i>Uot-machu</i>
Violet	<i>Hangshan</i>	<i>(Meikhet machu)</i>
Pink	<i>Shandor</i>	<i>Chandol</i>

## 6. Numerals counting in Chothe and Meitei

English	Chothe	Meitei	English	Chothe	Meitei
1	<i>Akha</i>	<i>Ama</i>	20	<i>Somni</i>	<i>Kun</i>
2	<i>Ani</i>	<i>Ani</i>	30	<i>Somthum</i>	<i>Kunthra</i>
3	<i>Inthum</i>	<i>Ahum</i>	40	<i>Somri</i>	<i>Niphu</i>
4	<i>Inri / Inrih</i>	<i>Mari</i>	50	<i>Somranga/langa</i>	<i>Yangkhei</i>
5	<i>Ra-nga/ La-nga</i>	<i>Manga</i>	60	<i>Somruk</i>	<i>Humphu</i>
6	<i>Aruk</i>	<i>Taruk</i>	70	<i>Somsari</i>	<i>Humphudra</i>
7	<i>Sari</i>	<i>Taret</i>	80	<i>Somret</i>	<i>Marphu</i>
8	<i>Aret</i>	<i>Nipan</i>	90	<i>Somku</i>	<i>Marphudra</i>
9	<i>A-ku</i>	<i>Mapan</i>	100	<i>Liha</i>	<i>Chama</i>
10	<i>Asom</i>	<i>Tara</i>	1000	<i>Lising-akha</i>	<i>Lishing ama</i>
11	<i>Asom-akha</i>	<i>Tara-mathoi</i>	10000	<i>Lishing asom</i>	<i>Lishing tara</i>

## 7. Parts of body in Chothe

English	Chothe	English	Chothe
Head	<i>Lu/ lukuk</i>	Thumb	<i>Khut-pi</i>
Hair	<i>Saam</i>	Index finger	<i>Khut-chei</i>
Eye	<i>Mit</i>	Middle finger	<i>Khut-jai</i>
Nose	<i>Natung</i>	Ring finger	<i>Khutningthou</i>
Ear	<i>Nakui</i>	Small finger	<i>Khut-te</i>
Teeth	<i>Haa</i>	Leg	<i>Kay</i>
Lips	<i>Nei</i>	Feet	<i>Kay-pha</i>
Mouth	<i>Baou/ Mui</i>	Knee	<i>Hok-bu</i>
Neck	<i>Hong</i>	Thigh	<i>Phai / kaytoi</i>
Shoulder	<i>Lengkou</i>	Stomach	<i>Wong</i>
Hand	<i>Khut</i>	Buttock	<i>Doop</i>
Arm	<i>Bhaandto</i>	Chest	<i>Taang</i>
Palm	<i>Khut-pha</i>	Back side	<i>Tiing</i>
Forehand	<i>Khut-naam</i>	Heel	<i>Kaytong</i>
Finger nails	<i>Khut-ting</i>	Calf	<i>Kayrai</i>
Finger knots	<i>Khut-tang</i>	Bone	<i>Saruu</i>

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Pic. 1 H. Thambaljao (village chief), Y. Tomalsing (assist-chief) and Th. Jatra singh (host of the festival) of Lamlanghupi



Pic. 2 Structure of Chothe Village Council Court's (*Hu-bunkung*)



Pic. 3 Village priest on its way to the deities' site for benediction ritual.



Pic.4 Village priest performing *Konjai* divination (Th. Nabadip)



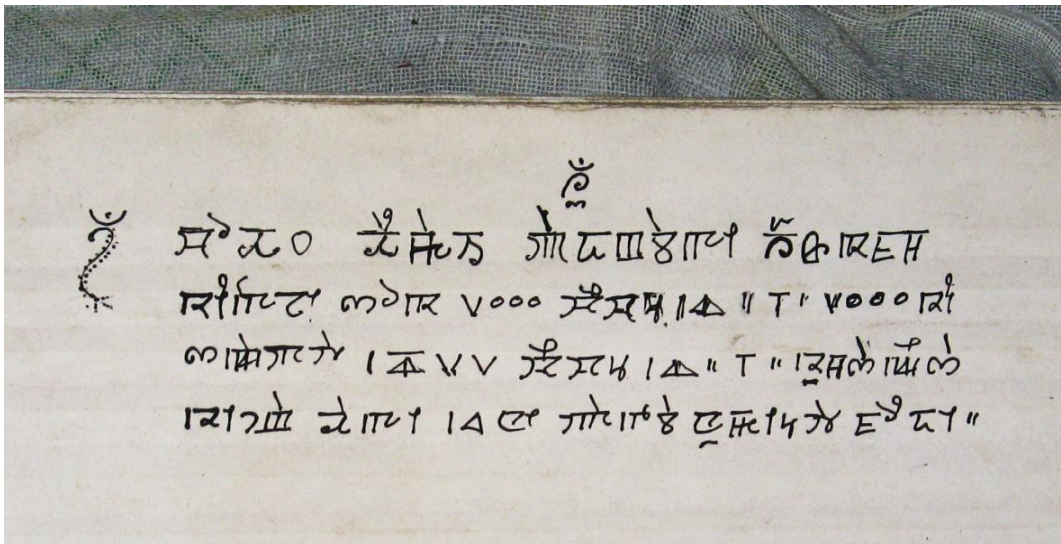
Pic. 5 Pu Lungchungpa (Pakhangpa) sacred grove/deities' site, Lamlanghupi Bishnupur



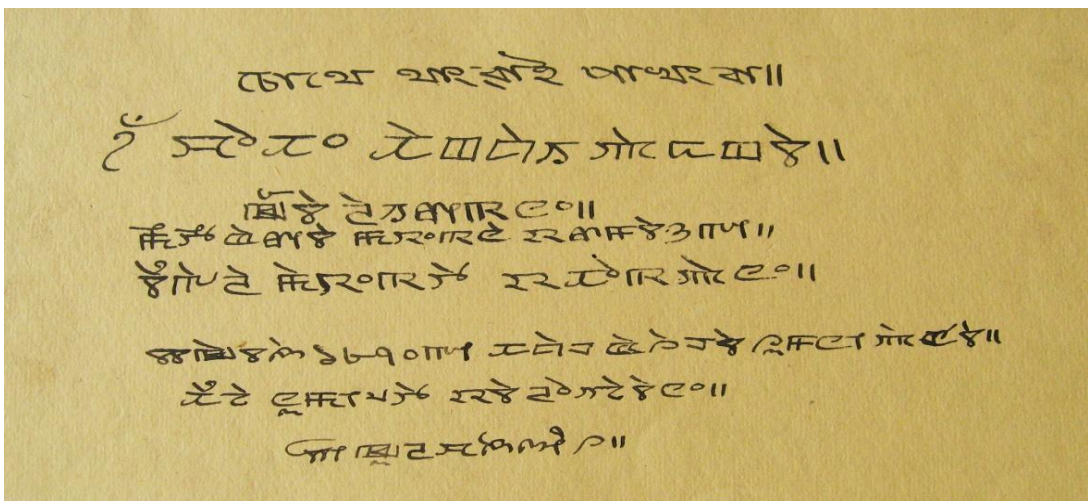
Pic.6 The symbolic position of three political houses i.e. *Urinta*, *Tangngarinta* and *Nungak-luthei bungkungs* at the sacred grove site represented by a trees and stones



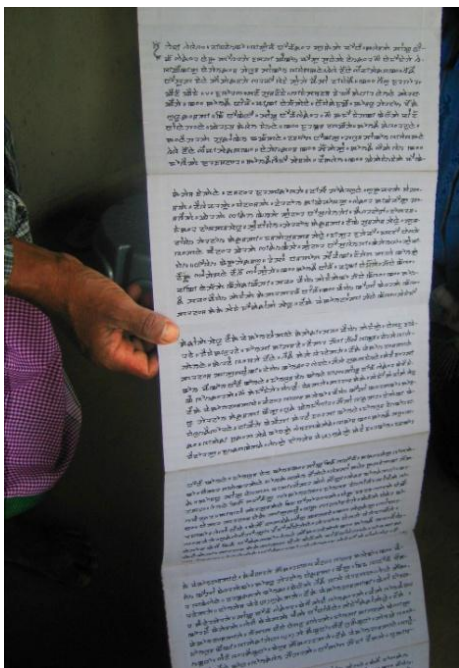
Pic. 7 The iron plate of a decree given by King Chingthang khompa (18<sup>th</sup> century)



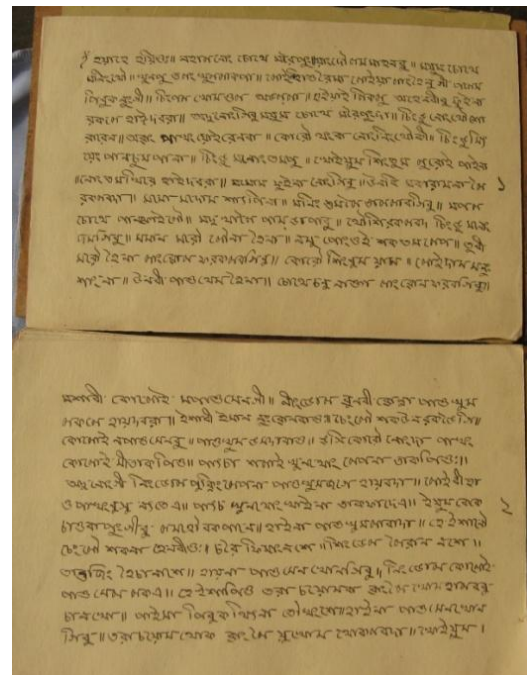
Pic. 8 The cover page of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* (CTP) the sacred manuscript in ancient Meitei script (mayek)



Pic.9 The cover page of *Chothe Thangmei/Thangwai Pakhangpa* (CTP) the abridge sacred manuscript in Bengali script



Pic.10 The CTP sacred manuscript in ancient Meitei mayek



Pic.11 The CTP manuscript in Bengali script



Pic.12 The box containing sacred relics



Pic.13 King's ear rings, iron plate, iron rods, forceps (2)



Pic.14 Sacred archaic materials (King's beetle nut forceps, gong, CTP original manuscript, jars, knives, swords, rods, etc.



Pic.15 The village two stones (Thanghung Lungthong), (Huchong)



Pic.16 Talisman stones (*Asha alung* of Roushi)



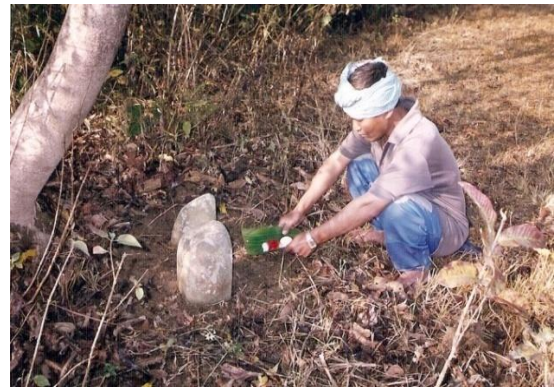
Pic.17 Manipuri queen's ear-rings  
(*Maharani Leima sana leilum*)



Pic.18 Yanggeir and Lungthun maythanu necklaces related to the folktale



Pic.19 Chothe child's naming ceremony  
(priest M. Puhonglung)



Pic. 20 Priest performing rite at the north  
*Bambu* deity



Pic.21 *Tuituk rin* people washing their face and feet of *Innampei* festival



Pic.22 *Fho parakpa* (Merachou in traditional shield dance)



Pic.23 Preparing indigenous bread (*butoi*) for *Achui* festive (Th. Khamte)



Pic.24 Youths (Y. Ranjit and H. Roshan) collecting indigenous bread (*butoi*)



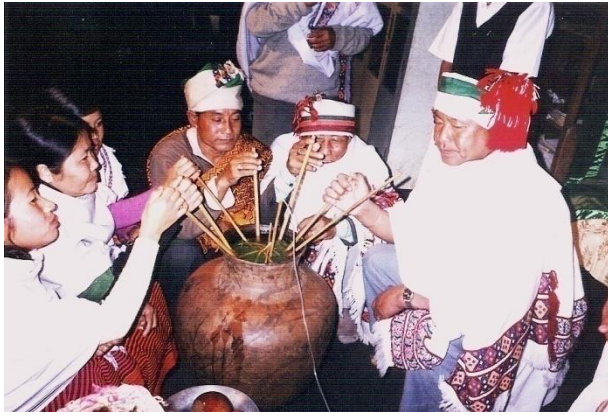
Pic.25 Village chief (Thambaljos) performing *Tongkaipa* with *tongthi* (wine pipe)



Pic. 26 Village priest (Merachao) performing ritual for *bambu* deity (*chapan thapa*).



Pic.27 Three youths performing the *thoukeipa* ceremony to the village chief and elders



Pic.28 *Sikan ongpa* ceremony



Pic.29 Inspection of drum sound (*Hung - metheipa*) ceremony



Pic.30 Lamlanghupi girls in traditional attires  
(*Innampei rin* 2006)



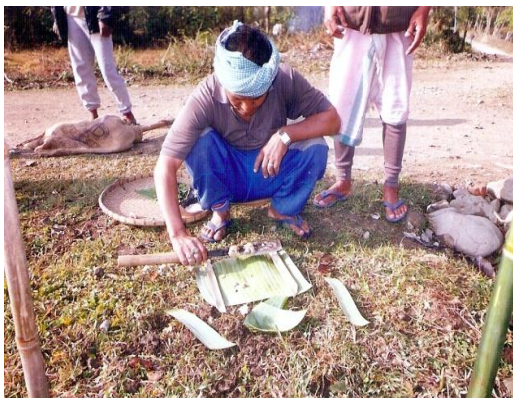
Pic. 31 Children in traditional attire (2006)



Pic. 32 Appeasement rite for directions deity



Pic.33 *Pheiroi khapa* (M. Kundo)



Pic.34 Ginger divination before the ritual



Pic.35 Sacrificial act of a dog, *Lamleh thoipa*



Pic.36 Dog's spleen divination of *Lamleh thoipa* ritual



Pic.37 *Lamleh thoipa* (hanging of dog's head upwards)



Pic.38 Village elders returning after *Lamleh thoipa*



Pic.39 *Think bompatepa* ceremony



Pic. 40 *Tuituk lethoi* (Tomalsing and Kundo)



Pic. 41 *Anam kokna* ritual



Pic. 42 Indigenous liquors (*leizu*) and rice beer (*zutin*) in the pot



Pic. 43 *Muithoi* ritual (Y. Leingam of Leininghu)





Pic.44 Roushi performing *Tuithoipa* ritual



Pic.45 *Tuithoipa* offering (Roushi and Pouti)



Pic.46 Traditional funeral ceremony  
(H. Khumanthopi 12-12-2006)



Pic.47 Christian funeral ceremony  
(Mk. Peter Ziontlang 6-5-2007)



Pic.48 Corpse put inside traditional stretcher



Pic.49 Traditional grave design (coffin ready for corpse)



Pic.50 *Athi lethoi* (dead ritual at the grave)



Pic.51 Ritual items for the dead



Pic.52 Yuhlung-pu monolith (*theilhong*)



Pic.53 Mareem-pu Monolith (*theil*)



Pic.54 M. Wailum and K. Khetrichou of Khongkhang



Pic.55 Leikhamchao and wife Tharaklei



Pic. 56 Ajouhu village elders



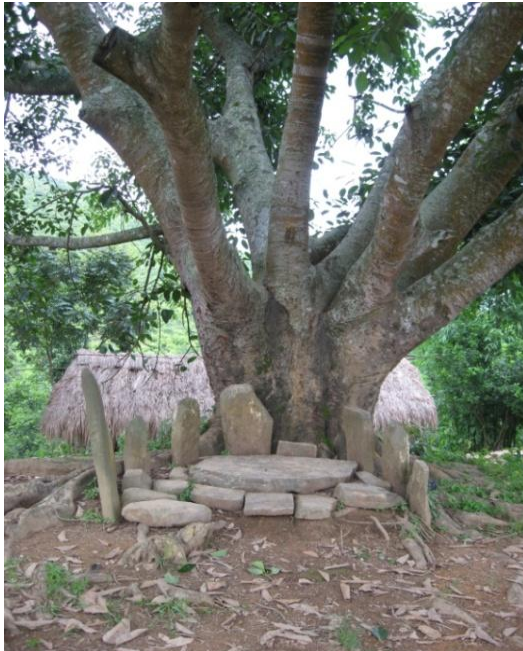
Pic. 57 New-Wangparal village elders



Pic.58 *Lungshun alung* (The cutting of stone)



Pic.59 The site of bachelor house (*ruishang*) of Tampakhu



Pic.60 Ancient village court (*Sikang lambai*) of peepal tree (*a-bung*) New-Wangparal



Pic.61 Abandon peepal tree or aneent village court of Old-Wangparal



Pic. 62 Y. Hongpa of Lamlanghupi



Pic.63 Mk. Neilut and wife Y. Lungnem



Pic.64 Men singing with their drums in Achui rin Pic.65 Women audiences Achui rin



Pic.66 Lamlanghupi youths dancing (*Chamtun lam*) during Achui rin festival 2007



Pic.67 Young girls serving termeric juice



Pic.68 Women/girls singing *Tamparai laa*



Pic.69 M.Shangkurei and Th.Chongnu preparing husk rice beer (*sawai zu*)



Pic.70 Indigenous method of brewing and distilling liquor/ alcohol (*leizu*)



Pic.71 Youth preparing cow for meat.



Pic.72 Chothe men cooking meat for feast



Pic. 73 Leininghu Christian women's organisation 2006



Pic. 74 Khongkhang Christian women's organisation 2006



Pic.75 Leininghu girls in traditional attires 2006



Pic.76 Chumbang youth (Machong and Philo)



Pic.77 Khongkhang youths 2006



Pic.78 Ajouhu women



Pic. 79 The south-eastern view of the ridge of abandon Ajouhu (Purum Khullen) village visited by T.C. Das in 1933-35 see Fig.16, (1945: p.77)



Pic.80 The panoramic view of Loktak Lake and the western hills from the eastern hill of abandon Ajouhu (Purum Khullen)



Pic.81 The replica picture of abandon Ajouhu village visited by T.C. Das in 1933-35 of Fig.16, (1945:p.77)



Pic.82 Author with elders at the abandon Ajouhu deity site (*Pu Lungchungpa*)



Pic.83 Pr. Vincent, Pr. Wailum and Herachao



Pic.84 Prokila weaving in traditional loom



Pic.85 Indigenous spinning machine (*Mui*)



Pic.86 Bamboo shoot (*antui*) fermenting



Pic.87 Author with respondents who are making winnows (*barei*)



Pic.88 Traditional bride price (*Manshipa*) ceremony of Khongkhang



Pic.89 *Chamtun* (hilt swords)



Pic.90 Bow and arrows (*Phei*) with the chest



Pic.91 Collection of old coins



Pic.92 *Lekhai, barei* (winnow), *Shangphai, leithang* rice baskets and *buhu* big winnow below (clock wise)



Pic.93 *Shei* and *shangkai*, fishing net and cloth basket (clock wise)



Pic.94 Traditional musical instruments (*Hung, shum, siki, shumte, ruishem* and *muishem*).



Pic.95 King's shawl (*Rengpun*) and scarf



1. Awa-ampi



2. Phurup lamhor



3. Chouchun



4. Rengam bushun



5. Leirum tongkap



6. Thalrungir



7. Yuikechun



8. Purum pal



9. Achoi-aam (a)



10. Achoi-aam (b)



11. Sheipikhup



12. Tangthum

Pic.96 Chothe men's shawls (*apai-pun*)



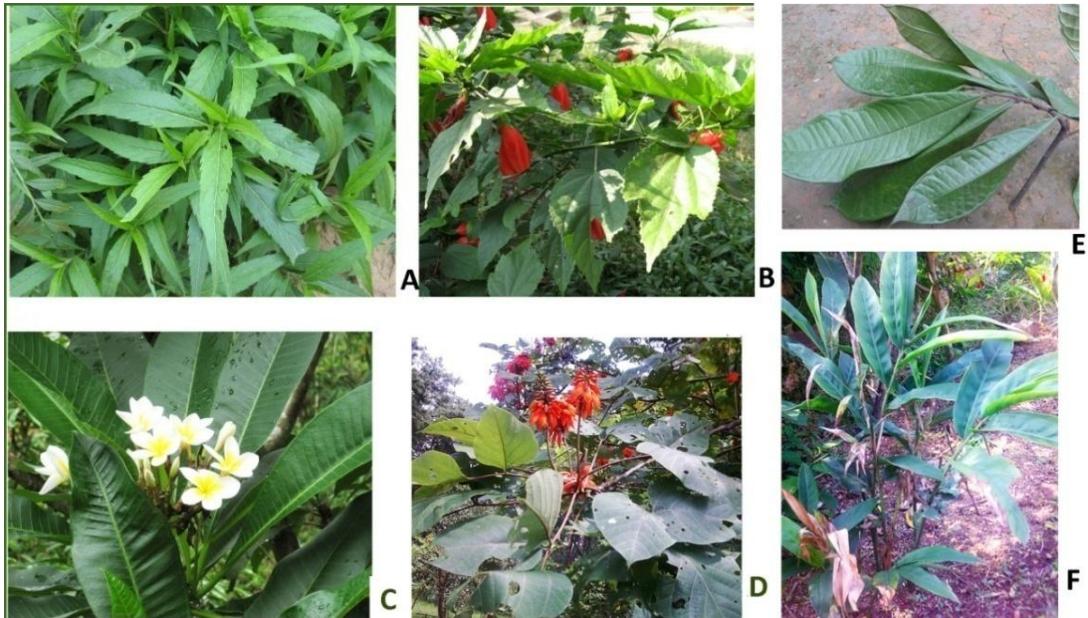
Pic.97 Men's headgear (*Luje*)



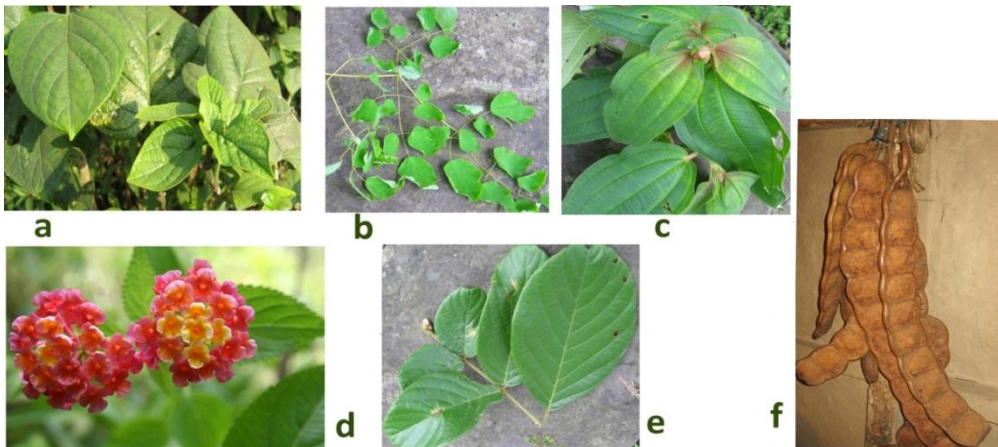
Pic.98 Chothe traditional dresses or sarong (*nik*) for women



Pic.99 Chothe modern attires for women



Pic.100 Ritual flower plants (A) *Renglei* (Langtharei in Meitei), (B) *Leisan*, (C) Keke lei, (D) Korou, (E) *Kuchu-leiham* leaf and (F) *Idou* (ginger species)



Pic.101 Herbal medicinal plants (a) *Anphui*, (b) *Thalictrum Foliosum* (d) *Aring* (*shampan lei* in meitei), (f) *Bakton* seed



Pic.102 Vishnu temple, Bishnupur



Pic.103 Kangla fort gate, Imphal, Manipur

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 The Study of Religion: Definition

Religion, which is a matter of belief and practice, is a universal social phenomenon which seriously concerns almost every living man. Generally, religion is understood by many as a belief in the Supernatural power or the Supreme Being and their relationship with the nature that surrounds them. Man, being a social animal, is also, therefore, considered a religious being. Religion is also accepted as one of the strongest sources and means of social control. It is considered as one of the earliest institutions of mankind and is found in all the societies of the past and present. Scholars from the different disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnology, Theology and Philosophy conceptualise the elements of religion in their own context; as a result there is no single uniform theory or definition on religion. Besides, religion being one of the earliest institutions is also one of the oldest subjects in human history that is taught and is most widely spread and universally discussed at many levels. Numerous scholars have explained the origin of religion from different perspectives and some of the approaches are discussed below, but let us first look into the definitions given by these scholars.

The term religion carries a different meaning for different people. Ronald L. Johnstone puts it in this way, “The English word ‘Religion’ has a Latin root, i.e. ‘*Religare*’ meaning, ‘*to bind together*’ (suggesting the concept of a group or fellowship)”, (1961: 7). Therefore, because of the richness and variety of the subject matter, opinion and understanding differ in theoretical conceptualization. Emile Durkheim in, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) conceptualised religion as a dichotomy on the basis of social facts by studying of the indigenous Aborigines of Australia and arrives saying that “religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories of beliefs and practices”, the first being the ‘states of opinion’ in the representation of the mind; the second ‘determined modes of action’ which is the practical side of life” (1915: 36). Durkheim’s religious concept is focuses on the importance of the Aborigine’s ‘totem’ a symbolic representation of their clan or society where he sees nothing in the practical meaning of the rites and rituals; rather he believes that it is in the sacredness of the totem that the rites and rituals are practiced to reinforce their group cohesion and solidarity which is seen to be the expression of collective consciousness (ibid.: 37). Accordingly he states that “religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities” (ibid: 10). Therefore, he claims that, all known religious belief

systems, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic that presupposes a classification of all the things as ‘real and ideal’, into two classes or opposed groups designated by two distinct terms or words — ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’ (ibid: 37). Thus, Durkheim gives one of the most convincing definitions of religion as:

*“A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them”* (1915: 47).

Durkheim’s religion is focused on the dichotomy of beliefs and practices (rites) embodied in the objects of the sacred and profane which is generally accepted as the essence of all religion, irrespective of whether being a simple or complex society. Universally, belief is an aspect of a powerful conviction upon something, a conviction that has the potential and capacity to create a strong faith. Hence, belief is understood to be the manifestation of conviction; faith and values consecrated in the sacredness of the object that is revered and honoured with adoration. For example, the Arc of the Covenant, sacred texts like the Gita, Quran, Bible, etc., besides these, there are also some objects considered to have endowed with certain power and having certain indispensable values for an individual or society, that have been conceived as sacred, like totems: bear, crow, tiger, beaver, etc. According to Durkheim, anything which is not sacred is ‘profane’. So, we see that no society or culture is completely free from the elements of sacred and profane and hence, the treatment of sacred things differs from one culture to another but generally honouring sacred things or objects may involve simple to complex religious activities or rites and rituals, for some they may be an obligation carried out in the form of certain socio-religious norms or moral principles.

According to James G. Frazer, “Religion is a belief in a power superior to man, which is believed to direct and control the course and nature of human life” (quoted from Rao 1990: 446). Elizabeth H. Nottingham, on the other hand defines it from the perspective of emotional and sentimental attachment of the traditional practices of the past as the determining criteria for religious belief. She says, “Religion is for many people so much an affair of the heart, so often inexplicable even to themselves, so coloured by their own special feeling for the particular belief and ceremonies that have become sacred to them through long association” (1971: 4). Another view closer to the above definition given by Malcolm Hamilton is that “Religion is seen to be the product of psychological factors inherent in all human beings and on the other it is seen as providing support for social values and social stability” (2001: 133). He believes that religion originates from the mind out of fear and security for the group cohesion guided by the moral principles of

social values to stabilize the social system. Considering the above given definitions and many others that are excluded here shows there is no consensus among them. As Lucy Mair states, “anthropologists have always agreed on the importance of the practice, but their treatment of the beliefs has been very different at different times” (1972: 211). Therefore, on the above statements Roger A. Johnson combines all the elements of religion into one aspect and states that “Religion is an extremely complex phenomenon. It encompasses beliefs and doctrines, myths and rituals, sacred scriptures and cultic objects, and the manifestation of transcendence in these many aspects” (1973: 9).

On the other hand, religious practices are all aspects of religious behaviour which is characterised by peculiar acts or practices, observances and performances executed under the umbrella of religion, such as moral principles or morality, socio-religious norms, ceremonies, magic, rites and rituals, taboos, superstition, etc., where the believers consider it an obligation or feel indebted to it for their life as they have faith in it.

In this study the term “indigenous” and “tribe” are used as interlinked conceptual terms for identification and description as both the terms in application are argued as true for the Chothe. The most cited description on the concept of the indigenous is given by Jose R. Martinez Cobo, the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on “Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities” of the UN.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this, B.K. Roy Burman says that there are two definitions widely accepted in the international parlance on ‘Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ that are contained in ILO Convention 107 of 1957 and ILO Convention 169 of 1989 (1994:15-16). However the recent “Workshop on Data Collection and Dissaggregation for Indigenous Peoples” organised by United Nations (UN) in New York, from 19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> January 2004, presented one of the most simplified working definitions of the indigenous, which reads as:

*“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system”.*<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, some equivalent terms used for indigenous peoples are: aborigines or aboriginal peoples, native peoples, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, first peoples, first nations and autochthones. The confusion between the terms ‘tribes’ and ‘indigenous’ is also explained by Virginius Xaxa who says, tribes are groups of communities living

outside civilisation free from the administrative socio-political organisation so also the indigenous are considered more of the native tribes of the place (1999: 1393).

### **1.1 Brief Profile of the Chothe**

Chothe is an indigenous tribe inhabiting in the state of Manipur having its own distinctive indigenous religion, socio-cultural, economic and political institutions. The Chothe have been classified as an *Old-Kuki Tribe* by the British Political Agents like J. Shakespeare (1912), McCulloch (1859), R. Brown (1873), T.C. Hodson (1904), and Greirson (1904) in the Linguistic Survey of India (L.S.I.) on account of their “early migration to Manipur” (Ansari 1991: 14). The Chothe have been notified as one of the 29 recognized Scheduled Tribes of Manipur by the Government of India on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1956. Ansari has categorized the Chothe as a *very small tribe* of Manipur comprising of only 0.58 % of the total tribal population in the state (Ibid.: 58). The Census of India, 2001 gives the total population of the Chothe as 2675 with a literacy rate of 72.35 %. They are concentrated in two districts of Manipur i.e. Bishnupur and Chandel respectively. However, they are divided into three groups or zones based on their village agglomeration viz.; a) Western, b) Central Clusters and c) Eastern groups (Basu 1985: 38). According to K.S. Singh there are only 2.85 % of the Chothe total population who still follow their indigenous religion and 8.59 % have not stated their religion as opposed to 88.50 % who are all Christians now (1994: 225).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem of the Study**

The Chothe since time immemorial believe that they are the descendants of *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pu Pakhangpa* the mythical Dragon-Python God as their Supreme Principal Guardian God. They also believed in the cosmic Heavenly and Earthly Gods i.e. *Thangvan rengpa* and *Shimlei rengnu*. They considered that *Pu Pakhangpa* is the avatar or Divine-incarnate of *Pu Lungchungpa* and therefore revered and worshipped Him. It is believed that the God *Pakhangpa* is a horned serpent possessing a supernatural power to transform himself into anything like, stone, tiger, dog, human being and even take human birth at any time and place (Naorem 1991: 104). British political agents like McCulloch, Hodson, Shakespeare and other scholars have stated in their ethnographies and books that the Chothe worship several gods like *Lungchungpa*, *Pakhangpa*, *Soraren*, *Sanamahi*, *Leima*, *Chungpathin* and *Tuipathin* in addition to a host of other gods and goddesses. Among the above deities *Thangvan rengpa* or *Soraren* have been treated as Heavenly God, while *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa* as God on earth (Yuhlung 2002: 6). They also

believe in life after death and reincarnation, besides being riddled by myth, legends, superstitions, omens, taboos, magic, rites and rituals, folklores, animistic beliefs and practices. These factors contribute to the making of Chothe indigenous religion which is considered as polytheism; constituted by several animistic and cosmologic beliefs and practices. It can also be considered as a pre-literate religion, since they have no written scriptures of their own like many other tribal religions of North-East India (Sen 1993: 23).

The Chothe indigenous or pre-literate religion is now on the verge of extinction because a majority of them have converted to Christianity and just a handful of Lamlanghupi Chothe still practiced their indigenous faith. Despite, being very small in number, they seem to perform many of their socio-religious activities accordingly. But some of their beliefs and practices are seen to be symbolically represented and observed for the sake of observance due to multiple factors. The crux of the point is that there is not much work done on this subject matter for which reason this research work was undertaken to explore and examine and document the age old indigenous religion. Some scholars have written on different subjects on this community but there has not been any in-depth and comprehensive work undertaken on this aspect. On the other hand, the reason why this study is felt to be necessary is because when most of the tribals of Manipur or North-East are said to have lost or are losing their indigenous religion, it is significant that the Chothe still retain their indigenous religion although confined to just a minority of the population. The significance is that along with this religion, traditional features still find relevance in their continuity despite considerable changes within the system. Therefore, there is a dire need to re-construct and record the Chothe indigenous religious beliefs and their socio-religious practices of the past from the existing system that is enduring even today before it completely disappears. Moreover, there seems to be a close similarity and connection between the Chothe and Meitei belief system which is obscure, this has also been somehow reflected in this study. All these factors and the dynamics of change pose a challenge and generated a strong fascination and an academic interest to study this community intensively and extensively.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The basic objective is primarily devoted to the study and documenting the Chothe indigenous religion in relation to their beliefs and practices. It also aims at understanding the phenomenon of their indigenous religion by examining their myths, rituals, festivals, superstitions, social and religious taboos, folklore and folk culture, etc., which are in practice even today. On the other hand, the study also focuses on some factors and

influences that are responsible for weakening their indigenous religion. The study is basically exploratory and descriptive in nature, which is expected to bring out further details about the Chothe indigenous religious beliefs and practices over and above existing information, whereby this effort, it is hoped, will serve as a future reference and benefit those interested in religious studies.

The basic objective therefore, is to study the gamut of the Chothe indigenous religion from the contemporary perspective.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

The study is basically exploratory and descriptive in nature, and is based on qualitative data. Therefore, the bulk of the data is the empirical findings gathered by participatory observation, extensive interviews and interview scheduled techniques which are carried out both in the forms of a structured and an unstructured manner among 200 individuals consisting of religious heads, village elders, senior citizens, youth leaders and lay members during field work. The universe of research consists of twelve (12) villages confined to Bishnupur and Chandel districts of Manipur, over which the Chothe population is spread out into the three village agglomerations as given above. Since, the followers of the indigenous faith are less in number, the extensive interviews and interview scheduled are also conducted among the Christian group of people who are mostly recent converts i.e. especially among the village elders, senior citizens and lay members who still have vast knowledge about their indigenous beliefs and practices.

For comparative analysis, we also refer to various secondary data in published and unpublished books, manuscripts, journals, newspapers, thesis, dissertations, village and church souvenirs, booklets, etc., which immensely provide deeper insight in understanding the Chothe indigenous socio-religious history from the perspective of their beliefs and practices which have helped to direct and shape the development of the present study.

A brief profile of the respondents' backgrounds may also be summarised. The table 1(i) shows that out of a total of 200 Chothe respondents interviewed, both followers of indigenous faith and Christians, there are exclusively 40 (i.e. 20%) followers of the indigenous faith with 24 males and 16 females, and 160 (i.e. 80%) are Christian with 134 males and 26 females belonging to different Christian denominations from different Chothe villages. The table 1(i) shows that the majority of the Chothe respondents are Christians, irrespective of denomination, indicating that a majority of the Chothe population has already been converted to Christianity and only a handful of them continue to cling on to their age-old indigenous faith at the present time. These Christian

respondents were taken into consideration because many of them still have the traditional knowledge as many are recent converts. The 200 respondents comprise of different age-groups who are religious heads, village elders, village leaders, senior citizens, youth leaders and lay members, both male and female, irrespective of religion. Their responses vary from the simple to the complex depending on the questions asked, where some could provide good answers while others could not. It is also found that individuals of similar age groups shared similar opinions because of their experiences.

**Table 1(i) Distribution of Chothe respondents by faith**

Religion	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
<i>Followers of the Indigenous faith</i>	24	16	<b>40</b>	<b>20%</b>
<i>Followers of the Christian faith</i>	134	26	<b>160</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 1(ii) Distribution of Chothe respondents by gender (male/female, both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

Category	Followers of the Indigenous faith	Followers of the Christian faith	Total	Percentage
<i>Male</i>	24	134	<b>158</b>	<b>79%</b>
<i>Female</i>	16	26	<b>42</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

In considering the distribution of male/female respondents of both the followers of the Indigenous faith and Christians, there are a total of 158 (i.e. 79%) males and 42 (i.e. 21%) females which indicates the male ratio is almost triple that of the female respondents [see Table 1(ii)].

On the criteria of the Chothe socio-political structural system or classification as shown in Chapter 3 under *Political Institutions*, the researcher has broadly divided the respondents into three age-groups viz.; (1) Youths (*Nungak-luther*), (2) Mature adults (*Tang-ngarinta*) and (3) Village Elders (*Urinta*) by taking their socio-political standard age-groups as 20-40, 40-60 and 60-100 years respectively. According to the Chothe socio-political and structural system the youth (*Nungak-luther*) generally fall within the age-group of 15-40 years and are generally considered unmarried individuals comprising of mostly students and youth leaders. The second group is generally taken by them as mature adults or married individuals within the age-group of 40-60 years that have already had certain experiences in their lives and are called *Tang-ngarinta* (mature adults) comprising of village leaders, political leaders, senior citizens and lay members. They are the intermediate group between youths and village-elders as they form the bridge of social bonding between the two polar groups of the young and old. The third group called *Urinta*

or village elders consist mostly of village elders, religious heads, senior citizens, retired or aged political leaders and old lay members of the community.

Although the initiation age of Chothe youth starts from 14-15 years, for this study the researcher has taken the minimum age of the respondents as 20 years since they are accountable to the questions asked. An interval of five (5) years has been used from 20-25 onwards till 100 years [see Table 2(i)].

**Table 2(i) Distribution of followers of indigenous faith respondents only by age-group**

Age-groups (Interval)	Frequency		Category	Indigenous faith		Total	Percentage
	male	female		male	female		
20-25	2	5	Youths ( <i>Nungak-luther</i> )	10	8	18	<b>45%</b>
25-30	7	3					
30-35	-	-					
35-40	1	-					
40-45	1	-	Mature adults ( <i>Tang-ngarinta</i> )	6	6	12	<b>30%</b>
45-50	-	-					
50-55	2	3					
55-60	3	3					
60-65	3	-	Village elders ( <i>Urinta</i> )	8	2	10	<b>25%</b>
65-70	-	1					
70-75	2	-					
75-80	1	-					
80-85	-	-					
85-90	-	1					
90-95	1	-					
95-100	1	-					
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2(i) shows that out of 40 exclusive respondents of followers of the Indigenous faith, 18 (i.e. 45%) belong to the youths (*Nungak-luthei or luther*) with 10 males and 8 females, 12 (i.e. 30%) are mature adults (*Tang-ngarinta*) with 6 males and 6 females, and the third group of village elders (*Urinta*) comprises 10 (i.e. 25%) respondents with 8 males and 2 females respectively. The data indicates that there are more youth respondents than mature adults and village elders.

**Table 2 (ii) Distribution of followers of indigenous faith only by male/female**

Category	Followers of the Indigenous faith	Percentage
<i>Male</i>	24	60%
<i>Female</i>	16	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

In considering the male/female distribution of the followers of the indigenous faith only, there are more males 24 (i.e. 60%) and females 16 (i.e. 40%) with males exceeding by 20% [see Table 2(ii)].

In considering their age-groups, both followers of the Indigenous faith and Christians of Lamlanghupi, out of a total of 62 respondents there are 30 (i.e. 48.38%) who belong to the youth group, 17 (i.e. 27.41%) mature adults and 15 (i.e. 24.19%) village elders. Table 3(i) shows there are more youths compared to the other two age-groups.

In the distribution of male/female of Lamlanghupi respondents only the [table 3(ii)] indicates that there are more males with 38 (i.e. 61.29%) than the female respondents with 24 (i.e. 38.70%) as the males were more responsive to questions.

**Table 3(i) Distribution of Lamlanghupi respondents only by age-group (both followers of indigenous faith and Christian)**

Age-groups	Indigenous faith		Christians		Total	Percent age
	male	female	male	female		
Youths ( <i>Nungak-luther</i> ) between 20-40 years	10	8	9	3	<b>30</b>	<b>48.38 %</b>
Mature adults ( <i>Tang-ngarinta</i> ) between 40-60 years	6	6	2	3	<b>17</b>	<b>27.41 %</b>
Village elders ( <i>Urinta</i> ) above 60 years	8	2	3	2	<b>15</b>	<b>24.19 %</b>
	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>22</b>		<b>62</b>	

**Table 3(ii) Distribution of Lamlanghupi respondents only by male/female (both followers of indigenous faith and Christian)**

Category	Followers of indigenous faith	Followers of Christian faith	Total	Percentage
<i>Male</i>	24	14	<b>38</b>	<b>61.29%</b>
<i>Female</i>	16	08	<b>24</b>	<b>38.70%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4 Distribution of Chothe Christian respondents only by denomination**

Denominations	Youths (20-40) years		Matured adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percentage
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>		
Chothe Baptist Church Association (ChBCA)	23	10	32	4	18	1	<b>88</b>	<b>55%</b>
Catholic (RC)	12	4	7	4	6	1	<b>35</b>	<b>21.87 %</b>
Evangelical Free Church of Independent (EFCI)	9	-	17	-	7	1	<b>34</b>	<b>21.25 %</b>
Independent Church of India (ICI)	2	-	1	-	-	1	<b>4</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
	46	14	57	8	31	4	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>		<b>65</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

The Chothe began converting to Christianity in 1938, the first village being Leininghu. Ever since, the process of evangelization has gained momentum among the people and continues in the region even today. Out of a total of 2675 Chothe (COI-2001), more than 88.50% are now Christian while the rest are Hindus and followers of the indigenous faith. The Christians have various denominations and as a result a tribe or a village may have more than one denomination at a time. There are four denominations among the Chothe viz. Chothe Baptist Church Association (ChBCA), Roman Catholic (RC), Evangelical Free Church of Independent (EFCI) and Independent Church of India (ICI). Distributing 160 Christian respondents by denomination, there are 88 (i.e. 55%) who belong to ChBCA, 35 (i.e. 21.87%) Catholic, 34 (i.e. 21.25%) EFCI, and 4 (i.e. 2.5%) ICI respectively. The data indicates that the number of Baptist respondents is more than the other three denominations because Baptist churches exist in almost all the Chothe villages [see Table 4].

**Table 5(i) Village wise distribution of Chothe respondents by age-group (both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

Age-groups	Lamlangupi (Indigenous faith)	Lamlangupi (Christians)	Ayuphu	Tamuphu	Olad-wan	New-wan	Chumwan (Purum)	Khandwan	Chhandwan	Zion	Lein	Chhant	Chhand	Salm	Lung	Lung	Total	Percentage
Youths between 20-40 years	18	12	2	5	2	3	5	6	2	5	4	1	-	10	-	3	<b>78</b>	<b>39%</b>
Mature adults between 40-60 years	12	5	5	5	7	3	8	10	3	5	3	1	3	3	2	2	<b>77</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
Village elders above 60 years	10	5	3	6	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	-	3	2	-	<b>45</b>	<b>22.5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

The Table 5(i) the village-wise distribution of all the Chothe respondents by age-groups irrespective of their faith; both followers of the indigenous faith and Christianity shows there are 78 (i.e. 39%) youths (*Nungak-luther*), and 77 (i.e. 38.5%) mature adults (*Tang-ngarinta*), and 45 (i.e. 22.5%) as village elders (*Urinta*) respectively. This table gives more detailed information about the number respondents according to their village.

Table 5(ii) shows the distribution of male/female ratio of the Christian respondents only on the basis of their age-groups in which there are 134 (i.e. 67%) males and only 26 (i.e. 13%) females indicating the high ratio of male to female respondents. The reason why more male respondents are considered is because the researcher finds them more accountable to the questions asked as most of the females shy away due to ignorance.

Table 6, distribution of educational qualification of Chothe respondents, shows that out of 200 respondents the number of under-matriculation or drop-outs comprises the maximum number with 66 (i.e. 33%) among the literate groups. This is followed by Matriculate individuals with 45 (i.e. 22.5%), Pre-university or class-XII passed with 41 (i.e. 20.5%) and 31 (i.e. 15.5%) Graduates and only 1 (i.e. 0.5%) Masters Degree holder from the Lamlanghupi village. The number of illiterate respondents comprises only 16 (i.e. 8%). Looking at the overall figure, indicates that the literacy rate of Chothe is high but the percentage with higher education declines as the degree goes higher. The reason is probably because of social or economic backwardness and other factors.

**Table 5(ii) Distribution of Chothe Christian respondents by male/female**

Category	Youths (20-40) years	Mature adults (40-60) years	Vill. elders above 60 years	Total	Percentage
Male	46	57	31	<b>134</b>	<b>67%</b>
Female	14	8	4	<b>26</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 6 Distribution of education qualification of Chothe respondents (both followers of the indigenous faith and Christians)**

Education qualification	Lamlanghupi (Indigenous faith)	Lamlanghupi (Christians)	Ayuphukh	Tamuphukh	Old-Wanganal	New-Wanganal	Chumbar (Purum)	Khangan (Pung)	Changan (Pung)	Zon	Linn	Chonthe	Chonthe	Salmeh	Lung	Lung	Total	percentage
Illiterate	3	2	-	3	1	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	<b>16</b>	<b>8%</b>
Under-matric	8	7	4	7	7	6	1	7	1	1	2	1	1	9	1	3	<b>66</b>	<b>33%</b>
Matric	6	2	1	3	1	1	6	8	2	5	3	-	1	4	1	1	<b>45</b>	<b>22.5%</b>
Pre-univ XII std	13	7	3	1	1	1	5	-	1	4	1	1	-	1	1	1	<b>41</b>	<b>20.5%</b>
Graduate	9	4	2	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	-	<b>31</b>	<b>15.5%</b>
PG/Master degree	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>01</b>	<b>0.5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 7, the village-wise distribution of occupation of 200 Chothe respondents both followers of the indigenous faith and Christians shows that the number of farmers comprises maximum respondents with 70 (i.e. 35%) signifying they are mainly agriculturists followed by students with 40 (i.e. 20%). The third in rank belongs to the self-employed (Business and other allied activities) individuals who stay at home with 26 (i.e. 13%), followed by government employees (both state and central) with 25 (i.e. 12.5%), and house wives comprise 24 (i.e. 12%). The rest of the respondents were pastors and reverends with 10 (i.e. 5%), and the private-school teachers 5 (i.e. 2.5%).

**Table 7 Village wise distribution of occupation of Chothe respondents (both followers of the Indigenous faith and Christians)**

Occupations	La ml ang hu pi (In dig eno us fait h)	La ml an gh up i (C hr ist ia ns )	A y o h u k h u	T a p a k h u	Ol d- W an gp ar al	N e- w- W an gp ar al	C hu m ba ng (P ur u m )	K h o n g g a n g	C ha ra po to (P a hu n t u g	Z o n g l a n g	L e n t h n g h u o u	C h a n d o n k p i	S a l e m t h a r	L u n g h u	L u n g l e h	Tota l	perce ntage	
Farmers	5	7	4	8	7	5	5	6	2	4	2	1	2	5	3	4	<b>70</b>	<b>35%</b>
Govt. employees	7	4	3	2	-	-	3	2	2	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	<b>25</b>	<b>12.5 %</b>
Private- teachers	2	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>05</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
Self- employed	3	1	-	1	2	1	3	4	-	1	4	1	1	3	1	-	<b>26</b>	<b>13%</b>
Pastors	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	2	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>10</b>	<b>5%</b>
Students	15	3	2	3	-	3	3	1	2	2	2	1	-	2	-	1	<b>40</b>	<b>20%</b>
House wife	8	5	-	2	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	<b>24</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100 %</b>

### 1.5 Chapterisation and Key Issues of the Study

The whole thesis comprises nine chapters, broadly divided into three sections. Chapter One, Two and Three introduces the objective of the thesis, the tribe “Chothe” in the study and its institutions. Chapter Four, Five and Six describes: Chothe mythology, belief systems and their practices, while Chapter Seven and Eight constitute the subordinate description related to the core of the thesis, where Chapter Nine form the conclusion.

Chapter one discusses the definitions of religion, statement of the problem, objective of the study, research methodology, chapterisation and key issues, the confusion of the Chothe and Purum tribes, theoretical formulation, and a general view on religion.

Chapter two introduces the Chothe in brief. It begins by describing the geographical location of the Western Chothe, Central cluster Chothe and Eastern Chothe respectively. Their historical background like the genesis of the Chothe, migration, demography (Factors and consequences leading to de-population; assimilation, natural calamities, wars and battles, low selection potential of mates) are also discussed. War and battle involved in the past, literacy and the influence of neighbouring tribes to the Chothe are also briefly stated.

Chapter three discusses the Chothe institutions of kinship and marriage; political and economy that have changed from simple to complex over the past hundreds of years. It describes how the Chothe endogamous prescriptive matrilineal cross-cousin marriage system is being slowly replaced with the exogamous cross-cultural or inter-tribal marriage system as they prefer to marry girls from outside their community. It discusses the Chothe political system in which the age-old traditional gerontocratic form of government is practiced in the Lamlanghupi village only and how the rest of the Chothe villages follow an elective form of village administration. It also explains how agriculture, the main occupation and the primary source of their economy is changing from the traditional to modern mode, since many are now found employed in Govt. services either in the secondary or tertiary sectors while others are engaging themselves in private entrepreneurships.

Chapter four, which is the core of the study, discusses the Chothe mythology in relation to the Chothe genealogical myth and the legend of Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa. The Chothe genealogical myth describes their world view, its creation and the origin of their religion and socio-cultural systems in an evolutionary manner. The Chothe indigenous religion like many other religions of the world describes that Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa is the avatar or Divine-incarnate of their Supreme Guardian-God *Pu Lungchungpa* who is also regarded as the mythical Dragon-Python God that represents the Almighty God on earth according to the traditional belief.

For this analysis various manuscripts like the sacred manuscript *Chothe Thangmei (Thangwai) Pakhangpa* and several other literatures like *Cheitharol Kumpaba, Moirang*

*Ningthourol Lambupa* are being referred besides the Chothe oral history. It suggested that Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa and Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa, the first historical king of Manipur is one and the same person born of a Chothe girl. The confusion about Pakhangpa's identity and his genealogy is prevalent even today because of the inferences in the later historical writing by various local scholars and also because of the naming system of the people of Manipur inhabiting the state. To substantiate the evidence of the above statement various analytical issues are discussed in the chapter like Pakhangpa's mother's identity, his romantic relationship with his wife Sunurempi and his political relationship with other great leaders of his time like Thangwai Khongding, Puleiromba, Luwang Langmeiba, etc.

Chapter five describes the Chothe religious belief system that is considered as polytheistic, comprising elements of cosmologic, naturalistic, animistic and totemic, although they acknowledge the existence of one Supreme God. It discusses that they also believe in a host of other lower gods and goddesses. It also emphasises that they believe in the re-incarnation (re-birth) and considers that every animate object has a soul. It also discusses about the concept of three worlds: the Land of God, the Land of the Dead and the Middle or the temporal world. It also describes about their relationship with various totemic objects like some of the American Indians, as each Chothe clan is associated with a specific totem like an animal, an insect or a plant. It also describes various types of superstitions and taboos.

Chapter six discusses about the Chothe religious practices. It focuses on the whole procedure of the "rites-de-passage" that comprises of various rites and rituals and ceremonies from birth to death. Special emphasis is also given on death and other death related ceremonies which has deep socio-religious significance.

Since the Chothe rites and rituals, and ceremonies are of varying degrees which begin from simple to complex or from minor to major ceremonies in this regard, an attempt has been made to classify them on the basis of its importance and seriousness.

The Chothe practices different types of magic like - imitative magic (*Doi-ai*) and contagious magic (*Pot-sem* or *Kut-sem*). They consider that unlike today magic was commonly practiced in olden days however, the influence it has had on the society has been discussed in this chapter. The types of witch and witchcraft are also stressed. Since the Chothe believes in a variety of talismans, amulets and fetishes the manner of usages are discussed. The Chothe performed various types of divinations (*Tasanpa*) in almost

every minor or major rites and rituals according to the severity problems or sicknesses. In this regard, a detail discussion on the nature and its significance is given in this chapter.

Chapter seven describes the two types of festivals in details at the same time brief discussions on the folk culture of the Chothe are presented. Festivals are an indispensable component of the socio-cultural and religious aspects of a community. In olden days the Chothe celebrated one or two festivals almost every month. But now only two major festivals are celebrated in a year viz. (1) *Innampei rin* and (2) *Achui rin*. These festivals are important to be considered because the community's belief systems, socio-religious and cultural practices are derived from them. The Chothe now seldom performed merit feast (*lohchou-maichou*) unlike in the past that was once commonly organized in order to gain social respect and prestige in the society due to various reasons. Some of the merit feasts are discussed in the chapter. The interface between the Chothe culture and tradition with that of the so called modern culture is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter eight discusses the various factors responsible for the decline of the Chothe indigenous religion. The indigenous religion of the Chothe that was followed by the entire community or tribe for many centuries is now practiced by just a handful of them. Investigations (by means of interview scheduled) are carried out in order to find out the factors responsible for the decline of the age-old socio-cultural and religious institutions.

In this last chapter i.e., chapter nine, the findings of the study are discussed and summarised.

## **1.6 The Confusion of the Chothe and Purum tribes**

There are only five published books available on the Chothe. T.C. Das' *The Purums: An Old Kuki Tribe of Manipur*(1945)', Biman K. Das Gupta's (ed.), *Proceeding of the Symposium on: Purum (Chote) Revisited*'(1985), Yuhlung Standhope's *Chothe Athouna*'(1986), Lai Imo's *Chothegee Kunung Eshee*'(2002) and Hidam Brojen Singh's *Chothe Grammar*'(2008). Apart from these books there are some critical informative articles found in different journals by, J.K Bose's *Current Science*'(1933), R.C Roy's *Man in India*'(1936), while Rodney Needham (1958, 1960, 1964, 1967), Claude Levi-Strauss (1949), Floyd. G. Lounsbury (1962), Charles Ackerman (1964), G.L. Cowgill (1964), F.B. Livingstone (1964), E.W. Muller (1964, 1966), W. Wilder (1964),

Geoghegan and Kay (1964) all debated in the *'American Anthropologist'* on the Chothe Marriage Alliance System. The articles by Bose and Roy are, however, based on brief notes and ethnographic contents of the community collected during their field work. However, the articles in *American Anthropologist* basically deal with the arguments and discussions on the Chothe (Purum of T.C. Das) prescriptive marriage system based on the matrilineal alliance or connubium theory. Although they are of exceptional quality, the articles do not have much of an implication to the present study but those interested in them, for the subject for argument, may find a continuation in the *Sociological Bulletin* journal written by Cheithou Charles Yuhlung (author).

The name Chothe has been confused with Purum for another tribe by the operating Census officials of India, Manipur, thereby confusing many scholars of the world. The so called Purum, who distinguish themselves socially and culturally from Chothe, live in the North-east of Imphal in Senapati district of Manipur (Gupta 1985: 26). The propaganda with the paradox of ethnic identity began with the publication of the T.C. Das' classical monograph titled *'The Purums: An Old Kuki Tribe of Manipur'*(1945), in which he apparently studied the Chothe of "Central cluster group" under the name '*Purum*' because their village names bear the prefix '*Purum*' as commonly referred to by the neighbouring plains people, in spite of having their own indigenous local names. The name Purum took centre stage in the academic world, especially among the anthropologists, because of the theoretical debate on the marriage alliance system. Rodney Needham attempted to find out whether the Purum with a population of 305 people still exists or has become extinct, and also to prove his alliance theory against the descent theory of marriage. Further, the confusion of identity was exposed in the 1971 Census, reporting the Purum population as '*Nil*' or '*Unspecified*' while the Chothe population substantially increased to 1905 souls in the same year because the Census Operators identified them, i.e. the Purums of T.C. Das or the Central cluster groups as a unit of "Chothe" (Ansari 1991: 67; Gupta 1985: 52), (see table 8)

**Table 8 Chothe population Census of Manipur, India from 1931-2001 (Schedule Tribe)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>1931</i>	<i>1951</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2001</i>
Chothe	250	695	1033	1905	1687	2571	2675
Purum	305	43	82	<i>Nil</i>	447	388	503

However, on the above confused basis, a symposium "*Proceeding of the Symposium on Purum (Chote) Revisited*" was organised at Calcutta in 1983 by the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI). Thereafter, the paradox or confusion was clarified at the national and international level in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a daily newspaper from

Calcutta on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1983, stating that Das' Purums are the Chothe who were misunderstood by a generic term derived from i.e. "Purum Khullen" (Ajouhu) the place of their settlement. Accordingly the newspaper states "the correct name of the tribe Purum is the character of the geography of this area, which is added as a prefix to the name of their villages". Biman Kumar Das Gupta, who headed the ASI-revisit team pronounced "We were sure that we were among the group who called themselves as Chothe whom Das had described as Purum" (1985: 53). There are also clear remarks given by some scholars who attended the symposium. They are T.S. Wilkinson, B.B. Goswami, R.K. Das, Dipali Danda, H.K. Rakshit, Surajit C.Sinha, etc. Individuals still not satisfied with these scholars' positive remarks may read the 'eight point' explanation of S. Jibonkumar Singh and H. Vokendor Singh on the misnomer of Chothe-Purum identity in which the last point suffices to clear all the historical confusion and confirms that "as one of the sources of history, folksongs of the people serves as a valuable source. Nowhere in the folk-songs of the people, the word Purum, is found. But the word Chote (the original word for Chothe) is frequently found" (2005: 232). Therefore, on the above explanations we shall use the name "Chothe" for all purposes under this study in the context of the Purum of T.C. Das or the Central-cluster groups of Chothe.

### **1.7 Theoretical Formulation**

Belief is understood as the manifestation of conviction, faith and values consecrated in the sacredness of the symbol or object by showing reverence and veneration. They believe it is endowed with some kind of Supernatural powers. But this philosophy of human thought with respect to religion changes from time to time. Evolutionists, like Auguste Comte in *Positive Philosophy* (1830) assert that as the human knowledge gradually develops from time to time, it directly corresponds to the development of human society. He propagated the concept of "Law of Three Stages", (1) theological, (2) metaphysical and (3) positivist. According to him, the theological stage is predominated by irrational thought and behaviour and that any phenomena or experience are treated as supernatural. The metaphysical stage is a transitional period marked by reasoning and logic and the third, positive stage is all about human reasoning scientifically. He believes his positive religion is the 'religion of humanity' in which the positivist priests are the new intellectual officials of banking and industry, etc., whose interest is the welfare of the state from the economic standpoint for the betterment of the society (Martineau 2000). When talking about the origin of religion, John Lubbock in *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870) says "fetishism" is the

foundation of all religion where man can compel some divine power to carry out his designs which he calls a phase of “magic” subsequently followed by nature worship or totemism, shamanism, idolatry and finally the ethics of religion through morality.

On the other hand, Charles Darwin one of the most outstanding evolutionists of the world, asserts in his illustrative book, *The Origin of Species* (1859) that every creature was the outcome of natural selection or survival of fittest in its environment and his denial to accept the mythical belief of human history that everything on this earth was the creation of the Divine God or the Creator, produced universal speculation. His assertion is that any change in the physical structure of any species was the result of gradual change over millions and thousands of years, and that the changes were unnoticed because the species had undergone a tremendous change from its originality, consequently he claims that even man evolved from primates. This proposition speculated worldwide controversy as it contradicted and threatened all existing religious beliefs, doctrines and practices, especially the Christian faith.

Despite the arguments of many evolutionists, E.B. Tylor propounded another new theory in his classical work *Primitive Culture* (1873, 1958), that “animism” or the belief in the existence of a “soul” or “spirit” is the base of all the philosophy of religion in every society and believes that the concept continues to hold even in modern spiritualism. He is of the opinion that most of the primitive societies of the world have the doctrine of soul or life or spirit endowed in all the living beings either plants or animals and this notion was carried on till the medieval period, and has undergone an extreme modification in the course of cultural evolution with the advancement of societies. Tylor disagrees with Lubbock’s proposition and firmly asserts that despite multiple alterations in the fundamental animistic belief, the theory of the soul is one principal part of system of religious philosophy, which unites, in an unbroken line of mental connection, the savage fetish-worshipper and the civilized Christian (1972: 19). Therefore, he explains from the common phenomena of mankind: sleep, ecstasy, sickness, and death and most importantly dreams and hallucinations as the base to support his theory on origin of religion, with the view that fetishism provides evidence of the existence of souls and spirits, and that sacrifice (rite) is the symbolic expression of the relationship between man and spirits. Another strong advocate of the evolutionary theory is Herbert Spencer, who, in *Principles of Sociology* (1896) supplements the above proposition at the juncture between fetish and spirit and assumes that the veneration of the dead out of “fear” is the immediate outcome in the development of ancestor worship among primitive societies as they believe in the existence of the “ghost” or “spirit” of a dead man and the supernatural phenomena they

experience. Such fear in ghosts is further induced to conviction when they happen to dream of the person or relate the dream with an event. Accordingly, he opines that the notion first evolved from the cult of plants and animals, and nature worship in general.

J.G. Frazer disagrees with the above evolutionary propositions of fetish, soul or spirit, fear and ghost theories. According to him “magic” was ahead of religion and that religion is the outcome of magical practices. He describes in his masterpiece *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1911-15) that magic as an art is comparable to science because both involve mental operation. His ethnological theory on the origin of religion is based on the principle of a dichotomy that magic and religion are two different entities. Thus he classified his “Sympathetic Magic” into two types, viz. homeopathic or imitative magic and contagious magic (1972: 416). He says that homeopathic magic functions according to the law of similarity - like produce like - which means, a doll like image or figure of a targeted person when invoked with a spell and is inflicted on it by something can directly or indirectly affect the concerned person. While the contagious magic or law of contact is said to have a direct effect on the person when a charm is spell on any body parts like hair, nails or clothing of the concerned person (ibid.: 425). Therefore, Frazer believes that when such sacred magic practices were affected, and its cause became known to the members of the society, such able magicians were, in due course, looked upon with fear by the common man for their awesome magical powers. Subsequently, the people begin to revere them for their skills and magical powers to communicate with the supernatural forces. Then, when society slowly accepted the practice and regularise it into customary law, it thus gives rise to the magico-religious system.

Magic is a powerful mental or psychological medium between man and the supernatural forces that have the potential to transform certain particular words into action, but one wonders where such powers were derived from and how religion originated. So, for naturalists like Max Muller, the cosmic phenomena served as the point of departure for religious evolution.<sup>3</sup> According to him, “nature was the greatest surprise, a terror, a marvel, a standing miracle, and it was only on account of their permanence, constancy, and regular recurrence that certain features of that standing miracle were called natural...” (quoted in Durkheim 1915: 74-75). The natural elements are the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the fire, the sky, water or rivers, trees, the wind, etc. These sensuous experiences of natural forces provoked the human mind to transform them into a concept of something through language or word, and he believed that these standing miracles made men

awesome; fearing this he later began to revere and worship these infinite forces and the mysterious powers that surrounded him.

Unlike the evolutionists, ethnologists and the naturalists, the functionalists like Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe Brown, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons give a totally a different version. They assume that since religion is found universally in all societies it has a vital function in maintaining the social system as a whole, and the main social requirement that religion is deemed to fulfil is the necessity of ideological, sentimental, cohesion or solidarity and the biological needs. Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the most prolific and outspoken functionalists, explains that every socio-religious act and deed has its own functions that ends in itself in the “biological needs of human beings”. He claims that, “the function of magic is to ritualize man’s optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear. Magic expresses the greater value for man of confidence over doubt, of steadfastness over vacillation, of optimism over pessimism” (1948: 90). Further he explicates that the naming and initiation ceremonies of a child, the marriage ceremony, etc., all have their own functional means and ends. Malinowski, like Frazer believes that magic came first, and then the science of reasoning entered to foster the development of religion.

Another modern functionalist is A.R. Radcliffe Brown who has similar views like Durkheim and stresses on the importance of rites in any religious system in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1964), that rites are the consequence of beliefs which determine the elements of the social functions in society. He also suggests several points in the study of religion and how one should specifically focus on religious actions and discover the sentiments developed in the individual in a particular religious cult.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard also makes a distinctive contribution in the study of religion as he specifically focuses on some elements of religion like witchcraft, oracles, magic and other related aspects from the perspective of Azande’s culture and Nuer. His articles, *The Notion of Witchcraft among the Azande* and *Oracle among the Azande*, describes how the Azande accept and relate any unfortunate or misfortune as the act of witchcraft, the essence of an oracle when a serious aspect arises out of the event and the need for magic and its application for the consequences are well elaborated. His book, *Nuer Religion* (1956) also describes the various intrinsic aspects of the Nuer religious beliefs and practices.

However, Max Weber’s view on religion is quite different from Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and many others as his study is based on rationality. In fact, his thesis is a counter-attack to disprove Karl Marx’s epitome statement that “Religion is the opium of

the masses". Marx in his effort for a communist society sees that the bureaucrats had seized religion as an instrument and had poisoned the minds of the proletariat by convincing them that their condition of suffering would be rewarded in heaven. On the above basis, Marx inferred religion to be a powerful conservative and oppressive force that denies the freedom and liberty of an individual by suppressing the masses, since majority of the people have accepted their suffering as their destiny without reasoning. He propagated the above statement in, *The Capital (Das Kapital)*, (1867).

Max Weber, contrary to Karl Marx's theory, argues that religion does not suppress all societies, rather, it uplifts some societies economically. He justifies his proposition in his famous and classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930). Before this book he had already analysed different types of world religions. He sought his main justification from the Calvinist doctrine, asserting that religion helps define the motivation which finally gave rise to modern capitalism. He says the Calvinist doctrine exhorts every member of the Church to work hard, where to work is to glorify God, which is a calling of God and that the hard earned money should be properly spent for the greater glory of God and should not be spent lavishly or unnecessarily. Thus, the spirit of motivation for the pursuit of salvation became the motivation for the pursuit of wealth, which resulted in the spirit of capitalism and the accumulation of wealth.

There are also innumerable scholars like Claude Levi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz, E.E. Pritchard, Andre Beteille, M.N. Srinivas, T.N. Madan, etc., to name a few, who have immensely contributed to the discipline of sociology, especially in the area of religious study. Some of their keynotes are highlighted: Claude Levi-Strauss whose specialization is structuralism, was perplexed to find out in his work *The Structural Study of Myth* (1955, 1963) that most of the mythical stories of the world are fantastic and unpredictable, and sometimes the content of the myth seems to be completely arbitrary, but interestingly on the other hand, he sees the paradox that myths of different cultures from one part of the world are surprisingly similar to the myths of cultures from another side of the world. This intrigued him to develop a basic theory of human thought that universal laws govern all areas of human thought, by examining the underlying structure of the relationships between the elements of the story rather than by focusing on the content of the story itself. Thus, he says that "myth exhibits a 'slated' structure which seeps to the surface ... through the repetitive process" (1972: 301). He also asserts that every word in a language is the condensed form of a story, object, or a concept of a thing, where each word has a conceptualised structure of itself when de-constructed.

A new concept introduced in the study of religion by Clifford Geertz, sees *Religion as a Cultural System*, in the meaning of “symbol” where sets of symbols establish powerful pervasive motivation in men by formulating a concept of existence, which is induced into the mind of people and become cultural patterns in society. These cultural patterns are “models” in relation to the other entities, according to him, which shape into a religious system (1972: 168-169). Clifford Geertz’s cultural patterns may be seen in T.B. Bottomore’s concept of “morality” as described in his book, *Sociology* (1962). He stressed on the development of the origin of religion and religious institutions and also morality based on three distinctive methodological characteristics i.e., Evolutionist, Positivist and Psychologicist. Bottomore, unlike Levi-Strauss, who studied myth from the structural point, rather looks into the content of the myths in which the morality found in myths serves as the guiding principle for the development of religion.

Brian Morris too, has unravelled many theoretical strategies in his work, *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (1987) that have been developed and explored by many anthropologists.

Many exceptional Indian scholars have also immensely contributed in theoretical formulations of religious study. M.N. Srinivas in *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (2003) describes various aspects of the Hindu religious beliefs and practices, particularly the cultural patterns or the caste system by taking the Coorg community of Karnataka (south-India) as a model for the whole Hindu society. Karl Marx’s perception of religion as a suppressive mechanism is perfectly perceived by M.N. Srinivas among the Coorgs, although Marx’s society is divided into two social groups of the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, Srinivas’ Coorgs are broadly divided into four hierarchical castes viz., Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishavas and Sudras. One very significant observation he makes among the Hindu believers that is deeply rooted is the change in the cultural and belief systems but not the structural change. The change is that many of the lower caste groups like the Sudras and the Untouchables began to imitate the Brahmins or Upper caste groups in their manner of eating, drinking, dressing, etc., which was strictly prohibited.

M. Kirti Singh has compiled various folklores in *Folk Culture of Manipur* (1993) some of it is believed to have already disappeared. He devotes one chapter particularly on the, ‘*Python Lore of Manipur*’ where he describes the origin myth and legend of the God *Pakhangba* the first historical King of Manipur. The book is indispensable for this study.

O.L. Snaitang’s *Christianity and Social Change in North East India* (1993) describes the role of social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people of Meghalaya, especially with respect to the influence of Christianity beginning in 1840 with the advent

of the British rule in India. He discusses how Christian missionaries have positively contributed to the process of social change and modernization especially among the Khasi-Jaintia people and also among the North-east tribals in general. Similarly M.C. Behera's (ed.) *Tribal Religion: Change and Continuity* (2000) contains numerous papers on various aspects of religion. It focuses on the syncretic religions of various tribal communities that emphasize on syncretic characteristics, that have emerged over time in spite of the influences of propaganda and other dominant religions on tribal religious traditions, either by the process of symbiosis or acculturation (as Hinduism on tribal religions), or in superposition (as Christianity on tribal religions).

Whatever the predicament involved in defining religion, the basic study of religion of any society, whether primitive or not, is to have an understanding on the belief and practice systems of that particular society on the criteria of the desired focused objectives. Andre Beteille's paper *Religion as a Subject for Sociology* (2005) emphasizes the importance of how religious study should be approached. He says there are two important features, both common to sociology and social anthropology, "the first is the extensive use of the comparative method, and the second is the investigation of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions in relation to other aspects of society and culture" (Gupta 2005: 56). Therefore he claims that "the comparative method is central to the discipline of sociology and, as such, to the sociology of religion" (ibid: 56). In this way, for theoretical conceptualization, many sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists and philosophers have taken primitive societies for comparative study as obsessed by the belief that life on earth, biological and spiritual, had evolved from the simplest forms, and being the oldest form aroused the greatest interest of study (De Vries 1967: 220). Primitive society is regarded to exist in the crudest form and is looked at as the most reliable source for such studies. Though simple it is believed to have contained almost all the basic elements of a religious system that could establish the base of a religion. Subsequently, various scholars have propounded the notions of pre-animism, fetishism, animism, and totemism each took a turn as the oldest form of religion, which was welcomed, and finally religion was dissolved in magic as a twin issue later.

In this particular study of the Chothe Indigenous religion, Andre Beteille's second approach has been adopted because investigation and recording of the Chothe indigenous religious beliefs and practices is considered to be more important at the moment before it completely disappears since what little remnants are left are also vanishing at a rapid pace. Since the religious value systems of many of the tribal societies are gradually undergoing a dynamic change through various agents like proselytization from one religion to another,

the Chothe society is no exception to it. On the contrary, there are also societies that have somehow retained their traditional cultural value system in some way or the other like the economic or political systems. The Chothe indigenous religion, kinship and political institutions are systems which have continued to exist even today despite the advent of Christianity and other powerful modern external forces of change, although they are followed by just a handful of the Chothe population.

### **1.8 A General View on Religion**

Since no man is without flaw or is a perfect being therefore no scholar's writings have escaped from the blade of criticism. Roger A. Johnson says that the criticism of belief developed along two levels: a rejection of particular beliefs, and a critique of belief itself as dishonest, debilitating, and dehumanizing (1973: 3). For instance, the first level, a rejection of particular beliefs is seen in the critical proposition of David Hume to a Calvinist Church for its orthodoxy doctrine, Rudolf Bultmann, speaking against the Lutheran Christian Church and Teilhard disagreement with the notion of the divine creation of the world in the Catholic faith. Similarly, Malinowski, an influential functionalist criticised E.B. Tylor and many others in his book *Magic, Science and Religion* (1948) says that Tylor's view on primitive religion was "based on too narrow a range of facts, which made early man too contemplative and rational" and also for over emphasising the primitive culture in the development of his animistic theory because he saw that the Trobriand Islanders "were rather interested in their fishing and gardens, in tribal events and festivities than brooding over dreams and visions, or explaining 'double' and cataleptic fits"(1948:18), argued that the primitive people in their early stage of life would not have developed such a critical mind to think about dreams and the souls or spirits rationally and scientifically as assumed by Tylor. Such are the critical comments on Tylor despite appreciation for his earnest work. However, Malinowski gives overall credit to J.G. Frazer for his outstanding contribution to the scientific study of religion and his classifications which greatly motivated him to write. But Durkheim argues that the origin of religion is neither Tylor's animism nor Frazer's magic but began with the belief in "totem" and that the essence of religious beliefs and practices derived from sacred and profane concepts.

Clyde Kluckhohn is of the opinion that scholars like Durkheim, Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski, despite their immense contribution to religious study and particularly the relationship between myths and rituals, are so interested in formulating the relations between conceptual elements they have lost the sight of the concrete human organism and

fail to present the description or base of their specific arguments of their analysis (1972: 98). Therefore, Kluckhohn feels that a functionalist should begin with the description of some particular ritualistic behaviour to relate the myth but such specific detailed information is lacking in all of them as a result their discussions on the subject are generalised, which he condemns. Lévi-Strauss' also, despite his remarkable contribution, does not escape from criticism as his theory on the origin of the "Trickster" has been criticized on number of points by several anthropologists. For example, Stanley Diamond (1974), strongly disagrees with Levi-Strauss for suggesting that the Trickster is a "mediator" and for assuming that the secular civilized often considers the concepts of life and death to be polar but primitive cultures often view it as an aspect of a single condition, the condition of existence.

Although at the second level, a critique that belief itself is dehumanizing, as seen in Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of natural selection, Karl Marx's epitome remark on religion as "the opium of the masses", and Freud's "illusion" a regression to infantile dependency in a self-defeating effort to overcome anxiety and fear, like consoling a child by protective parents are some few examples. It is considered sometimes that the criticism of belief itself is more fundamental than the rejection of particular beliefs. Most of these critics are humanists, and thus attack and preach against religious attitudes as dehumanizing; their views on religious belief are regressive, exacting the high price of perpetual immaturity and psychic suffering. When examined by the light of reason; rather the very posture of believing was thoroughly dysfunctional and destructive as preventing the realization of rationality, social justice, and psychological maturity. Therefore, several critics contend that religion has no independent reality in itself because it is vague and consider it merely the by-product of some elements more basic in the human process. And so, some claim that religion is nothing but a distorted expression of psychic dynamics, a reflection of underlying social factors, while others argue that it is only a primitive antecedent of scientific thinking. Thus, criticism on the writings of any religious study does not end even today despite some relaxation as people are now more inclined towards science and technology. Whatever belief one holds on to, what matters to me is one's belief in his or her heart, it is the faith and trust from which he or she receives strength and protection from the one God he or she believes when the soul is weak and guided by unseen external forces.

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## *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous definition. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/the free encyclopaedia/indigenous definition](http://en.wikipedia.org/the_free_encyclopaedia/indigenous_definition)) Accessed on : 20/4/07

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous definition. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/the free encyclopaedia/Indigenous definition/United Nation concept on Indigenous 2004 WS.1 3.htm](http://en.wikipedia.org/the_free_encyclopaedia/Indigenous_definition/United_Nation_concept_on_Indigenous_2004_WS.1_3.htm)). Accessed on : 24/06/07

<sup>3</sup> Max Muller.1890. *Physical Religion* (pp.119-120).

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## CHAPTER TWO

### INTRODUCING THE CHOTHE

#### **2.0 Introduction: Geographical Location**

Manipur is located in the north-eastern region of India. The state lies between 23° 50' to 25°41' north latitudes and 93°2' to 94°47' east longitudes, neighbouring Myanmar (Burma) in the east, Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west and Mizoram and Tripura in the south. The state has a geographical area of about 22,327 sq.km. The man-land ratio of the state is varied with regards to the hills and valley. The hill area covers about 20,089 sq.km (i.e. about 3/4<sup>th</sup>) of the total land area is inhabited by various ethnic groups, while about 2,238 sq.km (about 1/4<sup>th</sup>) of the land comprises of the valley, predominantly inhabited by the Meitei. According to the 2001 Census of India the state has a population of 23,88,634 (12,07,338/M – 11,81,296/F), with a density of 107 per sq.km and a total literacy rate of 68.87 %. There are nine districts and thirty eight sub-divisions out of which five districts belong to the hills and four to the valley. There are 2391 villages with nine CD Blocks and twenty five TD Blocks and thirty three towns (28 statutory towns and 5 census towns). Senapati is the largest, Thoubal the smallest, Imphal-East the most densely populated and Chandel the least populated districts of the state. The state has highest number of indigenous communities in India, thirty-three (33) recognised Scheduled tribes as per the Constitution of India under 1956 Act of Part-X. Clothe was formally acknowledged and notified as one of the Scheduled tribes of Manipur in the early phase of the survey on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1951 as per the constituency Act. The state has 60 seats in the legislative assembly out of which 19 are reserved for Scheduled (Castes or Tribes) and it has three MPs in the parliament; two MPs in the Lok Sabha and one MP in the Rajya Sabha.

The Manipur land mass is considered a part of the Purvachal or Assam-Burma geological structure and the hills are part of the Eastern Himalaya mountain chain. The highest peak is known as Mt. Tenipu (*Isii*) about 2,994 metres located at Mao in Senapati district. The rocks are largely made up of sedimentary and tertiary rocks which belong to two series viz. Disang in the eastern and Barail in the western part (Laiba 1992: 95). The soil is mostly alluvial. The climate of the state is of sub-tropical monsoon to temperate which depends upon the elevation with varying temperature from 0° - 40° centigrade. The average annual rainfall is about 207.77 cm or 1467.5 mm (ibid: 95). Some of the important rivers of Manipur are Barak, Irang, Leimatak, Maku, Tipai, Imphal, Nambul, Iril, Thoubal, Khuga, Lokchao, Maha, Thongjoulak and others.

The Chothe is considered as one of the oldest indigenous tribes of the state particularly in the southern region because they are considered as the earliest immigrants or most advanced group among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo speaking group (Ansari 1991: 14). The Chothe belong to the Mongoloid racial stock and speak the Sino-Tibetan language of Tibeto-Burman family under the Kuki-Chin and Naga-Kuki linguistic group of the Old-Kuki speakers (Grierson 1904). The community in study has many distinctive features in religion, kinship, marriage, political and socio-economic systems. The distinctiveness is already obvious from the anthropological and sociological perspectives with respect to their distinctive 'marriage alliance system' which was brought into the anthropological map of the world initially provided by the empirical data of T.C. Das's *The Purums: An Old-Kuki Tribe of Manipur* (1945). Whereby, Claude Levi Strauss (1949) used Das' data in his *Elementary Structuralism* for his "Alliance Theory". Thereafter, this particular theory was seriously propagated by Rodney Needham as "Matrilateral Connubium" in many of his writings from 1958-1964. Gogoi asserts Needham's theory is against the protagonist of the "Descend Theory" (1989: 9).

There are twelve Chothe villages recognized by the Census of India, besides there are six new settlements which are not included in the Census though considered registered at their district Headquarters. The Census of India 2001 gives the entire Chothe population as 2675 with a literacy rate of 72.35 % (see Table 9). The Chothe are mainly confined to two districts of Manipur viz. Bishnupur and Chandel. However, Arabinda Basu, on the basis of the village agglomeration and geographical settings has divided it into three regional zones or groups viz.; (a) Western group, (b) Central cluster group and (c) Eastern group (1985: 38).

### **Western Chothe**

The Western Chothe are now known as "Lamlanghupi" (*Ram/Lam* - area/land, *lang* - bright, *hupi* - main village) which literally means, 'the main/parent village on a bright area'.<sup>1</sup> The village was named as *Lamlang* (bright area) as it is located on an elevated open bright area just below the Laimatol peak or Loiyang south-western hill range of Manipur entirely overlooking the valley and the Loktak Lake. On the basis of their oral history they consider the Western group or Lamlanghupi as the parent village of all the Chothe villages. The village is about one and half km. south-west of Bishnupur Police Station and the Imphal-Churchandpur state highway or Tiddim road. It is about three km from Bishnupur town and 30 km from Imphal (State capital). The villages have

been incorporated into the Municipal Council of Bishnupur district, and Ward No.12 has been reserved for the Chothe since 1983.

The village Lamlanghupi is still identified as “Chote-Munpi”, a polling centre of Henglep constituency No. 57 under the hill district of Churchandpur, North sub-division, as recorded in the Census report of India. According to them Chote-Munpi was an abandoned old settlement near Leimatak area now occupied by the New-Kuki (Khongsai) Thadou speaking groups.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the actual group of people is located in one area Lamlanghupi (Bishnupur) while the name of the village Chote-Munpi exists in another part of the area (Churchandpur). The western Chothe group is internally divided into two villages viz.; Lamlanghupi and Lamlanglon, though many people still assume them to be one.

The Chothe of Lamlanghupi is surrounded by various ethnic tribes: the Meitei in the north, east and south-east, the Rongmei (Kabui) and Chiru in the west and north-west, Kom, Aimol and Chin-Kuki in the south and south-west respectively. Inter-marriage among neighbouring ethnic groups is common and the marriage with Rongmei girls is the highest in comparison to other groups.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Western group. But another important source of income is the commercialization of their brewed wine (*Zu*) to the neighbouring Meitei villages, while the rest mostly depend on the secondary and tertiary modes of occupation.

The Chothe are considered among the first or most advanced groups of people who settled on the lofty Laimaton or Loiching or Loijing hill range in early days before any group of people inhabit the area (Singh 1986: 150). Loiching hill range extends from Thangjing peak in the south to Nungshai-Wainem hills in the north beyond Laimatol peak and extends from the bank of Loktak Lake to the Tipiamuk river basin zone. This indicates the suzerainty of Chothe territory in the past which covered the whole south-western region of Manipur especially the Henglep constituency area of Churchandpur. W. Ibohal Singh states that, “By far the Marems were one of the most important tribes in naming different places. It appears they were a cultural group of people” (ibid: 150).<sup>3</sup> Their oral history also records that in ancient times constant conflict and battles with the new advancing groups (kukis) and other neighbouring communities the Chothe were unable to withstand the wars, so they finally moved southward to the mount/hill (the present settlement area) and settled under the protection of the Manipur king.

Geographically, this lofty Loiching hill range is considered as one of the best places in the state because of many advantages like the magnificent view of the entire

valley and its closeness to the Loktak Lake, also as the best strategic position during war, the availability of abundant perennial river sources and the thick forest that covered the whole western region. The Loktak Lake is considered to be the largest fresh water lake in north-eastern region. The Leimaton peak serves as the best check-point or a strategic position against the invading Moirang (Kege) principality in the south and Imphal principality from the north and the Cacharis (Bengal) in the west.<sup>4</sup> Many perennial rivers and streams that run supply the best fresh water to the area. The incessant thick western mountain range extends up to the Cachar plains that are rich in natural vegetation and wild life supporting their economy. Besides, there are two very important passes known as *Tongjei Maril* (old-Cachar road in Bishnupur) and *Ngaparum-Chingjin* (New-Cachar road near Kangpokpi) that leads to Tipperah or Takhel (Tripura) and Cachar towns.<sup>5</sup> The Cachari or Bengali (*Mayang*) might have migrated through *Tongjei Maril* to Lammangton or Bishnupur in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and brought Vaishnavism. Owing to such an advantage the area became the most important centre in early days next to Imphal (Kangla) and Moirang principalities.

The Chothe oral history says that in olden days the elevated semi-plateau area at the foothill of Leimaton peak was called “Lamlanglon” meaning, ‘frontier land mound’. The area became a prominent Princedom centre of the Meitei (Poirei) in the later part of 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century probably during Kyampa (1467-1508) or Khagamba (1597-1652) as an important military cantonment in the south-western region to defend against the uprising of the Moirang (Kege or Keke).<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the cantonment developed into a major centre and was popularly known as “Lammangtong” or “Lammangdong”. But the name was subdued in the later period when Shanti Das Goswami, an adherent of Ramanandi Sect of Vaishnavism, came and introduced the new religion when he was first given a temporary asylum in the area by the early Meitei rulers. Later in 18<sup>th</sup> century on the recommendation of King Garib Niwaz (Pamheiba) the “Vishnu” temple was constructed in the state and henceforth, the area Lammangtong became known as Bishnupur.<sup>7</sup> The huge resplendent territory that once belonged to the Chothe does not belong to them anymore as it is occupied by the Meitei now. Moreover the population being greatly reduced to few hundreds, various neighbouring ethnic groups have continuously infringed into their territory. This poses a serious threat to their indigenous territorial rights, religion, economy, traditional political system and their culture.

### **Central Cluster Chothe**

The Central cluster group comprises fifteen villages including five new settlements, all of which are located in the eastern Hirok hill range of Chandel district, Manipur. They can be further classified into two sub-zones of eastern and western clusters since the villages are located on the extreme western side of the south-eastern hill range as divided by a ridge. The villages lying on the western slope of the south-eastern hill range comprises five villages; Ajouhu (Purum-Khullen), Tampakhu (Purum-Tampak), Leininghu, Chandropoto (Phantu) and Chothe Khunou. These villages are located about 2 - 4 km east of Kakching-Sugnu road. They do their marketing or sell their forest and handicraft products in Waikhong, Thongnoujam and Kakching towns. The Eastern cluster group comprises Chumbang, Old-Wangparal, New-Wangparal, Chandonpokpi (Phaipi) and Ziontlang besides the new five small settlements viz.; Lunghu, Salemthar, Leirungtabi, Lungleh and Bethel. All these villages are located on the sides of Pallel-Chandel road and do their marketing at Pallel, Kakching and Chandel towns.

T.C. Das (1945) in his book describes the panoramic and the magnificent view of the valley from the abandoned settlement of Ajouhu (Purum Khullen) which is situated on the top of the hill about 4,500 ft. above the sea level. He states that “the scenery of the surrounding country from this village is superb. Towards the east, range after range of hills rise higher and higher in successive tiers till they lose themselves behind the clouds. The dense jungle which covers them assumes a blue colour under the mid-day sun and one finds it extremely difficult to take his eyes away from such a magnificent sight. Towards the west the paddy fields extend far into the annually flooded area which ultimately merges into the calm waters of the Loktak Lake, studded with small but precipitous hillocks, in some of which the fisher-folk have built their houses. Beyond the lake, towards the west, the Laimatol range followed by six others one after another, holds sway up to the border of the Cachar plains. The north and the south are blocked by the two peaks which rise immediately beyond the village. In the south-west a few grass-covered straggling hillocks stumble here and there till we reach the more regular ranges which guard the southern boundary of the valley. Looking towards the direction of the capital of the State some may see the road which connects Imphal with Sugnu up to a great distance passing through villages hidden under the clumps of bamboos. This panoramic view is practically the monopoly of the Purums of Khullen, the three villages do not enjoy this privilege owing to their situation at a lower level” (1945: 16-17). The Ajouhu abandoned their village during the Second World War some fifty years ago. The last group of people

had relocated themselves on the western slope of the foothills. True to Das' word the panoramic view was their monopoly from the village site.

Their main occupation is agriculture. During the off-season they engage in selling firewood and handicrafts products like bamboo baskets, winnows of different shapes and sizes to their neighbouring Meitei. In the case of transport and communication with the district Headquarters Chandel, the eastern cluster villages enjoy an advantage and better facilities than those on the western side whose expenditure is higher as they have to travel an extra distance by crossing Kakching and Pallel towns, since there is no road that cuts across the hill ridge though they dwell just adjacent to it. The neighbouring communities of this Central cluster comprises of Anal, Maring, Moyon, Monshang, Lamkang, Tarao and Meitei.

The Central cluster group claims that when they arrived in the region more than four hundred years ago, much ahead of other communities, the whole area on the western side of the south-eastern hill ranges or the whole western side of the Maha river that was covered with thick forest belonged to them (The Maha River is the largest river in Chandel and one of the main tributaries originates from their southern territory). Now, even their preserved community forest, which is approximately 15 sq. km. in area, has diminished to small holdings after the Naga-Kuki crisis from 1987-1994 as many of the eastern neighbouring tribes like, Anal, Moyon, Mongshang, Lamkang, Maring and Tarao who once settled on the top of the hills bordering Myanmar (Burma) came down as refugees leaving their ancestral places and permanently occupied the area around the Maha river valley along the Imphal-Chandel road. The forest area shows no sign of any large trees growing now unlike the south-western mountains rather it is covered with pine trees and other shrubs.

### **Eastern Chothe**

The Eastern group of Chothe comprises only the Khongkhang (*Khongkap*) village on the south-east of the Tengenoupal hill ranges just beside the Indo-Myanmar National Highway (NH-39). The village is about 76 km from Imphal and 32 km south-east of Pallel respectively and about 30 km from Moreh town in the east.

The Eastern Chothe in earlier days were called "Mouhulon" named after a kind of bamboo "Moupi" found in abundance in the area. According to them, a long time ago the Queen (Maharani) of Manipur visited their village when she heard of her old relatives who lived there. When the villagers were informed about her coming to their village they immediately prepared a footpath like a ladder, especially for her along the slope of the

village. They say on reaching their village she was overwhelmed to see her old relatives living peacefully in a remote area and all her tiredness and exhaustion left her. Being so pleased with the hospitality given to her by the people it is said that she gave her gold earrings (*sana-leirum*) to them as a sign of her gratitude and also to carry on the bond of friendship and loyalty (see Pic.17). Further, it seems she told them that the village should be henceforth called as “Khongkap” meaning, ‘long foot pace or steps’. Thereafter, *Khongkap* became known as Chothe “Khongkhang”.

The topography of the region is such that the eastern blue-mountains run successively in almost parallel high up to the Kabaw valley in Myanmar (Burma) and one can endlessly enjoy the perfect beauty throughout the seasons from the village. Another breathtaking sight of the area is the clear white fog that completely envelops the deep gorges and low-lying areas in winter. The sight is so captivating that one would not like to leave such a beautiful scene. On bright sunny days one can get a good glimpse of Tamu town of Myanmar from one particular angle in the south-east. But the west and north-west is blocked by the Tegnoupal mountain range, the highest peak on the Indo-Myanmar road. There are still some big trees growing in the deep forest though it has been somewhat disturbed now by the influx of the New-Kukis from the east and also by their jhum cultivation.

The Khongkhang village, though located on the top of the mountain, is very rich in natural resources like forest products of timber, bamboo, various citrus fruits, and wildlife like tigers, leopards, wild-boars, monkeys, foxes, jackals, deer, and some varieties of jungle fowl. The rivers and streams between these mountains abundantly provide a variety of fish. The climate is moderately hot in summer and cold in winter and it usually remains foggy on rainy days. The rainfall is also moderate. Unfortunately there is no immediate neighbour and the nearest neighbouring communities are the Maring in the north and north-east, Lamkang in the south-west and the Thadou-kuki villages in the north-west of Tegnoupal sub-division. All these neighbouring villages are located beyond 6-15 km from Khongkhang village. The villagers, depending on their requirement for necessities, do their marketing in three towns: Moreh, Pallel and Kakching. But to sell their forest produce they go to Pallel or Kakching. However, the transport and communication system is poor in this sparsely populated region.

## **2.1 Historical Background: Genesis of the Chothe**

The history of the Chothe is obscure as they have no written records and all that is known has been passed down from one generation to the next through oral narratives.

Since there are only five books on Chothe, their historical background has been elaborated for a better understanding about the tribe in study. There is also no certainty and reliability on human memory for such long and explicit narrations but one has to accept them as history of the past that has a very significant value to the society. Therefore, according to their myth, they believe that the origin of the word *Chawte - Shote - Zote - Chote - Chothe* is derived from the term “Kachokte” or “Kachoite” meaning ‘my stirred/holding child’ considered as the name of the first Chothe man. Mythically, the second person is known as “Thanidam”, meaning ‘the moon and the sun are alright’, who became *Kachoite’s* wife. They lived inside the cave and their progeny multiplied year after year protected by their Supreme Guardian God *Pu Lungcungpa* the Dragon (*Ruipi Shantai*). The cave or hole where the *Kachoite* and *Thanidam* lived was called as *Khul, Khurpi, Hurpi, Hurpi-thouranga*, the exact location is unknown but believed to be somewhere in southern China (Maipak: 1985). In Chothe *Huipi-thoranga* means, ‘the cave from which the five men came out’. The cave in which the Chothe men and women lived is said to be covered with a huge flat rock. When the time came their Almighty God sent a monkey to remove the rock and opened the cave. John Shakespeare says “the Chawte told me the tale of peopling of the world out of a hole in the ground, adding the graphic touch that an inquisitive monkey lifted up a stone which lay over the opening, and thus allowed their ancestors to emerge” (1912:151). Thus, the first Chothe man to come out of the cave is believed to be called “Makan”, who outwitted the ferocious tiger waiting outside to devour them with the *Awa-ampi* shawl. Thereafter, the Chothe men and women came out of the cave and began to live on the surface of the earth. Henceforth, they have been migrating from place to place, far and wide until they finally settled at the present areas (their myth on their pre-history or history connected with the development of their religious principle is discussed in chapter four.)

## **2.2 Migration**

Migration is a natural process. Many individuals and societies from the earliest times have always been constantly on the move from one place to another for various reasons. The advance of science and technology, economy and better transport and communication has increased the rate and frequency of migration as compared to the past. The volume of people migrating everyday from one town to another from one city to another and from one country to another is much greater than in the olden days. Like any other indigenous people the Chothe also, since early days have been migrating from one place to another due to numerous explained and unexplained reasons. Some of the most

reasonable explanations are due to constant internal conflicts, wars and battles, scarcity of food, drought and famine, epidemics, diseases like plagues, smallpox, cholera, population explosion, expulsion, the search for fertile land and better geographical sites for village settlements.

The actual time and place when the Chothe began their migration to reach the present settlement is obscure. But from the historical point of view it is most probable that they have migrated from the southern region of China during the mass expulsion and exodus, and occupied the Chin-hills of upper Myanmar (Burma) from the mythical cave *Huipithoranga*. According to S.A. Ansari, "The Mongoloid race reached North-east India following two routes. One route passed through Tibet and another through Yunnan province of China. Those following the routes through Yunnan and eastern China moved southward to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma and further westward to hill regions on the Indo-Burma frontier tract. Important among these passes are Patkai, Chaukan, Aimol, Taungup and An" (1991:10). This is supported by the linguistic background as the Chothe have been classified under the family of Sino-Tibetan language of Tibeto-Burman sub-branch of all Indian tribes categorised under the sub-sub branch of Kuki-Chin-Mizo and Naga-Kuki-Chin (see the chart in Sl. No. 152 of S. Bharati 2005: 431). Maipak Yuhlung (64/M) of Lamlanghupi and Chandbabu Parpa (56/M) of Tampakhu are of the view that is based on the legends and folktales that "the Chothe and other Kuki-Chin groups might have migrated after the construction of the first Great Wall of China". But the period falls after Qin Shi Huang dynasty, the first Emperor of China around 200 - 220 B.C.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, they believe that after living for many years in the Chin-hills of Upper-Myanmar (Shan kingdom) they further moved down south either, following the Chin-Win or the Irrawaddy River and inhabited the southern kingdom of *Khyan* or *Khampat* (Shan and Pong Kingdom) located on the north-western region of Myanmar extending the whole eastern part of Mizoram. Much later, they were further pushed westward and occupied the lofty mountain peak of Lungleh, a district of Mizoram. The Chothe called the place as "Lungleh-Waishu" meaning, 'let the rock shine' (*Lungleh* - plenty of rocks or stones, *Waishu* or *Warshu* - let it shine or prosper).<sup>9</sup> The name suggests a beautiful elevated rocky fertile land which is considered as one of the earliest and most important historical settlements in the history of Chothe because some of their folktales and folksongs highly glorify their culture and long existence, describing the climax of their civilization until they were driven out by other new powerful invading groups. Could the Chothe be the early Pong or Khyan group of the Proto-Tai-Sino-Tibetan group who reached Manipur with Prince Samlong (Samlungpha) a prince of Pong kingdom in 678

A.D.? This assertion is based on *Cheitharol Kumpaba* and the Pong chronicles 777 A.D mentioned by Pemberton, or could the Chothe be part of the Chinese general Ko-lo-feng's of Nan Chao who conquered Upper Burma, Assam and Manipur in 760 A.D (Laiba 1992: 57, Parratt 2005: 6, Singh 1986: 16). The reason is that some of the early historical kings of Manipur like, Samlungpha, Sukanpa, Taothingmang, Sameireng, Aayangpa, Loiyumpa, Chingthang, Tapungpa, Puranthapa, Punsipa, etc. bear the true indigenous origin as found mentioned in many of their folktales as claimed by Mrs. Tharaklei (87/F) of Tampakhu. In this connection W.I Singh also mentions how the Pong or Shan came in contact with the Poirei and how Samlungfa, after conquering Basa, finally arrived at Ngapurum Chingjeng (old Cachar road) after crossing the river Gwai and Khebu Chingjeng by 1220 A.D. (1986: 14-15). The predicament of analysing the oral history of migration is their inability to locate the specific places and the period of settlement though they know most of their old settlement names found in their folktales. For example, *Ahu-mul Huipithoranga* (Chin Hills), *Ahu Lungleh-Waishu*, *Ahu Tarik Jampebung*, *Ahu Thingtin Aishanlon* (Tamilon), *Ahu Toujanglon* (Tamalon), *Ahu Tumpokpi*, *Ahu Katokpi*, *Ahu Shimnudung* (Tuirung), *Ahu Vainudung* are mentioned in their folktales and folksongs (CLAM, Souvenir 2000: 2).

The Chothe are believed to have migrated extensively far and wide till the extreme south of Yangon (Rangoon) towards the sea and made a movement towards the north-west again (Bose 1933). Hongpa Yuhlung also claimed that "My great forefather had the tradition of using variety of huge seashells (*Moipung*) in early days".<sup>10</sup> According to R.C. Roy, who first studied the Chothe, "The Chawte clan is a branch of the "Old Kukis", as the earliest immigrants in Manipur are called. Competent authorities tell us that the 'Old Kuki' clans came down from the Chhindwin valley generations ago and proceeded southwards toward the sea and turned northwards again up the hills. But my informants knew nothing of the seaward migrations of their forefathers. They possessed only a vague tradition of their migration to the present home from the south" (1936: 135).

However, one very important point regarding the direction of the Chothe migration is the common vernacular statement which they all claimed to have migrated from the east, in the direction where the sun rises as told to them by their great forefathers. It reads as, "We, the Chothe came from the east, in the direction where the sun rises, this is what our great grandfather and grandmother told us" (*Ani Chote ngei chu Nasu, Ni shukna kena wa-a ta, ani pu-pi na relphui-a*). Since, the Chothe do not have any written records, it is difficult to establish the nearest kin group and to which section of the proto-Sino-Tibetan family they actually belong since they claim to have come from the east.

The Chothe at *Lungleh-Waishu*, most probably ends when the new Shan or Khyan dynasty or another powerful group emerged and began their territorial expansion. According to Maipak, as told by his father and grandfather, the Chothe made a strong resistance against the new invading forces but they were finally compelled to move out of Lungleh-Waishu because of the immense devastation caused since thousands of them are believed to have died at the event. Historically the separation of the people into different directions occurred at this event that led the entire Chothe population to be scattered. They claim that some groups fled towards Tripura (Tipperah) in the west and later moved north, while some were left behind around the area and majority of them marched north heading towards the south-western region of Manipur.

According to their oral history it is believed that they initially settled at *Ahu Wainudung*, near *Tuiva* River in Chin-hills, a place bordering the present Manipur and Mizoram states before they entered the southern region of Manipur. They then, moved north-west and lived at *Ahu Tuisarung* (hot running water) believed to be near the Barak river or around Jiribum (Silchar), then at *Ahu Tilungsau* or *Ahu Tuiwaisu* where three rivers conjoin (Yuhlung 1985: 27). Being nomadic, they kept migrating towards the east looking for suitable places and settled at *Ahu Nachangjoi*, then at *Ahu Saikhupai* believed to be around Tipaimuk area. Subsequently, they marched north-east and re-established their permanent settlement near Leimatak around the Loktak Hydro Electric Project, pump house as described in the *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)*. Subsequent old settlements that followed in the south-western region around Leimatak river basin are; *Ahu Lungsuk (Nungsuk)*, *Ahu Taipiruk*, *Ahu Ramudol*, *Ahu Surouthil*, *Ahu Lungsuk-bung (Chothe-Munpi)*, *Ahu Kumpibung* (South of Moirang near Churchandpur), *Ahu Lamngente* (Ngente-Leikentha), *Ahu Tuipi* (Leimatak area), *Ahu Chainapung*, etc. (CLAM 2000: 3). Each settlement has some historical connection based on their folktales. However, the first group of valley people to come into frequent conflict are the Moirang (Kege) as recorded in MNL and the folktales.

The exact period when the Chothe entered the south-western region of Manipur is unknown although the *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* one of the oldest historical texts of Manipur mentions the Chothe Kingdom on two different important accounts without referring to any time frame in any part of the book. The text describes that *Ura Ngangoiba* or *Ura Khundaba*, the fourth king of Moirang (Kege), “fought with the Chothe of Naharam of the western hills. The Chothe chief was defeated and taken prisoner. The king himself participated in the battle and showed his dexterity in the use of weapons” (Kabui 2002: 178). The second account describes at length how the eighth king of

Moirang *Konting Hanba* or *Thangwai Konding* invaded the Chothe village of *Nungsuk (Lungsuk)* one of the dominant villages (ibid.: 181-182). The MNL beautifully described the aerial view of the entire Chothe country that they inhabit the peaks of the five mountain ranges, where four rivers meet, formed by the gorges of those five mountain ridges, in which the country was ultimately destroyed in the devastating battles by the Moirang. The four rivers are known as (1) *Tusamphai* (2) *Tukhaileng* (3) *Tuisareng* and (4) *Changbe Yemmathei*, and the name of five mountain ranges where the four rivers meet are; (1) *Nungsuk ching* (2) *Thangkhong-Tanglouching* (3) *Makan-Turuching* (4) *Houपाल-Thaba ching* and (5) *Lallum-Sagontak meina khubi ching* and the five main villages that settled on the top of these five mountain ranges are; (1) *Thongnang-Kampa* (2) *Thangkhong* (3) *Tanglei* (4) *Makan* and (5) *Tuntha* (Singh 1982: 92-93).

The above account indicates that the Chothe in early days enjoyed the political hegemony as a powerful tribe in the south-western region after the event at *Ahu Lungleh-Waishu* but their civilization and political dominance was destroyed by the Kege-Moirang, as soon as they arrived in the region and emerged as a new powerful group (Kabui 2004: 176). There are still many stories associated with superstitious beliefs that prohibit intermarriage between the two communities because of historical and religious reasons. Any Chothe girl that gets married with a Moirang man, it is believed, will not live long after marriage. Kongsam Manikchand gives a similar explanation as to why the Chothe especially Marem clan (Khuman) and Ningthoujas of Meitei still cannot marry. According to him the two specific clans of Moirang are believed to be cognate through Pakhangba.<sup>11</sup> It is believed that after the incident at *Nungsuk (Lungsuk)* the relationship of Chothe with the Poirei (Meitei) was strengthened. The Poirei are believed to have come from the north-west. As they tried to pass through the Chothe territory (Loiyang) in the southern region of the state they sought asylum amongst the Chothe, which was granted at the foothills of Leimaton. According to their oral history thereafter, the matrimonial relationship and political alliance began to develop, helping one another in times of war and conflict. After Imphal (Kangla) principality was created by the confederation of Moirang principality, south-western kingdoms (like Chothe, Kharam and Koireng) and Poirei (Meitei) by ousting the Khaba-nganba of the north, it is said that the Moirang principality later tried to detach itself from the confederation several times which resulted in many battles. According to Chothe elders it is believed that the political relationship enhanced again during King Kyampa (1467-1508) matured during the reign of King Khakempa (1597-1652) and continued till the time of Maharaj Chandrakriti (1850-1886).

They Chothe claim that the Central cluster group were separated from the parent Lamlanghupi Western group probably during the reign of King Kyampa or Khakempa after a 'Tug-of-war' was organised in honour of their jubilant war celebration. According to them the defeated group in the tug-of-war became the followers of the queen and lived near the Palace (Imphal). They claim the present Treasury Office of Manipur near the Governor's House opposite Kangla fort was their old settlement called as *Ahu Saishakung*. They claim the old banyan tree with some stones around it that still exists inside the Treasury Office was their abandoned *Laman* or deity's secret place when they occupied it. Later some of this group shifted to another place called *Ahu Yangpalkung*. This second settlement is found mentioned by W. Ibohal Singh that "The rest of the Mareems moved towards the north of their settlement. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. more precisely in the period from c.1403 to c.1415 A.D they were found to have inhabited the Koubru hills at a place known as Yangpham Chaklikpok" (1986: 150). The Chothe say it was during the reign of Pu Punem Mareem (one of the Chothe chief) that the split occurred and he was later succeeded by Pu Lentih and Pu Damli who led them further down south-east. They left the place because of the political turmoil and marched towards the south-east hill ranges and settled at various places like, *Ahu Thampuilai*, *Ahu Mankang*, *Ahu Punkang*, *Ahu Langmeiching*, near Langthabal, Sandangsengba Maring (Thoubal), Pallel, etc. until they reached the present area. The problem of locating the exact places of these settlements is a major predicament in systematically constructing their history as they do not have any written records.

The settlement of *Ahu Lungsuk-bung* (*Chote-Munpi*) is also still remembered because of a major defensive battle against the Kamhau, the Sakte Chin group or the Chin-Lushei group which occurred around 17<sup>th</sup> century. The event is said to have occurred after some brave Chothe men like Parirangpa, Neitangpu and other great warriors had expired. The battle is also considered very destructive like the *Ahu Lungsuk* battle with the Moirang. They were scattered and settled in many places like *Ahu Kumpibung*, *Ahu Kanwai* and *Ahu Oksongbung* around Moirang and Churchandpur border (Hiyang 1985: 26). Soon the Khongsai or the New-Kukis joined the arrival of Kamhau before the Chothe could re-establish their village pushing them northwards. The *Cheitharon Kumpaba* (*Ch.K*) records that nine *haos* were abducted from Chothe Paya by the Khongchais (Parratt 2005: 151).<sup>12</sup> There are many similar accounts recorded in *Ch.K* where the Chothe encountered many defensive battles against the Rongmei (Kabui or Zeliangrong) in the southern region around Khoupum valley (ibid: 160). The Rongmei in the south are

believed to have migrated from the north during the reign of King Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) who reached as far as the Mizoram border and moved up again.

According to the Chothe oral history, the second major split occurred at *Ahu Chainapung* in the south-western region in which one section of the group headed towards the north and temporarily occupied *Ahu Purumkhong* (near Wainem village) and who further moved north around Imphal and then migrated down to the south-east of Chandel. The event at *Ahu Chainapung* seems to have occurred during the frequent Khongsai (New-kuki) aggression and probably before the reign of King Chingthangkhopma (1759-60, 63-74). According to Kamei “on 20<sup>th</sup> December (Wakching) 1786, Chingthangkhopma went in an expedition against the Kukis, He marched to Lamlangtong where he spent a night; spent another night at *Chainapung*, then proceed to the Laimatak base, spent a day at Nungshai” (Kamei 2004: 64). There is a confusion to ascertain this period. According to P.S. Haokip “during the reign of king Chandrakriti, Kamhau, the Sakte Chin king, declared war on the Meitei Kingdom and captured the King, taking him away to Chin land” (1998: 27). This indicates that another major war with the New-Kuki occurred during the reign of Maharaj Gambhir Singh (1825-34) or Chandrakriti (1850-86). The Chothe elders claim that their great forefathers were fully involved with Chandrakriti in different battles against the New-Kuki groups because of their political ties where Chandrakriti’s gratitude is shown by his frequent visits to Chothe villages and giving his ornamental assets as gifts to the Chothe (Singh 1995: 103). Many of such ornamental assets or artefacts of various kings of Manipur given to Chothe during their relationships are still preserved and treated as sacred items by the Lamlanghupi Village Council (see Pic. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14).

It does not necessarily mean that the process of migration and territorial expansion ended at *Ahu Chainapung*. The first and the second groups kept changing their places and continued splitting, depending on the situation. Although they moved north and settled for a while around Imphal as described above, they further proceed to south-east along the eastern mountain range near Thoubal and finally confined themselves to the present Chandel region as the Eastern group and Central cluster group respectively. The Central cluster group has many stories to tell about themselves. They claimed to have attacked and snatched a Kom village situated between Pallel and Kakching hillocks before they further moved down the mountain range and settled at *Ahu Chipi*. Some of them say that the confusion of identity between ‘Purum and Chothe’ began from this incident after they snatched and temporarily occupied the village by renaming it as *Ahu Sumpum* before they moved further down south.

Parpa Roushi (76/M) of Ajouhu said there is one folksong to prove that the Chothe Central cluster group settled at *Ahu Chipi* composed by Pu Theipu (village chief) in dedication to the Banyan (*Bung*) tree which he had planted. It is said to be their tradition and custom to plant banyan trees at new settlements. The title of the song is “Chipi-laa”, and the first stanza in free translation is given below:

*“Keina saking Chipi zaija-o,  
suva bungpi phunche,  
Kolvai lamna - o hoisa ae”.*

(I will witness the Chipi’s prosperity,  
when this Banyan tree grows big,  
dancing around would be delightful to see).

Some of the settlements that followed after *Ahu Chipi* are; *Ahu Belhuring*, *Ahu Louhar*, *Ahu Lunghu*, *Ahu Phaihu*, *Ahu Ajouhu* (Purum Khullen), *Ahu Waipu-Inlon* (Tampakhu), *Ahu Chumbang*, etc. Subsequently, the rest of the Central cluster villages bifurcated from these three later principal villages. They also tell a story about a mysterious event when they settled at *Ahu Louhar* that all the roofs of the Makan families were blown off on one stormy night. They believe that it was because of a false promise made by one of the Makan man to the village council and to his fellow friends after a quarrel broke out and the matter was brought up to the village authority. The story is discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Khongkhang the Eastern group and Lamlanghupi the Western group also kept changing their settlements from time to time around the area due to religious and environmental factors. Lamlanghupi village is said to have shifted at least four times from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards within a radius of ten kilometres. The first one was said to be because their deity augured them to change their sacred-grove or deity’s site from Laimaton peak in their divination. The second, due to the epidemic of cholera and smallpox, while the third was because of scarcity of water since the water source was far from their habitat. Thus, the present settlement is said to be more than a hundred years old after shifted from Khuman (Khuman is a Meitei village now).

Based on the above description and evidence it is significant to note that the Chothe and some other old ethnic groups like; Kharam, Koireng, Anal, etc. have migrated and colonised the whole south-western region of Manipur from the early period. But it is unfortunate that we cannot ascertain the exact period of their entry in the region as no written records are available except the two historical texts that describe only their early

presence and later subjugation by the new invading groups. The *MNL* states that the “Conquest of Kharam village of Langte was the beginning of the Moirang conflict with the hill tribes of the western hills” and subsequently the other surrounding groups too had entered war with Kege Moirang (Kabui 2004: 176).

John Shakespeare, a British political agent, has classified the indigenous groups of Manipur into “Old and New-Kuki” clans/groups based on the stage and direction of migration from the southern region and the cultural traits, language, dress, food habits compared with the new-influx or New-Kuki clans/groups of Kuki-Chin-Mizo. J. Shakespeare’s old-Kuki clans are; Aimol, Anal, Chawte (Chothe), Chiru, Kolhen (Koireng), Kom, Lamkang, Purum, Tikhup and Vaiphei (1912: 149). S.N. Ansari in support of this view states that, the Chin-Kuki tribes, on the basis of their arrival are divided into Old-Kuki Clans and the New-Kuki Clans, thereby resulting in the generic usage by many scholars of today (1991: 14).

J. Shakespeare vividly states about Chothe in nutshell that, “Though the chronology of the Chronicle is not beyond suspicion, I think this may be taken as proof that these clans appeared in Manipur a good deal earlier than their relations the Bete and Rhangkhol entered Cachar” (1912: 148). There seems to be no doubt about Shakespeare’s statement as far as their oral history is concerned since the Chothe and other Old-Kuki groups also claim they had a large population and controlled a huge tract of land in the early days. Finally they were reduced to a minority because of numerous factors like bloody and frequent wars and battles, succession, famines, plagues, invasion and assimilation. Similarly McCulloch also substantiated the statement that, “All these tribes were much more numerous than they are at present, and not further back than thirty years ago, some of them who are now represented by but one or two small villages in position far removed from their former ones, occupied large tracts, but though reduced in numbers they retain all their particular customs, speak their separate languages, and are objects of much interest” and that “they are now but small remnants” (1857: 42, 65). It is these facts that classified the state as having a number of various ethnic groups because they maintain their cultural identity.

Many of the so called the Old-Kuki strongly disagree with the usage and suffix ‘Old-Kuki’ to their ethnic identity. They say the word ‘Kuki’ is not relevant at all as it is a generic term coined by the British political agents. They prefer to identify themselves either with their own ethnic names or with an indigenous name that has historical connection.

This grievance can be contended with the writings of William Shaw who says that, “the origin of this word ‘Kuki’ is not known, but it first appears in Bengal in Rawlings’ writings of the “Cucis or Mountainers of Tipra” in Asiatic Researches (II, xii) in 1792. And he discovers in the works of Lewin (Exercises in the Lushai Dialect, p, 1) a derivation for ‘Kuki’ from DZO (Lushai) word, ‘Tui-Kuk’, for the Tipperah (Sakchip) Tribe (1929: 11). While, some scholars are of the opinion that it was the name of the first Thadou village in Cachar. So, now the term Kuki is understood as a generic word that was derived during the British colonial period and thereafter, because of frequent usage and references in various discussions and writings it became widely popular in the course of time. Similarly, many names like Maring, Meitei, Moirang, Chiru, Purum, and Kom are also considered as generic terms that derive from the frequent references made to a group of people in identifying with their peculiar characteristic and behaviour in early days.

### **2.3 Demography: Factors and Consequences Leading to De-population**

The 2001 census of India estimates the entire Chothe population as 2675, while the first Indian census report of 1931 shows only 250 souls, which excludes the “Purum” (Chothe) of T.C. Das with 305 souls (see table 8). The exclusion was because of the internal confusion during the survey between the census enumerators and nature of nomenclature used by the people living in the region.

The most intriguing question is why is Chothe population remains so thin even today despite absence of wars and battles unlike in the past? Could it be due to high mortality and low fertility rates? Or could there be other reasons? According to them, there are explained and unexplained reasons to justify the cause for their slow and low growth rate. Some factors that may be highlighted are: frequent devastating wars and battles in the past, natural calamities such as plagues, smallpox, cholera and typhoid, low selection potential of mates, assimilation into Meitei through matrimonial and political relationships, etc. Similar factors are also explained by Gina Shangkham in her book (2006: 2-3).

**Assimilation:** The process of acculturation and assimilation cannot be denied in the history of Manipur, since Meitei culture is blend with that of various ethnic communities, though they earlier had their own distinctive identity. Imphal, the capital of Manipur is a melting pot of numerous ethnic groups from the surrounding hill tribes. This fact is pointed out by R.K. Ranjit (1988) who writes, “Instances of the hill people coming down to the plains and identifying themselves with the plains people had been a common occurrence... the period was characterised by a type of relation where the various tribal

villages became either the subjects or the allies of the Meitei kings only due to the latter's military supremacy" (1988:86). To substantiate his point it is found recorded in *Cheitharol Kumpaba* that most of the *haos* (tribal) people were made to pledge to become blood brothers especially during king Chairairongba period (Parratt 2005: 110). No doubt, there is a place called Haobam Leikai in Imphal an old tribal colony. The people now living there are believed to have completely assimilated with the Meitei by accepting the *Salam sagei* or clan. There are also many accounts even today where many communities like the Tangkhul, Maring, Chothe, Kharam, Koireng, Rongmei, Liangmei, Tarao, Bengali, Cachari, Tripuri, etc. have been absorbed and amalgamated into Meitei culture and live in different assimilated areas. It is believed that the earliest group of people who were assimilated to Meitei are people related through matrimony and politics, allied tribals captured in wars, domestic helpers, matrilineal kin members of the subsequent kings and queens. Moirangthem also mentions that Meitei are a conglomeration of migrant groups.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 9 Chothe population by village: Census of India 2001 and personal data 2004**

<i>Cen sus Sl. no.</i>	<i>Census name</i>	<i>No. of house hold</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Fem ale</i>	<i>Common indigenous name</i>	<i>No. of Hous ehold</i>	<i>Person al data Sept.20 04</i>
79	Chandonpokpi (Phaipi)	8	41	19	22	Phaipi	19	91
121	Khongkhang	47	256	133	123	Khongkhang	49	296
154	Purum Tampak	88	387	195	192	Tampakhu or Phaihu	72	332
155	Purum khullen	26	126	53	73	Ajouhu	38	164
157	Purum Lainingkhum	37	200	95	105	Laininghu	35	204
158	Chothe Khunou	14	66	37	29	Chothe Khunou	14	67
159	Chandrapoto	53	243	117	126	Phantu	54	260
197	Ziontlang	34	178	81	97	Ziontlang	31	186
198	New- Wangparal	33	158	68	90	New- Wangparal	25	138
199	Old-Wangparal	29	127	56	71	Old- Wangparal	21	111
203	Purum Chumbang #	<b>154</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>398</b>	Chumbang	72	336
177	Chothe Munpi@	54	306	170	136	Lamlanghupi	53	291
						Lamlanglon*	13	42
						Bethel Happy land*	04	13
						Lungleh *	10	50
						Salemthar*	10	42
						Leirungtabi *	05	27
		577	2888	1426	1362	Lunghu *	06	39
	<b>Total</b>		<b>2675</b>				<b>531</b>	<b>2689</b>

*Note: The asterisk \* marked villages are new settlements which are not yet recognised by the Census of India (COI). According to the Census of India the total population of the scheduled tribe of Chothe is given as 2675, which is almost equivalent with the personal data collected as shown but the Census of India 2001 data by village gives 2888 total population an error in the figure is found with the Purum Chumbang # village, and this mark @ indicates the abandon settlement of Lamlanghupi in Churhandpur district (Henglep sub-division).*

In connection to the above explanation many Chothe too claim that those who were left behind around Imphal like; *Ahu Yangpalkung*, *Ahu Sarouthil* (near new Checkon), *Ahu Saishakung* (near the present Manipur Treasury Office, Imphal, opposite Kangla Fort), *Ahu Mankang* (near Moirangkhom), *Ahu Langmeiching* (Langthabal hills), etc., were assimilated long ago with the Meitei. Most of them were believed to be great leaders holding high political portfolios, domestic helpers of the kings and queens and his royal family members. One evidence suggests that many tribes have been assimilated to Meitei is that many of the valley people still bear tribal names although many have taken to Hindu names by now because of their religion.

**Natural Calamities (Epidemics):** Natural calamities like epidemics, plagues, droughts and famines, wars and battles and also other superstitious beliefs are considered to be the causes for their low demographic profile. The chronicle *Ch.K* records many events of wars and battles and some major epidemics which strongly affected them. The first epidemic seems to have occurred in 1520, while the second, third and fourth occurred in 1720, 1737 and 1744 respectively, and are all related with the diseases of smallpox, cholera and typhoid killing a great number of people (Parratt 2005: 46, 127, 145, and 158). It is mentioned that Khuraileima Mayampi, one of the queens of Garib Niwaz too became a victim of the deadly smallpox in 1720 (ibid: 127). According to Chothe oral history the epidemics were so devastating in their region that thousands of them perished. They claim to have buried five to ten persons in one burial tomb because it was impossible to dig a tomb for each of the deceased since their tomb design is very complicated. They also claim that those who were seriously infected and died by the dreaded diseases were even burnt for fear of transmitting and spreading the disease to the survivors. This type of funeral is erroneously remarked by M.T. Laiba that the Chothe-Wainem in earlier days used to burn their dead bodies (1992: 27). The fact is that the Chothe bury the dead bodies accompanied by several rites and rituals.

The Chothe, being superstitious, believe that the cause of the epidemics was a curse bestowed upon them by their hostile enemies for extensively using magic and witchcraft against their enemies like the Moirang, Maring, Khongsai and Rongmei at the time of wars and battles. According to H. Thambaljou and Y. Maipak of Lamlanghupi,

“Chothe were very famous in olden days for possessing powerful magic and charms”. They believe many powerful magical charms and spells were lost to the Meitei and Maring priests in due course of time. Hiyang Gulapsing of Lamlanghupi said that, “The first plague is believed to be the curse of an old Chothe widow (name unknown) married to a Moirang man”. He says that according to the folktale, the widow visited her parents’ village and when some of the Chothe youths accompanied her by boat only up to the south eastern bank of the Loktak Lake and left her alone. In spite of her earnest request the youths refused to escort till her house. Hence out of her extreme anger, she cursed their descendants to have a short life span. Another similar magical spell story is told by Y. Tomalsing called ‘*Ruipi Loiyang*’ (the main horizontal beam or bar of the house) related to the decline of their power and population.<sup>14</sup> He says that the house beam was a powerful magical talisman of the Chothe that had tremendous power and strength until it was taken away by a Moirang man and his Chothe wife (name unknown). It is said that the man discovered the secret magical beam during the three years of marriage labour in his wife’s house as per the Chothe custom, and thereby conspired with his beloved Chothe wife to trick her father to give her that golden shining beam as *Mansum* (bride price or dowry). The father, because of his silly promise made to his only daughter, ultimately gave it away. Thereafter, it is believed that the power and strength of the Chothe began to decline gradually. Some believe that it is because of their forefathers’ negligence to pay due reverence to their Supreme Guardian God *Pu Lungchungpa*, improper ritualistic practices, wrong veneration and invocation of magical formulas in their rituals. Considering all the above explanations many still firmly believe that it could be because of such magical pride, egos, mistakes, malpractices of magic and rituals, and negligence that put them in this situation of near extinction, in the epidemics of 1520, 1720, 1737 and 1744 (Parratt 2005: 46,127,147,158). For example, Lamlanghupi of Bishnupur, at *Ahu Lamlanglon* is said to have had a large population of more than 500 households at one point of time but were substantially reduced to few households by natural calamities.

Likewise, the people of *Ajouhu* narrated a tragic incident where half of their village population suddenly disappeared in a mysterious midnight landslide at *Ahu Tuitrit*. They believe that the tragedy was a curse on their village chief for his cruelty and wickedness in dividing the society into the rich and poor and celebrating the main festival separately. In one particular festive season there was heavy rainfall and as usual the rich people started celebrating the festival on a narrow elevated area. However, one night all the rich people mysteriously perished in landslide and only those few poor people who were celebrating

on the upper narrow ridge survived. The Central cluster people are believed to be the descendants of those who survived the incident.

**Wars and Battles:** The early history of Chothe is about wars, battles, inter/intra conflicts, subjugation and territorial issues against various ethnic groups beginning from *Ahu Lungleh-Waishu* settlement to *Ahu Chainapung* till the latter part of the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that the frequent destructive and expensive wars and battles, plundering and burning down of houses of the entire villages against the Moirang, Meitei, Maring, Kharam, Kamhao, Khongsai and Rongmei, as mentioned in various historical texts have cost them thousands of lives and heavy loss of property since their arrival in the southern region which ultimately led them to their downfall.

**Low Selection Potential of Mates:** Another theoretical explanation given for the reason of their low demographic profile is the high mortality rate and low fertility rate. Although their superstitious beliefs might not necessarily be true, it is very convincing looking at the demographic profile of their slow population growth rate and the high mortality rate as indicated in Arabinda Basu's statistical data. The high mortality rate is especially found among the middle-age group rather than with the infants and to be more precise the percentage of men in the age group of above fifty-five years is very low compared to other ethnic neighbouring communities. Basu writes, "Infant mortality rate before reproduction (i.e. 15 years and below) seems to be very low in both the Purum isolates compared to other Indian tribes" (see his Table 13, also supported by Table 3 and Table 5 too). Further he states that, "Purum display greater mortality than fertility components; the same ratio where mortality components exceeds fertility components by about two times" (1985: 40, 43, 49). Therefore, from the perspective of kinship and marriage rather than from the superstitious point of view Basu states that "The low selection potential among the Purum is the result of their lower pre-reproductive mortality as well as their lower mean and variance in number of offspring" (ibid: 49). The above statement reasonably supports the Chothe prescriptive marriage system. As a result, the selection of mates is somehow limited and complicated in structure as it is confined within the community which has their own distinctive rigid marriage system although the number of intermarriages with other ethnic communities is now increasing.

## 2.4 Wars and Battles Involved in the Past

The history of Chothe is all about wars, battles, conflicts and territorial feuds from the earliest period to the nineteenth century which have always been defensive in nature. They believe that they had a large population at *Ahu Lungleh-Waishu* (in Mizoram) before they were completely devastated in the battle against the new invading Chin-Kuki groups. Later they claim to have re-established their supremacy and political hegemony in the southern region around the Leimatak river basin but soon the abrupt attack of the Kege-Moirang on Chothe *Ahu Nungsuk (Lungsuk)* village left them devastated. Subsequently, till the later part of the nineteenth century, similar wars and battles continued in the region especially with the Moirang and other neighbouring ethnic communities like Kamhao (Sukte-Chin group), Khongsai (New-Kuki), Rongmei (Kabui or Zeliangrong), which are all evidently supported by historical books like *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* (MNL) and *Cheitharon Kumpaba (Ch.K)* besides several local sources like folktales, folksongs, legends and myths that survives to tell even today.

*Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* gives an account that the Chothe fought the first historical war with Moirang (Kege or Keke) during the reign of King Ura Khundaba or Ngangoiba, the fourth king, although the specific period is not known. Prof. Gangmumei Kabui writes, "He fought with the Chothe of Naharam of the western hills. The Chothe chief was defeated and taken prisoner. The king himself participated in the battle and showed his dexterity in the use of weapons. The reference to the defeat of the Chothe is a historical confirmation of the tradition of the Chothe that they migrated to the present habitat in the south east Manipur hills through the hills west of Manipur"(2003: 178). Later the eighth king of Moirang Konting Hangba also known as Khangwai Konding also invaded the Chothe for the second time while they were settled at *Ahu Nunsuk (Lungsuk)* around the Leimatak river basin.

The text describes that the Moirang king first attacked a Koireng village at Khungunching and defeated chief Nungnangchong before he conquered the Chothe *Nungsuk* country. The book describes how the war was fought: 'In the land of Chothe conglomeration all the brave and courageous warriors of Kege (Moirang) gathered together in the middle of the main village called 'Chothe', wearing all chest plates, spears in their hands, surrounded and attacked them. The Moirang soldiers led by the king fought a ferocious battle. Chothe village was destroyed and Kharam, a neighbouring village too was completely shattered. The whole village was completely destroyed. In that battle the King of Chothe called *Natoi Nachaoba* was defeated and captured'(Bhagashore 1992: 93). Such was the nature of warriors, the destruction and devastation of the battles in the past.

The *Cheitharon Kumpaba* chronicle gives an account of the Chothe involvement in wars and battles till the twentieth century. One probable early incident as evident begins from King Thangpi Lanthapa in 1302 A.D. which is recorded as, “They also fought against the Loipi Hao at Seku hill, in the south, and were victorious. They captured in battle Tenkongbi and *Marem Namngap*”, *Marem* (Marim) is a clan of Chothe. During the reign of King Kongyampa in 1324 A.D. it was recorded as: “They captured in battle Mayang Maipa Samloipa... Lakasumka Tao and Aaring Aarang Tao were detained and later fought against Chakpa, at Khurai Haora at Lamangtong”<sup>15</sup>; During King Tenheipa’s reign in 1335 it recorded as: “They also fought against (inhabitants of) *Loipi Marem* and at Yangpham Chaklikpok in Koupa (Khoupum) mountain range. They were victorious. They captured *Marem Sanlungpa*”; In 1359, during King Tapungpa’s reign it was written as: “They fought against the (inhabitants of) *Loipi Marem* at Yangpham Chaklikpok”; Then during King Punsipa’s reign in 1404 it was recorded as: “They captured *Keihou* the king of the *Tangkhuls* and *Marem Khamtingpa*; And also in 1653 during the reign of Khunchaopa (1652-1666) it was recorded as: “They attacked Makan village. Aachongnga, Maichampa and Chammaingang, these three and others totalling eighty people were captured in the battle” (Parratt 2005: 35, 36, 83). It is believed when Kyampa became king the relationship between Meitei and Chothe strengthen once again and the relationship matured during the reign of King Khakemba as the Chothe helped him defeat the Moirang principality. Henceforth, the close relationship between the Chothe and the Meitei began to revive, not forgetting their loyalty and friendship they had in the past.

By the eighteenth century the Moirang principality was overpowered by the Imphal principality and they seemed to have relaxed without wars for awhile but soon their attention was focused to the new immigrants like the Kamhao (Sukte Clans), the Khongsai (New-Kuki), the Cachari (Maihang or Mayang), Rongmei. The war especially with the Kamhao and Khongsai entered a new phase in their history and it is still narrated today because of the severe and massive battles caused massive destruction resulting in constant change of settlements. Hiyang Thambaljao and Y. Maipak inform that many pitiable and tragic stories still survive even today but such stories are not often narrated by the elders because of the sensitivity they feel and fear that it could arouse enmity again. They are of the view that the events occurred after brave and courageous Chothe men like Parirangpa and Neitangpu expired (Hiyang 1985: 26). The most probable period of this incident could be in late seventeenth or early eighteenth century because a similar account is recorded in *Ch.K* that in 1741 in the month of June-July (Yingen) on 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday, “nine *haos* from Chothe paya had been abducted by the Khongjai (tribe)” (Parratt 2005: 151). Then, in the

mid-eighteenth century there were many minor battles with the Kabui (Rongmei) who came down from the northwest, commonly referred to the war as *Marong Lan* by the Chothe. One such incident occurred in 1745 during the reign of Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) in the month of Phairen (January/February) is recorded as: “On Thursday, Kabui Chothe were scattered and 105 Hao’s were slain” (ibid. 2005: 160). Y. Hongpa is of the opinion that the reference “Kabui Chothe” should be stated as “the Chothe and the Kabui” because they are a different ethnic entity and had fought several battles and serious disputes had taken place with the Rongmei after the *Khongsai Lan* or Kuki war where many seem to have died from both sides in the event. Disputes over territorial rights and minor battles with other ethnic communities seemed to continue till the time of Maharaj Chandrakriti (1850-86). For example, the frequent inter-tribal wars and battles like with the Kharam. G. Shangkham writes, the Kharam in the south, “fight with the Chothe during which many men lost their lives”, and also in the north at “Kharamban” the present Khuramban bazaar, Imphal (2006: 2, 44-45).

Therefore, the history of Chothe is replete with wars, battles, feuds, territorial disputes and exodus starting from Chin-hills to *Ahu Lungleh-Waishu* (Lushei hills) since the early period to the settlement of *Ahu Lungsubkung* and *Ahu Chainapung* in the south-western region of Manipur till the nineteenth century. Although when wars and conflicts finally end with one group there seems to be another group waiting on the other side of the village boundary ready with spears and swords for the next battle. However, by the eighteenth century they appeared to have grown tired and exhausted because of constant battles and the natural calamities of plagues that greatly reduced their population to mere thousands by the time. They seem to have learnt moral values on the causes and effects of wars and battles much before others could as they did not partake in any warfare or participate in any political alliances anymore in the later periods as they were rather more concerned with feasting, drinking and merrymaking. Therefore, as T.C. Das (1945) describes, they appeared docile and submissive in nature. However, most of the tribal people, though politically subjugated by the Meitei kings, remained autonomous and functioned independently. The concern of the Meitei king was manpower or soldiers to help him in the war campaigns and the tributes. It is said that people captured in wars and battles were often treated as slaves or bonded labourers instead of killing them like the Rongmei of Imphal. If one reads personal diaries and accounts of the British Political administrators like Ethel St. Clair Grimwood’s *My Three Years in Manipur and Escape from the Recent Mutiny* (1891) it gives a clear picture of the Manipur socio-historical conditions of the time. There is no doubt that there are instances of killing or carrying out

human sacrifices or head hunting even among the Chothe, similar to other Naga tribes like the Ao, Konyak, Lotha, Tangkhul, Angami. They claim the *Zarr rhein* festival, especially celebrated only by the Parpa clan, is related to the human sacrifice and was later replaced by rat sacrifice (*aju-rin*). The above description indicates that the Chothe in ancient days were once acknowledged as a powerful tribe in the south-western region of Manipur with a large population but due the above known and unknown factors and subservience to Manipur kings later, they subsequently became what they are now.

## 2.5 Literacy

According to the 2001 Census of India, the total literacy rate of Manipur is 68.87 per cent while the literacy rate of Chothe is given as 72.35% which indicates a remarkable achievement in the field of education with an increase of almost 10 percent from 59.89 per cent in 1991. However, my personal investigation conducted in September-October 2004 shows 68.76 % (average is 70.79 %), (see Table 10). The variable is taken from Class V passed to Post-Graduates. The variable of the classification in percentage is given in Table 7, where the total number of under-matriculation or drop-outs from Classes V to IX is 1194 (44.40 %), Matriculation or Class X passed is 318 (11.82 %), Pre-university Class XII passed is 224 (8.33%), Graduate is 100 (3.71 %) and post-graduate is 13 (0.48 %) respectively.

Table 10 indicates that the bulk of the literate populace belongs to the under-matriculate category while the percentage of graduates and post-graduates is extremely low in all villages, except Lamlanghupi which has the maximum number of graduates - 26. This indicates that majority of them attended high-school but did not continue further due to various the socio-economic reasons.

In the following six villages, namely Chumbang, Khongkhang, Phantu, Chandolpokpi, Old-Wangparal and New-Wangparal, one Govt. Lower Primary (LP) school each is found and one Govt. Junior Board (JB) school each in the four villages viz. Lamlanghupi, Tampakhu, Laininghu and Ajouhu. Besides these, Lamlanghupi, Ziontlang and Salemthar have one Private English School each. Each village has at least one government primary or high school but the enrolment of the students in these institutes is very low due to irregularity of teachers and very poor infrastructure. As a result most of the village children enrol in the neighbouring private schools which offer them better education.

For example, St. Paul's School, run by the Salesian congregation at Chandel and Loyola School (Estd. 1982) the Jesuit Catholic missionary school at Lamlanghupi, besides

these two, other private missionary schools have immensely helped Chothe society and its neighbouring communities especially in the field of education and socio-cultural development. The high literacy rate among the Chothe and other tribal communities is attributable to the dedicated service rendered by these private schools rather than Govt. schools.

**Table 10 Chothe literacy rate: Census of India 2001 and personal data collected in Sept.-Oct. 2004**

Category	Aj ou hu (P u m kh ull en )	B et he l H ap py lan d *	C h a n t h o n K p o k p i	C h o h e K p o u	C h u m ba ng (P u m )	K h o n g k h a n g	L a m n g h u p i	L a m n g h u p i	L a m n g h u p i	L e r n g h u p i	L u n g h u p i	L u n g h u p i	N e w - W a n g p a r a l	O l d - W a n g p a r a l	Ph an tu (C h a n d ra po to )	S a m t h a r *	Ta m pa kh u (P u r m )	Z i o n t l a n g	Tot al	Per c en t a g e
<b>Illiterates (COI-2001)</b>	35	-	-	0	19	7	0	1	0	0	-	0	0	0	29	0	53	2	<b>28</b>	<b>10.6</b>
<b>Literacy rate COI-2001</b>	.6	-	7	6	84	4	7	7	-	-	-	-	8	7	75	-	71	7	<b>-</b>	<b>72.3</b>
Under-matric (Cl: V-IX)	38	12	5	3	42	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	6	96	2	16	9	<b>11</b>	<b>44.4</b>
Matriculation (Cl-X)	09	-	1	0	64	2	3	3	0	-	0	-	0	1	28	0	47	3	<b>31</b>	<b>11.8</b>
Pre-university (Cl-XII. Std)	14	-	1	0	52	1	1	4	0	0	0	-	0	0	09	0	26	1	<b>22</b>	<b>8.33</b>
Graduates	09	-	0	0	13	0	0	2	0	0	0	-	0	0	07	0	10	0	<b>10</b>	<b>3.71</b>
Post-graduates	01	-	-	-	02	-	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	02	-	03	-	<b>13</b>	<b>0.48</b>
<b>Total</b>	71	12	7	5	17	1	1	2	3	1	3	1	1	9	14	3	25	1	<b>18</b>	<b>68.7</b>
			9	4	3	8	8	2	0	6	4	2	1	7	2	0	5	4	<b>49</b>	<b>6%</b>

Note: the asterisk \* marked villages are new settlements which are not recognised by the Census of India (COI) yet.

## 2.6 Neighbouring Tribes and their Influences

The Chothe are immediately surrounded by various ethnic communities and they have been influencing one another through the ages in language, religion, economic, political, and other socio-cultural aspects like food habits, dress codes, moral code of

conducts and behaviour. The Chothe of Lamlanghupi are closely surrounded by various ethnic groups like, the Meitei, Rongmei, Chiru, Kom and Khongsai, while the central cluster neighbours are encircled by the Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Lamkang, Tarao, Maring, Aimol and Meitei. The Khongkhang, the Eastern Chothe neighbours are the Maring, Lamkang and Thadou and Haokip. All these ethnic communities have their own distinctive customs and traditions which are different in many respects and also share many similar cultural traits. Interestingly, despite living side by side they maintain a high status-quo without interfering in any of the internal or political affairs of the others: they rather tend to appreciate the other's distinctive socio-culture values. These indigenous groups are highly democratic and diplomatic in settling various disputes like land, marriage, political issues in traditional methods. Every chief of the village or head of the community expects respect equally from his ethnic neighbours. If one does not conform to such formality the initiator is always blamed and charged for his incompetence and negligence, which sometimes may result in violence and conflict. Since each village or community has its own traditional rules and regulations any complication that arises is resolved amicably through cultural understanding. Moreover rigid customary laws of tribes are becoming flexible due to the various external forces that influence them. For example, intermarriage is encouraged by many and the penalty for wrong doers is getting reasonably lenient as compared to earlier days. Each community still maintains their own social ethos, moral code of conduct and lives harmoniously despite problems in the past.

R.C. Roy claims the western Chothe that “the culture of the Chawte of Loktak Lake region in Manipur has been largely influenced by their Manipuri or Meitei neighbours” (1936:137). This statement is made from an external observation because of numerous influences but internally they continue to practice many of their rigid indigenous socio-cultural traditions. For example, their intrinsic customs like rites-de-passage of birth, marriage and death ceremonies, festivals, rituals, nature of worships are different from Meitei. The Chothe of Lamlanghupi speaks the Meitei language more fluently than other Chothe group due to their geographical location and daily interaction with the Meitei of Bishnupur. From the historical point many socio-cultural elements have been acculturated and the process is still continuing. For example, language, dress code, life style, folkways are some of the elements that are acculturated by the Chothe from Meitei. But the internal aspects of socio-political activities remain almost the same as they do not want outside interferences.

Regarding to the Central cluster and Eastern groups there is so much cultural affinity with most of the neighbouring ethnic communities where the degree of influences

are very negligible since the surrounding ethnic groups are mostly tribal who share similar cultural traits and developmental activities in the region. Moreover, intermarriage among them is very common. Many of the individuals who marry girls from other communities are in most cases able to speak their wife's language or dialect. But these groups of people never try to impose their wife's customs and traditions upon their society. The dynamic elements of influences are brought by education, modernization, liberalization, globalization, Government developmental policies and programmes, flexibility in their custom and tradition, annual student's conferences and meetings, and most importantly the advent of Christianity have brought vast changes to the entire Chothe from the traditional to the modern.

From the historical perspective the earliest ethnic neighbours of Chothe who inhabit the south-western region are the Kharam, the Koireng, the Funan, Maring, the Moirang (Kege) and the Poirei (Meitei). But significantly the Chothe, Kharam, Koireng, Kom, Aimol, Chiru, Purum, Tarao are all believed to have originated from one common ancestor as based on the semantics of their language, cultural and historical backgrounds. It is also said the Kom, Aimol and Chiru have a historical link with the Rangkhoh of Mizoram and Tripura. The strong bond of relationship between the Chothe and the Meitei (Poireiton) develops from the matrimonial and political relationship as described in many ancient historical and religious texts of Manipur.

Y. Hongpa and Y. Chouyaima of Lamlanghupi said that, "The people in olden days often claimed supremacy over others to identify themselves as distinctively as possible from others by keeping their reputation high". According to them, for example, the Kharam are known for their bravery in wars with big swords and huge shields, the Maring for their magic and peculiar hair style as they tied their hair knot (*Samtun*) near the forehead unlike other Kuki-Chin-Mizo who tied it above or at the back of the head. The Moirang's (formerly known as Kege) came to be known as "Mai-rang" (painted/striped face/dresses) because of their wild and aggressive attitude in fights with painted faces and striped dresses. They say in early days the Meitei (Cachari or Bengal) were often referred to as "Mai-tai" (people who apply white paste on their face/forehead) or "Mee-atei" (stranger or foreigner) because of the white paste (*Tika* or *Chandon*) applied on their forehead signifying their distinctive religious Vaishnavite identity from other groups. Similarly, there are many ethnic communities distinguished themselves from other cultural groups by their peculiarities, thereby influencing each other in many ways.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Ram* or *Lam* means land: Many original words sounding with *R* is interchanged with *L*. For instance, *Rung* or *Lung*, *Rui* as *Lui*, *Piring* as *Pilling*. Similarly *Chou* as *J/Zou*, *Zu* as *Yu* etc. indicating that many of their original words and vocabulary are declining and diminishing each day.

<sup>2</sup> *Khongsai*: The first clan of the New-Kuki or the Thadou speaking group that comes in contact with the so-called Old-Kuki in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are locally known as “Khongsai”. But the Meitei generally refers to all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo speaking groups as Khongjai unable to distinguish the particular ethnic groups.

<sup>3</sup> *Marem* or *Marim Chothe*: *Marem* or *Mareem* or *Marim* is one of the major clan of the Chothe. In olden days a village is usually known either by the chief’s name or his clan’s name after identifying the group of people. So we often found many old writing confused with local and common (nick) names. For instance, *Makan Turuching*, “*Makan*’ is another major clan of Chothe (see page 13). W. Ibohal Singh pointed out that “By far the Marems were one of the most important tribes in naming different places” (1986: 150). He describes “A little later than the Loi another tribe of proto-Sino-Tibetan origin arrived and settled on the north-west of Lamangdong on the Loijing range. This particular Tibeto-Burman tribe of proto-Sino-Tibetan was called *Marem*. The *Marems* came to their habitat on the *Loi-jing* range by the southerly route” by 11<sup>th</sup> A.D century (Singh 1986: 150-153, 208-9, 423-4; Kabui 2002: 169). The Chothe oral history says that the Poireiton group seeks shelter while they tried to pass through the southern region. This indicates that the Chothe or Marim clan arrived in Manipur probably much earlier than the Poireiton (Meitei), though the given date cannot be ascertained.

<sup>4</sup> *Moirang*: Though Moirangs are originally known as ‘Kege/ Keke’ (Chinese-Tai stock), they are commonly referred as ‘*Mai-rang*’ by Chothe Marems, literally, ‘aggressive face or attitude’ but it means, ‘stripes people as they wore stripes dresses’. They are also known by their clan dominancy called Khuman as Dr. Kongsam Manikchand describes, “The Khumans were particularly famous for their wild and turbulent nature” (Naorem 1988:154). It is also believed to have derived from the word ‘Moriya’ king while some said from ‘*Mui*’ means hair or silk (fiber) refer to the indigenous spinning machine because the Kege-Moirang are said to be the first group of people to have introduced silk and silk-worm rearing in Manipur (Kabui 2002: 14). The indigenous spinning machine is called *Mui* in Chothe but the Meitei called it as *Tareng - Masha* and the silk cloth as *Mokka phe*. Likewise the ‘Maring’ is said to have originally derived from ‘*Mei-ling Ru-ngei* = *Mailing* = *Maring* meaning those people who stole fire’, the Maring are believed to be a section of Poirei. This legend is still alive in the Chothe folklore as they came seeking asylum but the next day they stole all the fire and left the place secretly out of fear (Singh 1986:151).

<sup>5</sup> *Tongjei Maril*: It is an old Cachar road that pass through the Leimaton peak near Bishnupur, and *Ngapurum Chingjing* the new Cachar road near Kangpokpi that pass through Tamei village of Tamenglong district; are two important old trading (card) road/routes exist on the south-western region that passes to Tripura, Cachar (Silchar) or Bengal-desh where the Vaishnavist and Muslim of Bengal immigrated from it. M.T. Laiba describes that “*Tongjei Maril* existed during the years 1837-44, in a bad shaped and peddles” (1992: 354).

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<sup>6</sup> *Meitei*: W. I. Singh states that “The *Marems* gave names of other places associated with the word ‘Moi’ lying in the valley like *Moi-chachinm* *Moi-ching*, *Moi-tangpok*... The *Marems* used to call the *Loi*, *Lai*, *Chakpa* and other *Tai* by the name *Tai*. Hence, the *Marems* probably gave the name *Moi-Tai* to the tribes of *Tai* origin inhabiting the foothills of *Loi-ching* close to them. It is believed that subsequently other immigrants also call these tribes *Moi-Tai* as transferred from the *Marems*” (1986: 424). Many local scholars have attempted explaining in different ways which is clear from G. Kabui statement that “the origin of the *Meitei* is shrouded in mystery and the study on the subject is greatly influenced by the religious faiths and the political ideologies of the *Meities* themselves, thus making the problem highly speculative and controversial” and that “B.H. Hodgson in the mid nineteenth century thought, was a, combined appellation of Siamese ‘*Tai*’ and Kochin Chinese ‘*Moy*’ (*Moy Tai*= *Moytai* =*Moitai* = *Meitei*)”, (Kabui 2002:15). From the above it is seen that some *Meitei* originally belong to the Chinese-*Tai* origin but not all, some other tribal groups also refers them in ancient days as *Poi* or *Poirei*, *Chenglei*, *Shelloy*, *Funan*, etc. But later these groups seem to have amalgamated to form new cultural groups by acculturation and assimilation. The *Poirei* group after their defeat at *Ewaitha* (*Moirang*) is believed to settled at the foothill of *Loiching* or *Lamangtong* (*Bishnupur*) by *Pakhangpa*, hence, *Poirei* the ancient *Meitei* are known as “*Loi*”. However, when another new immigrant *Cacharis* (*Bengali-desh*) immigrant of *Vaishnavism* faith came by early 17<sup>th</sup> A.D century through old-*cachar* route, the tribal inhabitants identified them as *Mai-tai*. According to *Y. Hongpa* of *Lamlanghupi* said the term “*Meitei*” was derived from ‘*Maitai-ngei*’ (*Mai* - face, *tai* - apply, *ngei* - other people) meaning, ‘people who applies white paste on their face or forehead’ (*ticka/Chandon* in *Meitei*) which has religious symbolic significant. But such reference of *Maitai* or *mee-tei* actually means “outsider or foreigner” because of their distinct behaviour and religious characters as different from the original inhabitants. The *Poirei* or *Loi* and other hills tribes who amalgamated themselves and lived in the valley were later slowly acculturated and assimilated by the power of *Vishnavism* (*Hindu*). Henceforth, these prominent new cultural groups living in the valley were identified and commonly refers by the hills people especially by the *Chothe* (*Mareem*), *Kharam*, *Koireng* as *Mee-atai* = *Meitei* meaning, outsiders or foreigners or other people, to this *Poireton* or new emigrant group. It is believed that even the *Vaishnavists* initially settled at *Lamangtong*, and hence *Vishnu* temple was constructed there. Therefore, the term “*Meitei*” bears a generic name commonly referred by hills tribals to the conglomeration of various groups living in the valley (*Imphal*) synonymously identifying them as “outsiders” to the *Poirei* or *Poireton* group.

The *Chothe* elders claim that terms like; *Moirang*, *Maring*, *Mayang*, *Imphal*, *Chiru*, etc. were also given to different group of people because of their peculiar characteristics and behaviour. *Mayang* from ‘*Mai-hang* = *Mayang* = black or dark face’ refers to the dark skin coloured people of *Tripuris*, *Cacharis*, *Bengali-desh* of early immigrant traders who came through *Tongjei Maril* and *Ngapurum Chingjing* roads. The original word for ‘*Imphal*’ seems to be “*Inn-phai*” referred by tribals, while “*Yumphai*” was used by the plain people (*Cacharis/Bengal*) which literally means, “big house/palace in the valley or plain’. As you see such variation in the phonetics between the hill tribals and valley people often confuses the outsiders with its origin and etymology. It is very obvious that the valley people like *Bodo-Cacharis/ Bengali* had difficulty in exactly pronouncing the word like the indigenous tribals group where a name like “*Angam*” is pronounced as “*Angom*”. Even the tribe “*Chiru*” or *Chi-ngu* literally, ‘salt thief’ is said to have given by the *Chothe* to those people who stole salt from their fellow brothers *Purum*. According to *P.S. Haokip* based on the folktale

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said, a section of people were involved in stealing salt from the Purums. Thus, landing themselves into a problem, so they asked Chothe to be their mediator. When the matter worsened and the Chothe asked them to swear their denial on *hah* (by their teeth), they confessed their guilt and asked forgiveness. The mediator who intervened was so unsatisfied with the trial said, 'since you have been denying your guilt from now on you will be named 'Chiru' (Haokip1998: 34).

<sup>7</sup> *Vishnu Temple*: This temple is now preserved as a cultural heritage protected by the state as historical monumental site. M.T. Laiba claimed that it was King Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) and not King Kyamba who introduced the image of Vishnu and constructed the Vishnu temple at Lamangdon or Bishnupur (1992: 43). This statement is undeniable as Pamheiba is believed to be son of Santi Das Goswami and Nungthil Chaibi or Shorha (Thaowon Saamtharnu) a Chothe lady.

<sup>8</sup> *Great Wall of China*: ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great Wall of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Wall_of_China)). Dated: 15/ 9/08

<sup>9</sup> *Lungleh-Waishu*: Lalrammuana *Chawhte* of Durtlang, Leitan south, Mizoram-796025, presently pursuing his Ph.D degree in the Dept. of Anthropology, NEHU claimed they are part of the Chothe group who stayed behind during the early stage of migration. Because of its minority in the state they are being assimilated as one of the Mizo (Lushei) clans as "Chawhte" and comes under the aegis of Mizo Federation who accepted them as one of the twelve dominant clans of Mizo.

<sup>10</sup> Hongpa Yuhlung of Lamlanghupi claimed that in olden days his forefathers' used different shaped and sizes of huge colourful seashells (*Moipung*) for different purposes. Such things are not available now because they have buried along with them when they died. He said such large sea-shells were use as a whistle to signal the people for the preparation of wars and battles along with drums and gongs or when the king and his party returned from wars and battles. Sometimes the sea-shells were also used as whistle to acknowledge the arrival of important persons like the king or any royal members. The utility and function of seashells become purposeless since the autocratic and feudalistic system of the society had been replaced with the democratic elective system. Their grandparents retained it as decorative ornamental assets but most of it seems to have lost or disappeared during their course of migration while many are believed to have buried along with their forefathers dead as it is the Chothe custom to bury such personnel assets when they died. He did not have any idea from where they have collected but he believes they must have obtained during their process of migration or from foreign traders. Though the Chothe no longer used it some Meitei are seen using such shells in certain religious ceremonies.

<sup>11</sup> *Ningthoujas*: Dr. Konsam Manikchand said "The fact that the Ningthouja salai still do not marry these two sageis of Moirang is a living trace of what had occurred in early times" because when Pakhangba (N.L) took a refused at Moirang after a fight with the Khabas, he left two progenies *Mungyang Chaopa* and *Tangkhrum Limiyipa*, who were later absorbed in the Moirang salai (clans) and became two sageis (sub-clans), (Naorem 1988:152). Therefore, they believe that some of the dominant clans like Ningthouja and Khuman clans of Moirangs are cognates of Meitei Ningthoujas, this applies to the Chothe Marims and Khiyangs (Hiyangs)

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clans too because they believe that whoever marries a Moirang girls did not survive long after their marriage, since they claim that the two clans are cognate clans so the norm is still observed even today.

<sup>12</sup> *Hao*: It is a term refers by Meitei in general to hill people or tribals of the Manipur.

<sup>13</sup> Moirangthem Thawanthaba. Manipur: A case study on migration. Enet. Accessed on 12-june-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Loiyang*: the shinning beam: It is said that after the Moirang youth married the Chothe girl and took away the shining beam from her parent's house because of her father's promised to her, the Chothe who were once prosperous and has huge population began to diminish in its wealth and population. Therefore, some of the Chothe attributes their depopulation to this incident too; although some viewed it was because of their negligence to their ancestors and their incorrect ritualistic procedures. It is also believed that the name of the western hill range (*Loiching*) probably derives its name from this *Loiyang* (the main horizontal house beam) incident in ancient period. It is also believed that later the emigrant who settled at the foothill of *Loiching* the western hill range are subsequently became known as *Loi-ching mee* (which now refers to the Lois or the Poireiton ancient group of Manipur). This loiyang story seems to have occurred much before the event of *Pidonnu: The Chothe lady and Chingkhei the Moirang king*, the great historical tragic love story which have been commonly staged as drama in theatres by the Meitei.

<sup>15</sup> *Tao*: The subordinate names probably refer to the Thao clan of Chothe who settled on the western or Loiching hill ranges. The leaders probably gave asylum in early days to the bodo-Cacharis or Mayangs (Bengalis) the immigrant groups to the state.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### CHO THE INSTITUTIONS

#### 3.0 Introduction

In order to understand the nature, behaviour, function and structure of a particularly society sociologists focus on marriage and kinship, political, economic and religious institutions. Such institutions serve as the backbone in the sustenance and development of a society. They are the products of collective activities like the folkways, mores and norms that regulate the social system for the betterment of the society. These regulations are of standard norms or laws guided by their own intrinsic principles. Institutions are abstract in nature significantly represented by signs and symbols seen often in formal organizations. Social institutions are universal, as they exist in all types of societies. Many sociologists like Durkheim are of the view that religion was the first formal institution followed by the political and economic institutions, while family and marriage systems are the informal institutions of simple society. As society expands and grows from simple homogeneity into complex heterogeneity, its social, economic and political institutions also evolve to cater to the needs and demands of the people and to facilitate inter-relationship networks. According to K. Praveen Parboteeah and John B. Cullen, social institutions regulate societal activities through a freedom or constraint duality of prescribed behaviours that are the results through incentives and coercive and normative constraints shapes not only organizational forms but also at the individual-level, especially, values regarding work (2003: 138, 145). For example, Monica Heller (1995) points out that, the proper use of language by certain organizations and groups can be exercised to wield power or resist certain major decisions. This is made possible because of the guided norms of the organization or the social institution established by these groups to strengthen their unit and maintain the systems.

**Definition:** Numerous scholars have defined institution but so far no consensus on one common definition has been achieved. Oliver E. Williamson asserts that, we are still very ignorant about institutions, despite the enormous progress witnessed in the study of institutions in the past quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He opines that since institutions are very complex, and the chief cause being our ignorance, a unified theory of pluralism should be accepted. There being many instructive lenses for studying complex institutions, pluralism is what holds promise for overcoming our ignorance (2000: 595).

MacIver and Page define institution as “established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity”, while H.E Barnes defines institution as “the social structure and the machinery through which human society organizes, directs, and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs” (see. Rao 1998: 106). Similarly, *Dictionary of sociology* defines that, social institutions consist of all the structural components of a society through which the main concerns and activities are organized, and social needs (such as those of order, belief, and reproduction) are met. According to Gordon Marshall the above definitions are of the views postulated by Herbert Spencer and Talcott Parsons, for both it was central to the notion of society as an organism or functioning system (2006: 317-318). These definitions and concepts point to the formal or informal structural organizations which arise naturally out of human needs and necessities. These definitions are supported by Scott (1995) and Turner (1997) who are also of the view that social institutions are structures that evolve in societies to organize human interactions for positive causes. They provide individual actors with sense making and taken-for-granted heuristics to know what is legitimate, reasonable and appropriate to them.

**Type of Institutions:** Institutions are categorized into primary and secondary. The primary institutions comprise of family, marriage, religion, political, economy (property) while the secondary institutions are the education systems, laws, parliamentary legislatures, and any other constitutional organizations. But according to Olsen and Turner the core institution system include the economic, kinship, religions, political, legal, educational, and stratification systems (1991, 1997: 8). We find kinship institutions comprise of family and marriage; the political institutions: parliamentary legislatures and legal matters; the educational institutions: various academic and training centres; the economic institutions: banking, corporation enterprises; and religious institutions: denominations and various church organizations.

Torsten Persso (2002) affirms that political institutions use the tools of modern economics both in theory and practice for constructing the equilibrium theory of macro-economic policy. According to him the macro-economic policies are shaped by political institutions; empirically, the electoral rules, the choice of fiscal policy instruments and the incidence of corruption or rent sought by politicians (2002: 884).

Later sociologists like Max Weber, Ralf Dahrendorf, Talcott Parsons, N.J. Smelser, S.N. Eisenstadt, etc. primarily focus their attention on institutional study like

religion, economy and political institutions in order to explain the conflicting nature within the systems.

But Alpha C. Chiang says that among non-economic factors, religion stands out as an important, if elusive, force in shaping economic behaviour. In spite of his appreciation to Max Weber for linking religion with economy, he expresses his unhappiness towards western scholars for their disinterest in the Oriental religious beliefs and practices (1961: 254). S.N. Eisenstadt also describes the interrelationship between social and economic institutions. He says the Israel's economic values, social orientation, and ideologies are shaped by following both traditional and modern social values. That is to say the Yishuv economy was a combination of a continuously expanding colonization – both agricultural and industrial, and the driving force or motivation in the expansion of their economy is a largely non-economic factor because the set of institutions and its values are exclusive (1956: 146-47). Similarly N.J. Smelser (1965) elucidates the relations between the economic and non-economic aspects of social life – how these aspects overlap and how they influence one another. But it is W.W. Rostow (1959) in *The Stages of Economic Growth*, who gives the best paradigm of the generalizing economic history in the form of five stages of economic growth, designated as (1) the traditional society, (2) the preconditions for take-off (3) the take-off (4) the drive to maturity (5) the age of high mass consumption. He opines that the problem lies after crossing the last stage that is newly arising in few societies. The first, second and third stages of his paradigm can be well understood by reading Daniel Learner's, *The Passing of the Traditional Society*, who describes the gradual changes of the Ankara society of Turkey from the traditional outlook to modernity discarding the old and accepting new ideas in the developmental and modernisation process which is similar to that of the Chothe.

### **3.1 Kinship: Marriage and Family**

The name Chothe (Purums of T.C. Das) took centre stage in social anthropology during the period 1950-1970, because of the prescriptive marriage alliance system or the preferential matrilineal cross-cousin marriage system which is practiced by the Chothe. This particular system was first highlighted by Claude Levi-Strauss' in his theoretical paradigm of, *Les Structures Elementares de la Parente* (1949). This work was criticised by George C. Homans and David M. Schneider (1955) from a different perspective. Rodney Needham (1959-1960's) an ardent scholar, received this criticism seriously and argued in support of Claude Levi-Strauss' 'alliance theory' and propagated his own synonymous theory called 'matrilineal connubium' or 'marriage in cycle', which are all

based on the empirical data provided by Tarak Chandra Das' book, *The Purums* (1945). Subsequently, numerous renowned anthropologists like, Frank B. Livingstone (1959), Floyd G. Lounsbury (1962), Charles Ackerman (1964), William H. Geoghegan and Kay Paul (1964), George L. Cowgill (1964) and William Wilder (1964) etc. argued and debated against one another on the subject, which continues even today amongst various eminent sociologists and anthropologists of the world. In fact, Nitul Kumar Gogoi made a critical study on the above debate and states that "... though majority of the Purums have been converted to Christianity they continue to follow the prescriptive law for their marriage" (1989: 51).

The Chothe practice patrilineal descent and an exogamous prescriptive matrimonial alliance system, in which matrilineal cross-cousin (MCC) marriage or marriage with mother's brother's daughter (MBD) is most preferred. There are seven eponym clans and seventeen sub-clans, a total of twenty-four according to B.K. Das Gupta (1985: 74), (see Table 11). The significance of the Chothe marriage system is that there is a clear concept about their marriage principle. There is no direct exchange of wives between the lineages or sub-clans or clans. They marry girls only from the prescribed lineages or clans set by them and taking girls from un-prescribed lineages or clans is strictly against the marriage rules and is considered as a breach of social norms. Nitul Goigoi also clearly recorded prescriptive marriage system of the Chothe practice. However, marriage with father's sister's daughter (FZD) is prohibited because they are believed to be a cognate. Therefore, girls are exchanged indirectly among specific lineage or clan that operates in rotation basis which may complete the cycle in the third or fourth generations or may not at all. This indirect exchange of girls is possible because of the triadic structure they maintain; (i) wife-giving, (ii) wife-taking and (iii) unrelated or distant relatives or neutral groups. T.C. Das and Rodney Needham have clearly shown as (i) a boy's or rather his father's sib, (ii) his mother's group of sibs, or rather the group from which his wife is recruited, and (iii) his sister's husband's group of sibs, i.e. the group of sibs in which his sisters are married - this is sometimes his mother's mother's or his mother's mother's mother's sib (Das 1945: 123, 125; Needham 1958: 80, 81). Therefore, marriage functions in cyclical manner, where one clan accepts a girl from another clan or sub-clan and gives its girls to yet another clan or sub-clan, so no particular clan or sub-clan is superior or inferior in the Chothe society (Yuhlung 2007: 61). The male head of the family or lineage or clan is called as *shapa* or *pipa*, while the daughters are referred to as *sheinu* or *sarrnu* (*ni-ngol*). On the basis of descent many scholars view society to be like a

dyadic or moiety in structure but in the case of marriage system the society is broadly divided into three groups, pointed above.

The Chothe practice three basic forms or types of traditional marriage system, viz. “*nu-ngak loh*” (arranged marriage), “*mou-rui*” (love marriage) and “*tlang-chom neilah*” (elopement). The first type called *nu-ngak loh* or (*mou-jong*) literally means, ‘search a girl or look for a girl’ is a form of arranged marriage. When a boy reaches marriageable age the boy’s paternal relatives (on behalf of his parents) approach the desired girl’s family (usually MBD) with a wine pot (*zuchom leizu*) and a rooster, and propose the girl for the boy. If the girl’s parents accept the proposal they dine and drink together, after which a day is fixed for the three years marriage labour of *nu-ngak loh* at the girl’s house. This marriage is considered as the most common and preferred form of the Chothe marriage system. The second ceremony that follows the *nu-ngak loh* or (*mou-jong*) is called *mou-shem* (preparation for the bride). This ceremony is performed when both the boy and the girl have agreed and decided to settle down together, the amount of fee is a pig and a wine pot (*zuchom leizu*) given by a boy. The last ceremony after the completion of the three years marriage labour is called *mou-rui* (taking away of the bride). On this day, the groom offers one pig, one basket of boiled meat of cow or buffalo and one pot *leizu* wine. Only the paternal kin members of the bride are allowed to eat the meat and drink the wine brought by the groom’s family but other members can have it at groom’s place if invited.

**Table 11 Chothe clans and sub-clans according to various ethnographers**

<b>J. Shakespeare 1912/ Clans</b>	<b>J.K. Bose 1933</b>	<b>R.C. Roy 1936</b>	<b>T.C. Das 1945</b>	<b>B.K. Das Gupta 1985</b>	<b>Y. C. Charles 2007/ Sub-clans</b>
<i>Kiang</i>	<i>Hiyang</i>	<i>Hiyang</i>	<i>Kheyang</i>	<i>Khiyang / Hiyang</i>	<i>Aihung, Impi, [Ingte], Rungkung, (Hulpu)</i>
<i>Marem</i>	<i>Marim</i>	<i>Marim</i>	<i>Marrim</i>	<i>Marim/ Marem</i>	<i>Rimphumchong, Rimkung, Rimkelek, Pilling (Piring), (Musom)</i>
<i>Makhan</i>	<i>Mekhong</i>	<i>Makhang</i>	<i>Makan</i>	<i>Makan</i>	<i>Kankung, Makan-te, (Laisik)</i>
<i>Thao</i>	<i>Thao</i>	<i>Thao</i>	<i>Thao</i>	<i>Thao</i>	<i>Thao-kung, Thao-run</i>
<i>Irung</i>	<i>Jurung</i>	<i>Jurung</i>		<i>Yuhlung</i>	<i>Tangkim</i>
	<i>Piring</i>	<i>Piring</i>	<i>Parpa</i>	<i>Parpa</i>	<i>No sub-clans</i>
				<i>Rungkung/ Rangshai</i>	<i>[Teyu]</i>

*Note: See also Needham 1960a: 238. Piring or Pilling is now accepted as sub-clan of Marim.*

This *mou-rui* is also known as *maan-loh* (demanding bride price). In this regard those who are very poor and do not have any wealth may seek the girl with just a bottle of wine and a rooster, with the assurance and understanding that they will compensate later.

The third is called *tlaan-chom neilah* (marriage by elopement). This type of marriage happens commonly with the girls who elope or marry a boy outside the village or community. For this type of marriage the boy has to pay fine called *Phungtanglam* (fine for the breach of marriage prescribed by the clan), the fine is a pig of five *wei* or *wai* (about 2.5 feet around the neck of the pig) and a bottle of wine to members of the village council. The girl's family members are not allowed to eat the pig or drink the wine. In case the *Phungtanglam* fine is not given on time the girl's family with the support of the village authority has the right to wage war against the boy's family or the village or community for stealing their girl. Only after performing the *Phungtanglam*, the *nu-ngak loh* or *mou-shem* ceremonies are performed. Otherwise the daughter or girl is not allowed to visit or enter her parent's house. Once these things are completed the last ceremony is called *Maanshipa* or *Loukhatpa* or *Potshempa* (in Meitei) 'the gift giving ceremony', where the groom pays the bride price of three traditional shawls, one each to her paternal grandfather (*pu*), paternal uncle (*pipa* or *ateerpa*) and the third to maternal uncle (*apute*) then, one very good spear, one good knife (with tip curved downwards), two hoes or small spades, Rs. 500/- (one-rupee coins only), one bottle of wine (*Zu*), and a pot of rice beer. In case *ateerpa* or *ateirpa* expires, the shawl is given to the father or eldest brother or mother. (Yuhlung 2002: 4). On the very day the girl, in return, receives the blessings from her parent's side and material gifts. According to the Lamlanghupi marriage system until and unless this ceremony is performed by the boy she is not entitled to receive any kind of material gifts from her parents. But according to the *Chothe Lim Abom, Manipur* (CLAM), resolution, passed on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1005, , if a girl marries outside her community the boy has to pay rupees five thousand (5000/-) per year in lieu of the marriage labour service, which amounts to Rs. 15,000/- for the three years. And if any one breaks their marriage rules; i.e. marrying a girl from the un-prescribed clans or lineages, he is penalised with a fine of one pig of six *weis* and a pot of wine. Polyandry is not practised at all but polygamy and divorce do exist, but it is not encouraged. Widows and widowers, if they desire, can remarry but only after they completing their necessary customary obligations of repaying or returning the bride price.

The Chothe kinship terminology and teknonymy is varied and complicated. A man or woman may be addressed, referred, identified and introduced in different ways by different persons depending on the basis of his/her descent and marital relationships. For example, one specific and unique reference term *maksa*, which literally means 'alliance or compatriot', is generally referred to as brother-in-law or son-in-law by the wife's parents and clan members only. However, he may be addressed as *u-pa* or *eby* by his wife's

brothers but when he gets old he may be addressed as *arrang* (aunty's husband) or as *apu* (grandfather) by the grandchildren of his wife's lineage. On the basis of his lineage terminology he may be addressed as, *a-pu* (grandfather), *a-pa* (father), *a-teerpa* (elder paternal uncle), *a-tun/a-pate* (younger paternal uncle), *U-pa/aya/ata* (brother) depending on his lineage relationships. Such similar and different terminologies also apply to any girl or woman depending on her relationship with the addressee (Das 1945:125-6, see Table 5, Yuhlung 2007: 58-61). Therefore, due to such multiple terminologies the youngsters are not allowed to address their elders by name but according to their mores.

Even today, the Chothe adhere to the practice of prescriptive marriage system, where MBD or a girl of mother's clan is the most preferred choice, though the trend has declined substantially in the recent past due to various factors as provided by Cheithou Charles Yuhlung in the *Sociological Bulletin*, like increasing marriages with other tribes, despite their strong social and cultural prescriptive marriage norms (see Table 3 in, 2007: 51-52). Anyone violating traditional prescriptive marriage rules are severely penalised with a huge fine or even expelled from the village by the village council.

### **3.2.i Political Organisation: Structures and Functions**

The Chothe political system is gerontocratic, hierarchical, non-hereditary and democratic in nature. It has no written records or constitution of its own. It is based on the customs and traditions handed down by their forefathers and have no hereditary chiefs like the New-Kuki tribes. Every decision depends on the consensus taken by "Hu-bungkung" (village council) on the basis of mutual understanding.<sup>1</sup> The *Hu-bungkung* consists of three houses or units known as: (1) *Urinta bungkung* (council of elders), (2) *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* (council of matured adults) and (3) *Nu-ngak Luthei* or *Luther bungkung* (council of girls and boys /youths) respectively, their place which is now symbolically represented by stones (see Pic. 6). There are also some important persons who occupy special positions in the society. They are like, *Theimpu*, *Assain*, *Thao-lum* and *Rengchang*, *Sapu*, *Athem* and *Thirsu*. Each house or unit has a well defined internal structure and functions with specifically assigned roles and responsibilities. The *Urinta bungkung* and *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* form the main village council or the decision making body because only *Tangsha* the senior most leader of *Nungak-Luthei bungkung* represents the unit in any village meeting. The Chothe look upon the *Hulak* and *Luplak* as husband and wife in the political affairs. They believe that the political stability depends upon the two in their mutual faith, trust, cooperation and transparency which keep the political system effective, efficient, reliable and stable. Perhaps, if any person wishes to

make a request or appeal his grievances to the *Hu-bungkung* the minimum traditional court fee is just a bottle of wine (*Leizu*) set as a norm. But sometimes a rooster or a pig might be required if the case is a major one. The nature of the Chothe political system has been described by John Shakespeare as “All the Old Kuki clans are organised far more democratically than the Lushai or Thadou”. Lieut Stewart in his *Notes on the Northern Cachar* says there is no regular system of government among the Old-Kukis and they have no hereditary chiefs as among the new ones. A headman called the ‘*ghalim*’ is appointed by themselves in every village, but he is much more a priest than a potentate, and his temporal power is much limited. Internal administration among them always takes a provisional form. When any party considers himself aggrieved, he makes an appeal to the elders, or the most powerful householder in the village, by inviting them to dinner and plying them with victuals and wine” (1912: 148-49).

The Chothe are believed to have had a monarchical form of government in olden days but after its decline it gave way to feudalistic and eventually became a gerontocratic system. The historical texts of *Cheitharol Kumpaba (Ch.K)* and *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* describe that the ‘Chothe King Natoi Nachaoba’ was defeated by the Moirang king in the *Lungsuk (Nungsuk)* battle (Singh 1982: 93). The Chothe oral history also speaks about the existence of a monarchical system where many of their great kings (*Areng*) fought and died in great battles. Even today, according their custom and tradition, the chief is symbolically regarded as their king. For example, the formal address expressed in the courtesy of thanks giving (*thoukeipa*) by the *Tang-ngarinta* and *Nungak-Luthei bungkung* members (see Pic.27).

“*Ka-reng-ngo, ka-thou-o, thanglei luthei, tui luthei, thanghung luthei, thingchu naruipa keichu nazu nabu bakka luiya na-sikan lonna nowe intin-nang nga meshou-we*”.

Which literally means: “My King, my Lord, we, the *Thanglei luthei, Tui-luthei* and *Tanghung luthei* (specific youth leaders) are thankful because we have drunk so much of your wine and ate your food. Therefore, we may not be able to perform our duty (*Sikan*) and reach our homes”.

Such ancient traditional courteous behaviour is strictly observed during their annual festivals and important rituals. Such customs help preserve their socio-political, economic and religious life. It is obvious that the Chothe had monarchical and feudalistic systems and enjoyed the political hegemony over others in the past which later became democratised and gave way to the gerontocratic form of government.

Every political system of the world has its own distinctive structures and functions. Likewise the Chothe *Hu-bungkung* i.e. the village council has three houses or units with specific roles and functions according to the structure of the positions they occupy.

**1. *Urinta Bungkung*:** This unit is the highest decision making body of the Chothe known as *Urinta bungkung* or council of elders. They are like feudalistic nobles or ministers of modern democracy. They comprise of seven members, each member representing a clan, every member of the council is the (*pipa*), the eldest male member of the lineage's (*inku*) or clan's (*phung*) head. They are highly respected, honoured and trusted by the members of the society for their vast knowledge, experience and their potential in diverse fields. There is no room for any arbitrary act for the chief and assistant-chief (*Hulak and Luplak*) since the council exercises authority based on the consensus of the house on mutual understanding. But based on common opinion the final decision is taken by *Hulak* which is obeyed without further questions. The seven positions of the *Urinta bungkung* are;

- (i) *Hulak* (Chief, decision maker),
- (ii) *Luplak* (Assitant Chief),
- (iii) *Zupai* (Wine Manager),
- (iv) *Keirung-ulin* (Senior Rice Treasurer),
- (v) *Keirung-noupong* or *Selungpa* (Junior Rice Treasurer or Accountant),
- (vi) *Hachari-ulin* (Senior Supervisor of the House) and,
- (vii) *Hachari-noupong* or *Changrui* (Junior Supervisor or Information Secretary).

The rest of the members in the elders' council are called "*Rui*" (followers). Although they occupy higher status and position as members of the elders, or elite group they do not enjoy absolute power and authority like the position holders. Therefore, all these political leaders play their own respective roles according to their designation of particular department assigned to them (See also T.C Das 1945:179-182).

**Coronation and Promotion Ceremonies:** According to the Chothe custom and tradition for a person of *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* to move into the highest political house i.e. Council of elders (*Urinta bungkung*) he has to undergo three stages of coronation ceremonies viz. (i) *Ruihong* or *Phamkeipa*, (ii) *Tolaihong* or *Phambakpa* and (iii) *Phamtakpa*. Within *Urinta bungkung*, there is a cabinet consisting of seven members who are considered to be in the highest hierarchy of the council and the people in general. To be a member of the cabinet of the *Urinta bungkung* member one has to perform a series of

four hierarchical ceremonies. The first is the initiation ceremony called *Ruihong* (*Rui* = bring, *hong* = him in). The *rui* offers a rooster and a pot of liquor (*leizu*) to the members of the council in any of the major festivals. The rooster is killed and cut according to the socio-religious custom *saram-ngaram* (cutting of meat and fish in accordance to the formula) and the cooked meat is distributed among the seven members of the Council of elders. After completion he becomes *Rui* a member in the house of Council of elders. The second ceremony is called “*Kui-git*” meaning, piercing of the ear. It is done on any auspicious day of the year by offering one pig and one pot of liquor (approx. 20 litres) to the village council with a simple rite after which the concerned person’s ear is pierced with a needle and is made to wear a metal ear-ring signifying that he now truly belongs to the aged group. The third is “*Thong-git*” meaning, piercing of the spinal cord. The significance of this is to test his patience and virility to be considered as a wise aged man. After this one has to offer a pig and a pot of liquor (*leizu*) to the council. Then, the last and fourth ceremony is called “*Petai*” which means, helper. He is then called “*Hachari*” or “*Changlai/rui*” and offers a pig and a pot of liquor to the community. In case of any vacant seat in the hierarchy he can acquire the lowest position within the year provided he performs the so called *Phambakpa* (the coronation ceremony) after which he becomes a full-fledged member of village elders.

The Chothe *Hulak* holds the post of chief (king in ancient days) of the village as long as he lives; it is not hereditary like the New-Kuki group chieftain system. In case the Chief (*Hulak*) dies his position is immediately succeeded by *Luplak* on a temporary basis until he performs the coronation ceremony of “*Tolaihong*” or “*Phambakpa*”.<sup>2</sup> The *Tolaihongpa* is a big feast hosted by the new in-coming Chief in honour of his chieftainship for all the villagers along with a simple offertory rite. He also invites relatives, friends, prominent socio-political leaders, chiefs of neighbouring communities on such special day. Khedon Khiyang (90/M) says that, “In olden days the *Tang-ngarinta* members on any auspicious day before a week or a month would take the king’s litter to the house of to be their new king or chief (former *Luplak*) and would request him to accept the litter they have brought. If he agreed, the youths would carry him to the deity’s place or *laman* or the dance ground (*laimang* in Meitei) accompanied by all the villagers for the formal ritualistic ceremony of the new king or chief. On the spot a short simple ritual ceremony would be performed to their deities by the village priest (*theimpu*) besides offering prayers and seeking blessings, he also consults divination for the new chief. The rightful chief takes the chieftainship by offering a big feast at his residence with a simple coronation ceremony of wearing a headgear and shawl either by the *Keirung* or *Yupai* on

his coronation day as the official head of the village followed by certain simple rite and rituals of *tongkaipa* and *zurum*".<sup>3</sup> The presentation of shawls and other items from his dear and near ones, friends and relatives, is followed by the coronation feast and celebration of singing, dancing and drinking that goes on the whole night. However, all the *maksas* (brother/son in-laws) and *sarrnus* (sisters) of the concerned person on the basis of division of labour, take charge of the whole celebration like receiving the guests, cooking, killing of animals (fowls, pigs or bison (mithun) and also serving the food and drinks to the invitees. But such an exquisite custom is no longer practiced except by the Lamlanghupi village.

The second coronation ceremony is similar for all the members in the house of council of elders except for *Hulak* who uses *tolaihong* on that *phambakpa* day. In this way, the *Zupai* succeeds *Luplak* and the senior *Keirung* moves up to the post of *Zupai* and so on. The members of the council of elders are promoted accordingly if any position is vacant. The last vacant position of junior *Hachari* is filled by the senior most *Rui*. According to their political norms he offers a small feast only to the members of *Urinta* and *Tang-ngarinta bungkungs* at his residence.

The third stage called "*Phamtakpa*" (directing the position) is a simple official ceremony. All the members of the village council (*Hu-bungkung*) gathered in the residence of *Hulak* the following morning of the coronation (*Tolaihong* or *phambakpa*) to officiate and indicate his position or seat in the highest political hierarchy by conducting the "thing-bompa" or "thing-tumpa" (counting of sceptre sticks or scrolls) ceremony by giving him the *sack* or *poi* (a small net bamboo basket for filtering the fermented rice beer).<sup>4</sup> He offers only one pot of liquor for the ceremony. In such ceremony all the members equally contribute except for *Keirung-noupong* who offers two liquor pots while *Luplak* offers a rooster and a pot of liquor respectively. Not so long ago, in the month of April 2008, Gulapsing Hiyang (65/M) of Lamlanghupi was inducted to *Urinta bungkung* who was earlier holding the post of *Zujong ulin* of *Tang-ngarinta bungkung*. Thereby, he performed the promotion (not coronation) ceremony of *Rui* to be a member of the council of elders. But the villagers agreed to double promote him to the *Petai* or *Hachari* post because the members in the *Urinta bungkung* were insufficient.

The tradition of carrying the King in the palanquin or litter (*tolai*) and maintaining the decorum of the village council court's house are no longer practiced by any of the Chothe villages. Though some of the remnants like *Laman* are seen in some of the old settlements like New-Wangparal but the village of Lamlanghupi still retains the traditional court system i.e. *Hu-bungkung* at least symbolically represented by plain wooden seats

instead of elegant throne and chairs. It is a privilege to observe this distinctive ancient seat arrangement of the Chothe village court (*Hu-bungkung*) on *Lamleh-thoipa* (*Panthong iratpa*) the ritualistic day. The seats are arranged according to their hierarchical positions in the veranda of the *Hulak's* house instead at *Laman* or sacred-grove (see Pic.2).

There is also another peculiar democratic custom observed in the Chothe political system which functions on the basis of their mutual understanding that I would like to share. For example, if a person within the group is supposed to move up in the socio-political hierarchy by offering the promotion feast is not able to do so in the given stipulated time because of financial or personal problems then, the chance is always given to his immediate junior who is willing to offer the feast for the coronation ceremony. This happens when the post remains vacant beyond a certain period of time and the senior gives way for his immediate junior, and the house consents the seniors decision. But if the immediate junior is reluctant the house reconsiders by making his contribution fees more flexible and encourages him to move up the hierarchy by performing a simple symbolic feast.

**Table 12 Fixed amount of fee for the coronation feast in early days (Also see T.C. Das 1945:176)**

<i>Rank of the officer</i>	<i>Equivalent term in English</i>	<i>No. of pigs to be offered</i>	<i>No. of wine pots (zu) required</i>
<i>Khullakpa (Hulak)</i>	Village Chief	3	20
<i>Luplakpa (Luplak)</i>	Assistant-chief	3	20
<i>Khunjahanba</i>	Village head	2	10
<i>Zupanpa</i>	Wine secretary	2	10
<i>Keirungpa</i>	Rice-barn secy.	2	10
<i>Selungpa</i>	Finance secy.	2	10
<i>Changlai (Changrui)</i>	Matured followers	1	07

Although some differences are seen in the position's name and the stage and also in the nature of coronation between Lamlanghupi the Western group and with that of the Eastern and Central cluster groups practically the functions of the designated positions are the same. The fixed amount (fees) of contribution for the coronation ceremony given by T.C. Das, have not changed much (see Table 12). However, if one is wealthy and rich he has the liberty to offer and celebrate the feast with more grandeur than others and enjoy more fame, respect and prestige in the society.

**2. Tang-ngarinta Bungkung:** The house is also known as *Laihu ruishang* (*loishang*) meaning, 'caretaker of the deity' because they are practically responsible for the maintenance and safety of their deities, sacred items and all other socio-political and

religious activities. The members in this house are all married men who occupy the political hierarchical positions, status and powers next to *Urinta bungkung* (Council of Elders) by their life experiences and are known as *Tang-ngarinta* meaning, mature adults. These leaders performed their own roles and responsibilities assigned according to their position they occupied. This house or unit too comprises of seven members of *pipa* or lineage or clan heads. They are:

- (i) *Pakhanglakpa* (Chief In-charge of the Youth),
- (ii) *Zupai* (Wine Manager),
- (iii) *Lomjui-ulin* (Senior Group Leader),
- (iv) *Lomjui-jaima* (Middle Group Leader),
- (v) *Lomjui-noupong* (Junior Group Leader),
- (vi) *Zujong-ulin* (Senior Wine In-charge) and,
- (vii) *Zujon-noupong* (Junior Wine In-charge).

The members of *Tang-ngarinta*, besides assisting in almost all the ritualistic activities, also carry out the socio-political affairs of the village and participate in the *Hu-bungkung* decision making. They handle any emergency cases and formed the main military officials like the modern military commanders and take charge of the youth battalion/force. They act like supervisors and executors of law and order. They train and discipline the youth from time to time at the bachelor's house known as, "ruishang" or "loishang" and are given the authority to punish and beat the youths with a special stick called "Sikan-chei".<sup>5</sup> Their position, status, role and responsibilities are well designated and assigned to each accordingly as given above. But in case of a vacant seat due to death or surrender of one's position under certain circumstances the post is quickly to be filled up by the person who occupies the immediate lower position. Similarly, the rest of the members holding the post follow suit. In short the *Urinta* are the decision makers and the *Tang-ngarinta* the executors of laws and orders with respect to their own assigned department.

**3. *Nu-ngak Luthei (Luther) Bungkung*:** This is a bachelor or youth house known as *Nu-ngak Luthei bungkung* (lit. girls and boys house or unit). The boy's dormitory is originally known as *Sikan-Inn* (beating house) or *Ruishang* (friends' house). Since, such kind of a dormitory is no longer in existence as the Lamlanghupi village council agreed to let the youths host it in one of the council of elders house as a substitute for the dormitory. Tomalsing Yuhlung said that, "In earlier days all the village youths gathered in the dormitory and they were trained, disciplined and imparted with moral values under the

able-leadership and command of *Pakhang-lakpa* of *Tangnga-ringta*". According to him, Pakhanglakpa is assisted by these youth leaders (given below) who are appointed on the basis of their seniority and leadership qualities from each lineage or clan though preferences are often given to the eldest brother of the family or lineage. The positions of *Nu-ngak Luthei bungkung* are also hierarchically arranged as:

- (i) *Tangsha* - one each first from Hiyang and Yuhlung clans,
- (ii) *Hancha* - one each from Hiyang, Yuhlung and Marim clans,
- (iii) *Hithang* - one each from any three clans and,
- (iv) *Leibak* - comprises all the boys above 14/15 years who have been inducted ceremonially into the youth congregation after offering a bottle of wine (*leizu*) and a rooster in the *Innampei Rin* festival.

Whenever a village council meeting is called for, only one of the *Tangsha* is allowed to represent in the village council court on behalf of all the youths (Hiyang 1985: 22). The *Tangsha*, *Hancha* and *Hithang* are dynamic bachelor leaders in their units who have their own followers of *Leibaks* to assist them and carry out the orders from the higher authorities of *Urinta* and *Tang-ngarinta* members. They are like the platoon leaders amongst the group responsible in guiding and recruitment process of the younger boys in their socio-political system. The girls too have their own resort, usually at one of their senior most girls' residence. All the girls gather in her house, especially during their annual festivals and she oversees their needs and programmes them accordingly. However, it is *Pakhanglakpa* who decides and gives the final decision to all the youths since he is the overall in-charge of the unit.

Some differences in socio-political structure and village administration between the Western group and that of the Eastern and Central cluster Chothe are said to have developed after the two groups left the main Western group without their chief (*Hulak*) many centuries ago (see Table 13). It is said that the Eastern group was led by *Luplak* while the Central cluster was led by *Hancha* and *Hithang*. Therefore, since the quorum for the village council was insufficient they were compelled to rearranged the three original houses or units of *bungkungs* into two viz.; (i) *Hloukal* or *Phamnei-ngei* (ruling house) and (ii) *Loumi* (farmers or opposition party), (see also Rimkung 2003: 12.b). The Western Chothe, however, continue to adopt the gerontocratic political system in its entirety till date but the Eastern and Central cluster Chothe have gradually changed to an election system where the village chiefs and its council of members are elected for tenure of five years. The new five years tenure-ship system probably began after they were converted to

Christianity as they could not adapt to their rigid age-old socio-religious and political system and lack of leadership amongst them.

**Table 13 The socio-political structure of the village council (*Hu-bungkung*) of Chothe (See also CLAM, record book p. 5)**

Category	A. The village council or <i>Hu-bungkung</i> of Lamlanghupi, the Western group			B. <i>Hu-bungkung</i> of the Eastern and Central cluster groups	
	1. <i>Urinta bungkung</i>	2. <i>Tangngarinta bungkung</i>	3. <i>Nungakluthei (Ruther) bungkung</i>	1. <i>Phamnei-gei or Hloukal (ruling party)</i>	2. <i>Loumi (opposition party)</i>
1	<i>Hulak (H. Thambaljou)</i>	<i>Pakhanglakpa (M. Marachou)</i>	<i>Tangsha (H. Yaima)</i>	<i>Hulak</i>	<i>Hancha</i>
2	<i>Luplak (Y. Tomal Singh)</i>	<i>Zupai (UO)</i>	<i>Hancha ulin (H. Ibochou)</i>	<i>Luplak</i>	<i>Hithang</i>
3	<i>Zupai (UO)</i>	<i>Lomjui ulin (UO)</i>	<i>Hancha noupong (Y. Sanjoy)</i>	<i>Hancha (Pakhanglakpa)</i>	<i>Loumi-Hancha</i>
4	<i>Keirung ulin (H. Bokul Singh)</i>	<i>Lomjui jaima (UO)</i>	<i>Hithang ulin</i>	<i>Zupaipa</i>	<i>Loumi-Zupaipa</i>
5	<i>Keirung noupong (Selung), (UO)</i>	<i>Lomjui noupong (UO)</i>	<i>Hithang jaima (UO)</i>	<i>Keirungpa</i>	<i>Loumi-Keirungpa</i>
6	<i>Hachari ulin or Changrui (Th. Jatra Singh)</i>	<i>Zujong ulin (H. Gulap Singh)</i>	<i>Hithang noupong (UO)</i>	<i>Selungpa</i>	<i>Tlongthich aoi ulin</i>
7	<i>Hachari noupong or Changrui (M. Kundo)</i>	<i>Zujong noupong (P. Nandi)</i>	<i>Leibak (youths)</i>	<i>Changrui or Rui or Hachari</i>	<i>Tlongthich aoi noupong</i>

*Note: The names of present western village authorities are also given, where (UO) stands for 'Un-occupied' or 'vacant post'. Marim Marachou holds the post of Pakhanglakpa from August 2007 onwards after Th. Nabadip died.*

Every society has its own sets of moral codes of conduct and behaviour. Therefore, it becomes the duty of each unit's leader of Chothe to safeguard and preserve their own reputation and status by conforming to their socio-political and cultural norms. For example, any youth committing a serious criminal act like, killing a person or breaches against the social, religious or marriage norms degrades not only his/her reputation but also defames his/her lineage and clan in general. It also directly affects the status and position of his or her clan representatives in authority. The village elders and leaders reinforce the moral values to the youths especially with regard to social norms. Even today, their everyday socio-cultural interactions are full of courteous behaviours which are significantly observable in the manner of eating and serving food, drinking and serving a drink, ways of greeting elders, dress codes for boys and girls, etc. Interestingly this study

shows that many men who are above fifty years of age still prefer to continue their indigenous, gerontocratic, hierarchical, democratic and non hereditary political system. Many respondents especially, village elders and matured adults irrespective of Christian or non-Christian wish to retain this age-old socio-political system. They admire and cherish their traditional form of government because it is ruled by people with distinguished reputation, dedication and experiences, unlike the new form of government often run by corrupt and self-centred people, for example like the panchayat system. The elders find the young leaders selfish, impatient, acts on their human instinct rather than seriously reasoning out the pros and cons of the matter, which is why, there is always political chaos and instability. For example, Rengngir of Leininghu says that “Some of our *Hulak* and *Luplak* of Central cluster Chothe villages of Tampakhu, Ajouhu, Chumbang, Leininghu, Old-Wangparal, New-Wangparal and Chothe Khunou had been impeached by the village council because they are found involved in corruption and in many mismanagement scandals resulting in political turmoil and instability”. But people who prefer the new political system are of the opinion that the old village chiefs and elders in authority are mostly illiterate, lack diplomacy and cannot conform to the new modern system of governance as they have rigid outlooks and are slow in making decisions. So they believe that they should do away with the gerontocratic form of government.

### **3.2. ii Some Important Persons in the Society**

There are also some indispensable individuals who play an important role in the society. Some of them are: (i) *Theimpu* (priest), (ii) *Assain or Ashei* (assistant priest or one who guides any ceremony), (iii) *Thao-lum* (oil manufacturer) and (iv) *Rengchang* (in-charge of music and its instruments), (v) *Sapu* (in-charge of decoration), (vi) *Athem* (propitiating deities) and (vii) *Thirsu* (blacksmith), (see Gupta 2000: 17).

*Theimpu*, the village priest is sometimes identified as local medicine man. He occupies a high status in the society because he is highly regarded, respected and given due reverence for his social responsibilities though he does not have any political power like any of the village council members. The female priestess is called *theimpi* though she also performs some minor rites and rituals but she plays an important role during child-birth and in the child-naming's ceremony. There are two types of *theimpu*, one is the officially assigned village priest who belongs to *Thao, Marrim, Parpa* or *Rangshai* clans and is the deity's keeper, while the other *theimpu* is a professional priest who is also an expert in the art of magic, witchcraft, charms and spells and has vast knowledge on variety of herbal treatment for the sick. He performs rite and ritual for sick patients wherever

necessary but cannot perform important community or village rituals. In case of the non availability of the actual head priest for important rituals, the task is carried out by the assigned assistant priest called *assain-pu* or *ashei* who usually belongs to either of the clans mentioned above. It is a religious taboo for people from other clans to perform village rituals. Another important person is the subordinate priest (*athem*) who arranges items for any important ritualistic ceremony. The *Thao-lum* and *Rengchang* are in-charge of the music and musical instruments like drums (*hung*), gongs (*shum*), *ruicham* (bagpiper), *siki* (horns), *changchou* (mouth instrument), etc. *Sapu* manages the decorum and meat for all ceremonies and festivals. The blacksmith (*Thirsu*) though, does not have any political position, but is an important person in the society because of his distinctive profession. The socio-political and economic lives of Chothe people are well described minutely by T.C. Das (1945) in his book. It is therefore not necessary to discuss it all again in great detail except highlighting the contemporary situation and describing some changing aspects.

### **3.3 Chothe Economy**

The Chothe economy can be classified as an indigenous tribal economy because the majority of them depend on the natural resources that surround them. Agriculture is the main stable economy of the people, who practice both wet and jhum (slash and burn or shifting) cultivation. Except agriculture, there is no other specific common economy carried out by the entire Chothe community. Their secondary income varies from region to region since they are all located in different geographical settings. Those settled near the valley do practice wet cultivation while the villages which inhabit on the top or slope of the mountains like, Khongkhang, New-Wangparal, Old-Wangparal and Lunghu still engage in jhuming. All the Chothe villages except Lamlanghupi, depend on the forest produce like, firewood, timber, bamboo, vegetables, fruits, bamboo handicrafts, etc., for their livelihood. But this kind of an indigenous economy is shifting towards the modern mode of economy as a large number of them are found engaged in the secondary and tertiary service sector (see Table 14 & 15). The society as a whole is undergoing a complete transformation as compared to some sixty years ago or more, from the socio-economic stage of underdevelopment to modernised stage of development. Each village is now electrified, almost every family and individual owns a colour television, and some are even connected to the Tata-Sky cable TV network. Many among them also own Video Compact Disc (VCD) players, radios, tapes, telephones or mobile phones. Roads and sanitation are improving, automobile owners are increasing, thatched roofs have been

replaced with tin, the *kacha* type of houses have become a semi-*pucca* and *pucca* houses, attitudes, lifestyles and food habits are also changing. The people are now becoming more materialistic adopting modern and western culture that is why their rich indigenous culture and heritage are gradually dilapidating.

Many Chothe elders claim that there was a kind of economic division of labour in olden days on the basis of gender. They say farming, hunting, fishing, collecting fire wood, construction of houses, etc., and all heavy works were done by men, while the women cooked food, looked after the babies, brewed rice beer and wine, collected vegetables and fruit from the *jhum* fields and occasionally helped in plantation as well as in the harvest, while the unmarried daughters helped their mothers in cooking, pounding rice, plucking cotton, yarning, weaving and in other domestic chores. Therefore, with regard to the Chothe indigenous industries, T.C. Das rightly states that, “Spinning and weaving are the two most important industries of the Purums. Cotton is grown in individual *jhums*. Almost every household produces sufficient quantity of this stuff to meet his annual necessity” (1945: 100). Moreover, they claim that in the past some of these colourful clothes made by them out of their own cotton and loom were exchanged with salt, earthen pots and other metallic objects with their neighbouring valley people. But today, the traditional division of labour is no more practiced and the society depends on others for cotton as they no longer grow cotton in their *jhums*.

### **3.3.i Eastern Chothe Group**

The people of Khongkhang are the hardest working group among all the Chothe despite their geographical isolation and are situated on the top of the mountain. As observed during my field study they are blessed with rich natural resources and still enjoy the fruit of abundance. They still carry on the slash and burn (*Jhuming*) in the vast tracts of forest areas as it is their main source of economy.

**Jhuming:** Clearing and burning of the forest is done in groups in the months of April-May, where each individual or family carves out its own plot from the group areas. The plantation begins within two weeks before the expected monsoon rain. Since the whole area belongs to the community no individual without prior permission of the village chief or authority may use any part of the forest land for his own benefit. If anyone desires to use the land for himself he may notify or propose it to the village authority in their meetings. The *jhum* fields are usually very large, approximately 20-30 hectares but while clearing for it about 30-40% of the forest trees are wasted and about 40-50% are sold to

the valley people in the form of Kilo-ton (KB - 5x5 sq.ft), while the rest is used by them. The price of the firewood depends on the quality and size of the logs and the local market rate.

**Group Working or Joined Labour (*Lomrui or Lomjui*):** The remarkable feature of indigenous group working or joined labour characterised by a strong community feeling or the “We-feeling” is practiced more amongst the people of Khongkhang compared to other Chothe villages in their socio-economic activities. For example, if a person invites a relative, a friend or a neighbour to help him in plantation, harvest or threshing, etc. he would provide food, drinks and other refreshments for the day. This type of group working is known as “*Lomrui*” (lit. going and working together). Another similar category is that a group of ten to twenty or more individuals form voluntarily and jointly work in every member’s field on the basis of rotation as per the schedule fixed by the members which is called as “*Lomjui*” (according to the members of working group) but the synonymous common term is “*jaitha*” (sound sleep). Such a group is formed voluntarily by relatives, friends or immediate neighbours but sometimes the group is formed by any organisation like the church, youth organisations and women’s societies. Such kind of group working or joint labour are formed usually when the work requires a large number of individuals, like both wet and jhum cultivation in the cases of ploughing, plantation, harvesting, threshing, house construction, social functions of relatives or friends, etc. In case, a person is unable to join the group on a specific day the concerned person sends his/her family member as a substitute. But if one is absent without prior information he or she has to pay the fine agreed to by the group.

**Bamboo Shoot (*Antui*):** The village of Chothe Khongkhang is famous for its fermented bamboo shoot called “*Antui*”(soibum in Meitei) that serves as a delicacy for any types of pork, chicken and chutney dishes and is one of the most economic products of the village. Since the village area is rich in natural forest resources like timber, charcoal, wild-animals, fruits and vegetables, it is also therefore, favourable for the growth of a variety of bamboo species like *Bambusa tulda*, *Dendrocalamus giganteus* and *Melocans bambusoides* too (Laiba, 1992: 116). Normally, early in the morning by 4-5 a.m., from August-October, after the plantation season, they go into the deep forest 1-3 kms from their village to collect the bamboo shoots of a specific variety of bamboo and return by 9-10 a.m. They wash themselves, have lunch, after which they begin peeling and slicing the bamboo shoot into small pieces, either at their own house or at a relatives or friends residence who chit-

chat, cracks jokes or gossip. Seeing their joyful work one can appreciate their simple folk lifestyle that has a strong sense of community feeling. The sliced bamboo shoot is washed in clean water and deposited in big bamboo basket (500-1500 litres capacities), after which they keep it in air-tight container by wrapping it with the huge wild yam leaves or plastic sheets and leave it to ferment for a minimum period of three months (see Pic.86). The longer it is fermented the better the taste. The demand in the market depends on the season and quality, and it is sold in bulk at Moreh, Pallel and Kakching towns. The price ranges from twenty to eighty rupees per kilogram. Ironically, this special *Antui* of Chothe Khongkhang is commonly identified with the Kakching town as “Kakching *soibum*” by the valley people because of the availability of it in the town. This is because Chothe have no knowledge about patenting their special product. M.T. Laiba describes that such fermented bamboo shoot is rich in protein, free amino acids, soluble sugars, ascorbic acid and thiamine. The chemical composition of this delicious bamboo shoot contains lactic acid, titrable acids (mainly, formic acetic and lactic acids) and volatile acids (formic and acetic acids), (1992: 116).

**Fishing and Hunting:** Since T.C. Das’ last visit to the Central cluster Chothe, the environment has considerably changed and many economic aspects have also substantially changed. The thick forest that once had many wild animals and a variety of vegetables has been depleted. Hunting is no longer a part of their tradition for most of the Chothe villagers and except for the people of Khongkhang and few neighbouring villages of Maring, the Lamkang and the Kukis-Thadous around the area. Khongkhang still carry on recreational activities of hunting and fishing because they have thick forests, gorges and streams. There are about ten people in the village who have licensed guns which are mainly kept for hunting deer, wild-boars, jackals, leopards, jungle fowl, monkeys, etc. They also use different types of indigenous animal and fish traps. Hunting is often carried out in groups or individually, but fishing is usually done in groups. It is said that in olden days, the Chothe sometimes fished at Leimatak River and Loktak Lake. Likewise, the people of Khongkhang fish in groups from January-April, in the Lokchou River and other nearby streams. They often used different traditional methods like fishing nets (*Inn*), net baskets (*anga-ru*), bleaching powder, dynamos, local made grenades and a variety of indigenous leaves, barks or roots of many poisonous shrubs called ‘*Uo*’ that are powdered before use. Such fishing is usually done in deep water-falls, cleavages and shallow streams. However, the people of Lamlanghupi and the Central cluster Chothe sometimes fish in the nearby catchment areas or watersheds of small streams or water clogging areas,

while some families rear different types of fishes in their own ponds for domestic consumption. They do not sell the fish or the meat of the animals they catch, rather it is dried above the hearth or else distributed among relatives.

**Fruits:** Different varieties of fruits, especially citrus and other indigenous vegetables are found in greater abundance in Khongkhang than in other Chothe villages and other adjoining villages. Fruits like, mandarin oranges (*theithum*), *theirupok* (a kind of fruit like an apple that is extremely sour), lemon (*theithui*), mango (*theinou*), jack-fruit (*theipong*), fig (*theichang*), goose-berry (*theichura or suru*), pineapples (*kehom*), banana (*amot*), tezpatta (*Cinnamomum tamala*), etc. are grown in this area. There is a good scope for commercialization of these fruits.

### **3.3.ii Economy of the Central Cluster Group**

Agriculture is the main economy of these people. In earlier days rice, banana, yam, cucumber, pumpkin, melon, water-melon, soya-beans, chillies and variety of beans were cultivated in the jhum fields. Since they have moved down at the foothills near the valley and have taken to wet-cultivation now, almost all of them have given up jhum cultivation and planting these indigenous fruits and vegetables. Their production has been substantially reduced to the mere kitchen garden. They now entirely depend on almost every valley produce like rice, potatoes, cabbage, mustard, dhal, peas, salt, sugar, tea, milk, fish, meat and others except for firewood. The villages of Ajouhu, Tampakhu, Phantu, Leirungtabi, New-Wangparal sell forest produce like firewood and timber to the neighbouring valley people sometimes or lease the forest area for a certain period of time, and the money becomes the corpus-fund of the community. Their secondary source of income is derived by selling firewood, bamboo basket, and winnows of different shapes and sizes to the valley people. They have specific names for each type of basket which depends on its shape, size and design. T. C. Das has categorised the baskets into four types based on design and usage: (i) Carrying basket (*Laan*), (ii) Storing basket (*Tai*), (iii) Haversack basket (*Laan-wang*) and, (iv) Tray basket (*Barei*) respectively (1945: 95). Different types of carrying baskets are known as *Nunghai laan* (swinging carrier basket), *Laander* (semi-hole basket) and the rest of carrier baskets are identified depending on the shape and size by using a suffix of *asinte* (small) and *alokpa* (big). There are broadly four standard measuring storage baskets [see Table 16(ii)]. The other varieties of baskets are known as *Tai-don* (plinth basket), *Tai-wang* (large holes basket), etc. The haversack is known as *Pai*, and a suffix of *asinte* or *alokpa* is used depending on its size. The fourth

type of basket shaped like a tray or flat in design is call as *Buhu*, *Balei*, *Lungnik* and *Wai-wang*. *Buhu* is the largest tray basket generally having a diameter of 5-6 ft., while *Balei* the most common winnow has a diameter of 2-2 ½ ft. in circumferences. The former two types are tightly knitted but the *Lungnik* and *Wai-wang* are loosely knitted like nets. The *Lungnik* has smaller holes compared to *Wai-wang* which has larger holes measuring about one sq.cm.

Since the Chothe are very skilful in craftsmanship such as carpentry and making bamboo baskets, they often compete with the Maring, Moyon, Monsang, Anal, Lamkang who also made beautiful bamboo or cane crafts. The valley people are less skilful compared to the hill men in such craftsmanship so they depend entirely on them for such variety of bamboo and cane made baskets, winnows and other handicraft products. The price differs with respect to the quality and size of the products. For example, a simple *Taidon* costs rupees twenty to fifty; while a good quality *Shangphai*, the measuring basket costs about three to four hundred rupees (see Pic.92). Most of these handicraft products are sold at Pallel and Kakching towns.

In spite of their little earnings about rupees fifty to hundred per day on an average, majority of them are unaware of the concept of savings or investment. The society which was once self-sufficient, is now, economically poor and dependent, unlike their neighbouring communities like Anal, Lamkang, Moyon, Kom, etc., whose socio-economic condition has tremendously improved in the past few decades. On the other hand, the sad fact is that, many have lost their land ownership right to the neighbouring Meitei because they have either sold it directly or leased it out to meet their financial crisis. In addition many of their indigenous plants and vegetables also have disappeared since they no longer practice jhuming to cultivate them.

### **3.3.iii Western Chothe group**

The Chothe Western group unlike the Eastern and Central cluster groups completely depend on wet-cultivation and grow different types of rice. But their most important source of income is the commercialization of distilled liquor or alcohol (*leizu*) which is sold to the neighbouring Meitei and other tribes (see Pic.70). Many who brew and distil liquor also own piggeries that greatly supplement their income because pigs are highly value and very expensive in the market. Almost every family has small kitchen garden to meet the shortage of vegetable supplies. The Chothe men-folk in general are enterprising and self-employed in various professions like house construction, carpentry or as drivers, etc., but they lack professionalism. Hunting and fishing are no longer practised since they

have moved down to the foothills and there are no thick forests or big streams around the village. Nowadays, meat and fish are purchased from the nearby Bishnupur and Ningthoukhong towns. Families with ponds rear different varieties of fish which are meant only for home consumption. They say that in the olden days, they extensively reared or domesticated a number of animals like, horses, goats, sheep, bison (Mithun), cows, buffaloes, pigs, dogs, ducks, chickens, swans, cats, etc., in the past, but today only few household rear animals due to the lack of space or pasture.

The Western Chothe group also faces a similar situation like the Central cluster group regarding the transfer of land ownership rights. The Chothe country which once covered huge tracts of land in the region has now considerably reduced to just few acres. According to them, most of them leased out land and some directly sold it to the neighbouring Meitei. In olden days the value of land was so cheap that when their great forefathers they met new valley people who befriended them on their request simply exchanged a big plot of land for just a bottle of wine, a rooster, some metallic objects or sold off their property directly for just few rupees. For example, Hongpa Yuhlung (72/M) says, “My grandfather exchanged the whole mound of a hill to a fellow Meitei friend for just a rooster and a wine bottle. Now I own a very small portion of the area for cultivation which has to be distributed among my six sons but nothing will be left for my grandchildren anymore”. Similarly, Cheidon Hiyang (38/M) also remarks that, “My grandparents sold away our huge plot of arable land of about 20-30 hectares for just a sum of two hundred rupees to a neighbouring Meitei who settled near the Loktak Lake. Therefore, I am now poor because what is left is very small that have to be shared among our five brothers”. These are few examples of how the Chothe lost their land ownership rights to the valley people since early days. The new-immigrants of the valley people cannot be totally blamed the since they paid the price. The trend of leasing and direct selling of land to the valley people increased during the period from the 1980’s - 2000’s because parents started spending a lot of money for buying government jobs (bribery) for their educated unemployed children and for their further education. The momentum of bribing for a Govt. job in Manipur is still very strong. In Manipur, corruption is rampant, only the highest bidder for the job gets the benefit and opportunities from the government.

From the above description it is clear that socio-economically they are lagging far behind their counterparts: the neighbouring ethnic groups. The major problems seem to lie in their economic backwardness, narrow attitude, idealistic view, sense of minority, love for sedentary life, lack of exposure and connection with other groups.

### 3.4 Labour and Employment

The most sought of a stable job among unemployed Chothe youth is a government job. The desire or encouragement for self-employment or entrepreneurship is hardly found in the society. In table 14, out of 2675 population, only 184 (6.84%) individuals are government job holders. Out of 184 govt. employees there are only seven gazetteer officers, viz.; (i) Thao Hopson Chothe of Tampakhu, the Sub-Deputy Commissioner (SDC), (ii) Hiyang Sichong Ibohal Chothe of Lamlanghupi, Executive Engineer (EE), (iii) Yuhlung Standhope of Laininghhu, the Election Commissioner, Under Secy. (EC), (iv) Maigai John of Lamlanghupi, a Veterinary Doctor, and three Lecturers, (v) Hiyang Romo of Lamlanghupi serving in Deptt. of Mathematics, Delhi University, (vi) Thao Paingam of Ajouhu and (vii) Makan Davan of Chumbang, United College, Chandel.

The villages of Tampakhu, Lamlanghupi, Phantu and Chumbang have more employees in the category of Govt. civil employees, but in the category of active services: police and armies, Chumbang, Tampakhu, Chandolpokpi consecutively ranks first, second and third respectively (see Table 14). However, overall Chumbang, Tampakhu, Lamlanghupi and Phuntu rank first, second, third and fourth, in the total number of govt. employees. Many Chothe elders and youth are of the view that the state is very partial in offering jobs to the tribal in general. According to the elders, the corrupt socio-political system of the state and their poor socio-economic condition is responsible for many graduates working in different underpaid private institutions. Since, only the highest bidder in corruption and those with political backing get jobs. It is said that the amount differs from post to post because even for the post of a Peon one has to pay about thirty to fifty thousand rupees. Such practices are seen to be an open-secret in the state where the bribe price ranges according to the position of the post, which is from fifty thousand to five or ten/fifteenth lakh rupees.

Despite the Govt. efforts to educate and develop the villagers through various village developmental schemes and projects like, conducting workshops and seminars on numerous socio-economic and political issues, grants for tree re-plantations, construction of roads, maintenance or repair of roads, construction of sanitary, drinking water reservoirs, low cost latrines, emphasis on the use of Bio-mass gases etc. it is disheartening to see the results as no visible change is found and majority of the people are neglected or never get any benefit from such programmes. In general the Chothe are changing rapidly from traditional to modernization and westernization like the 'Coorgs of Mysore', where the lower class groups Sankritised themselves like the Brahmins or the upper class groups studied by Srinivas' and also like the Ankara town of Turkey in which modernized and

westernized values have replaced their age old-traditional values as recorded by Daniel Lerner (1972).

**Table 14 Distribution of Chothe Govt. employees (2004-05)**

Govt. employees	Aj jo uh u (P ur u m kh ull en )	B et he l H ap py la nd *	C h a n t h o n p o k p o u i	C h o n g h o n g (P ur u m )	K h o n g h o n g	L a n n g h o n g h o n g	L a n n g h o n g h o n g	L a n n g h o n g h o n g	L e n n g h o n g h o n g	L e n n g h o n g h o n g	L e n n g h o n g h o n g	L e n n g h o n g h o n g	N e n n g h o n g h o n g	O n n n g h o n g h o n g	Ph an tu (C ha n d ra po to )	S a l e m t h a r *	Ta m pa kh u (P ur u m )	Z i o n t l a n g	Tot al	Perce ntage
No. of households	38	4	19	14	72	49	35	53	13	53	60	15	25	21	54	10	72	31	<b>531</b>	-
Total Population	164	13	91	67	336	291	209	246	42	27	39	50	138	11	260	42	332	186	<b>2689</b>	-
Person in civil services of various dept's.	-	-	3	-	17	10	81	26	-	1	2	-	-	20	2	24	-	-	<b>114</b>	<b>4.23%</b>
Person in active services (Police & Army)	3	-	6	4	22	4	25	-	-	-	2	3	4	5	-	8	2	-	<b>70</b>	<b>2.60%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>6.84%</b>

Note: Asterisk (\*) denotes new settlements not recognized yet by the Census of India.

Table 15 shows exclusive of Chothe population who are engaged in agriculture and other allied economic activities. But the total number of individuals who are engaged in agriculture and other non-government services is about 887, out of which 521 (i.e. 19.37%) are prominent farmers, 366 [(887-521), (i.e. 13.61%)] are individuals engaged in non-government organisations and other private institutions, as self employees. Self employed women comprises 181 (i.e. 6.73%), the vocational weavers comprises of 81 (3%), private school teachers 32 (1.2%), private vehicle drivers 8 (0.29%), Catholic Nuns 3 (0.11%) and Evangelists, reverends and pastors comprising 44 (1.63%) respectively.

The total number of self-employees (both men and women) is almost double the total number of govt. employees. The number of persons engaged in the secondary and tertiary service sectors including govt. and non-govt. sectors is about 550 (366 + 184) i.e. 20.45% which is slightly higher than the total number of farmers 521 (i.e. 19.37%), (see



measuring the amount of paddy harvested. After threshing and winnowing, the paddy is pile up like a pyramid and is measured first the circumference or based of the paddy and then the height from base to tip with the *Lam-chei*.

**Table 16(i) Chothe indigenous method of standard measurements of units of length**

<b>Sl no.</b>	<b>Terms in Chothe</b>	<b>Literal meaning</b>	<b>Equivalent length of each unit</b>
1	<i>Wa-ei or Wai</i>	Left fist or throw or grip.	This unit of length is taken from the base side of one's closed left fist of a matured man's hand to the tip of his pointed thumb (app. 5 inches or ½ ft.)
2	<i>Khut-kap</i>	The length of a hand	This unit is the length measured from the fully stretched thumb to the tip of the middle finger (app. 5 to 5½ inches).
3	<i>Khut-taang</i>	The length of an elbow	This unit of length is measured from the base of a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger. (approx. 1½ ft.)
4	<i>Lam-chei</i>	The length of a stretched stick or both arms	This is the standard measuring stick of length equivalent to the length of the outstretched arms of a mature man. It measures from the tip of his right middle finger to the tip of his left middle finger. The length is approx. 5.5 ft. (equivalent to 24-25 <i>wa-ei</i> approx.).

**Table 16(ii) Chothe indigenous standard of measurements of units of volume**

<b>Sl no.</b>	<b>Units in Chothe</b>	<b>Literal meaning</b>	<b>Equivalent volume of each unit</b>
1	<i>Khut-chop</i>	Bowl of hands	The bowl formed by a man's two hands is the smallest unit of volume (appr. A quarter or 200-250 ml or kg)
2	<i>Masung tai</i>	Sharing inside, ( <i>tai</i> means any storing basket)	This is the smallest basket used with volume equivalent to ten-fifteenth <i>khut-chops</i> . The diameter of the circumference is about 1 sqft. and approx. ½ ft high. (appr. 1-1½ kg or lit.)
3	<i>Leitaang tai</i>	Matured basket	This quarter basket is almost equal to two baskets of <i>masung</i> (appr. 10-12 kg or lit.)
4	<i>Leekhai or Lee tai</i>	Half-basket or half-shares	This storing basket equals to two baskets of <i>leitang</i> or four baskets of <i>masung</i>
5	<i>Shangphai</i>	Plain surface of the rice or big rice or paddy basket	This is the standard largest storage basket equivalent to four <i>leitang</i> baskets or two <i>leekhai</i> baskets (Circumference = 2.3 ft, High = 1 ½ ft. app.)
6	<i>Shangpot akha</i>	One full load of rice or paddy bag	This is the amount of rice equivalent to two baskets of <i>shangphai</i> or four <i>leekhais</i> of paddy. Almost equal to 100 kgs rice bag.

The amount is calculated in terms of *shang-pot* on the basis of the indigenous method of arithmetic [see Table 16(i) and Table 16(ii)]. Such indigenous measuring units are still used by the Lamlanghupi but the Eastern and Central cluster Chothe have discarded the method of *lam-chei* and *shangphai* and have replaced it with kilograms and “tin” (a twenty litre mustard oil can).

### 3.6 Indigenous Rice of Chothe

The Chothe also have their own indigenous rice, some varieties still exist. There is a myth that says that a rat helped them bring back the paddy of an old woman which was carried away by the strong river current when fleeing from a war. Some types of the rice are (i) *Shang-maichamnu* (wrinkle face rice), (ii) *Shang-jaire* (good health rice) (iii) *Shang-koinu* (curve rice), (iv) *Shang-likte* (tiny rice), (v) *Shang-ningshiton* (oily rice), (vi) *Chithou-ahang* (black sticky rice), (vii) *Chithou-angou* (white sticky rice), (viii) *Chithou-asan* (red sticky rice), etc. All these types of rice are said to have derived their name from their nature and shaped.

According to them, the oldest method of preserving seedlings of rice is to keep them in big bamboo tubes fitted with a lid, while some wrap them tightly with cloth or store them in earthen pots. But now many store in bamboo baskets and gunny bags. Some of the indigenous varieties of rice are thought to have already become extinct since a majority of the Chothe have taken to wet-cultivation and use valley rice like the high yielding varieties of rice provided by the *Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR)* Imphal, Manipur, which are considered to be more productive. It is found that only some families of the Eastern and Central cluster Chothe groups still use their old indigenous rice as it is more suitable for the jhum cultivation. The villages living close to the valley favour for wet-cultivation use local paddies known as, *Phourel*, *Moirang-phou*, *KD*, *Hui-kap*, *Angan-phou* and *RI*.

### 3.7 Chothe Beverages and Wine (Zu)

Since time immemorial the Chothe have been brewing different types of beverages like rice beer and wine or liquor that form an important part of their food item. Certain types of rice beer and wine are use in accordance to the types of rites and rituals ceremonies. The Chothe call any type of wine or alcoholic beverages “Zu/Yu” i.e. rice beer and wine (liquor). There are four distinctive types of wines: three types of rice beer are named according to the method of brewing, (i) *Zu-ngou* (white rice beer), (ii) *Zu-ting* (fermented cooked rice beer) and (iii) *Shawai-zu* (fermented husk rice beer), and the forth one is the distilled liquor known as (iv) *Lei-zu* (commercial wine), (see Pic. 69 &70). The most important substance required in brewing rice beer and the liquor is called “Achoi” (yeast). It is prepared by powdering the *ngoupok* (dried germinating seeds of the paddy) and *jangzu* (dried bark of a kind of climber plant found in the deep forest), the flour is then mixed with water and made into small round cakes. It is then placed on six inches high

husk bed that is prepared in a safe area. It is then covered with some straw and wrapped with old blankets to ferment for about two weeks. The quality of rice beer and liquor depends very much on the quality of the yeast. The different ways of brewing rice beer and the liquor are also found in T.C. Das work (1945: 87-90) sub-titled as, '*Drinks and their Preparation*'. Rice beer is brewed even today for self-consumption and for use in festivals. Commercial distillation of liquor is practiced in Lamlanghupi by both the Christians and non-Christians as this is the most important source of income. Customers are mostly from the neighbouring tribes and the Meiteis. At present per bottle (750 ml) costs Rs.20/- and contains about 30-40 % v/v of alcohol. The quality of alcohol varies from season to season, also from family to family.

According to some of them, *Api Shangnginluh Shangningthum* the first daughter in their genealogical myth was the first woman to brew wine. But some say the old widow in their legend '*Api Shorkim Yulung*' was the first woman to brew rice beer (*Zu*). According to them, one sunny day *Api Shorkim Yulung* returned home very hungry exhausted and tired after working heavily in her field, so she desperately searched for something to eat before she began cooking her food, and found a package of rice wrapped in wild yam leaves which she kept in a corner to throw away. She opened the food package and got a very pleasant fermented smell, so she tasted it and found it to be delicious. Since she was extremely hungry she ate everything and fell asleep, tired and intoxicated. The next morning she realised that she got intoxicated by the food. Thereafter, she began to prepare it in the same manner and began to enjoy herself the food and the drinks. One day some village youths came to invite her for a wedding feast but one of them asked her for some water to drink. Instead, *Api Shorkim* gave them the rice beer to taste on the pretext of having no more fresh water in her house. The youths tasted the drinks and found that it was very refreshing and thought gave them energy and strength. From then on, news spread to the entire village and people began to gather at *Api Shorkim's* house to taste her rice beer. These youths who enjoyed the drinks sympathetically asked her to stop working in the field and stay at home instead, and prepare rice beer for them since she was old. Reluctantly she agreed and it is believed that she was the first woman to prepare *Zu* (wine) or rice beer that became an important food item of the Chothe and is also part of all *magico-religious* activities till today.

The practice of using wine in the child naming ceremony and other ritualistic activities in olden days is also described in the sacred text, *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)*. The elders of Lamlanghupi have also given an important account of Chothe wine connected with the Poirei (Meitei) king in early days. It is said that one day the Chothe

king invited the Poirei king for dinner and offered him his best wine (fermented husk rice beer). The Poirei king complimented the Chothe king stating that his wine was the best in the entire country as it was tasty sweet and also refreshing after his long journey. The Poirei king asked the Chothe king in which ceremony of feast the Chothe wine was most significantly used. The Chothe king told him that it was in the child naming ceremony and in magico-religious activities. On learning that the Poirei king assured the Chothe king that he too would follow the custom to keep up their friendship. As he promised he declared a decree in his kingdom that Chothe wine would be used in all child's naming ceremony of his people. It is probably believed that he himself initiated the custom among the Meitei. Therefore, until recent times it is believed that whenever the succeeding kings of Manipur and other royal families bore a child, they sent men from the palace to get Chothe wine. As a part of the Chothe tradition they often asked whether the child was a boy or a girl, and on the basis of the Chothe custom they give the palace men a shawl if the child was a male and a sarong (Mekla) for a girl, besides the wine. Hence, this particular wine is called *leizu* which in Chothe literally means 'commercial wine'. The Chothe claim that this tradition was in practice till the time of Maharaj Chandrakriti of Manipur (1850-86), who was also known as Nowchinglen Nongdren Khomba (Hudson 1908: 114).

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Bungkung*: The precise connotation of "Bungkung" means, 'the rhizosphere of the banyan tree' (*bung* - banyan tree, *kung* - rhizosphere). In olden days the representative of each house or unit of the village organisation is identified with a distinctive place symbolically represented with some stones around the rhizosphere of a banyan tree or the secret grove or deities' site and the open dancing ground is called *laman* (*laimang*). The remnants of such places still exist even today around the secret grove of Lamlanghupi, New-Wangparal and abundant Old-Wangparal (see Pic. 60, 61). Many valuable customs and traditions of Chothe have disappeared since they have given up most of the actual practices and only in their cherished memories remains as folktales.

<sup>2</sup> *Tolaihong* or *Phambakpa*: Literally *tolaihongpa* means, 'carrying or arrival of the palanquin' while *Phambakpa* means, 'feast of social position'. The terms though different both applies the same meanings, the former is an ancient term while the latter is considered a laymen term.

<sup>3</sup> *Tongkaipa* and *zurum*: The term *Tong-kaipa* means, 'pronounced or spelled or stretched the words'. When any drinks or meals are served to a person, he says an offertory prayer thanking, seeking blessings and protection from any kind of harm by pouring little wine on the ground and also sharing the piece of meat if provided. The *zurum* means, 'devolving the wine glasses'. The custom is after each *tongkaipa* there follow

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the *zurum* act where wine are serve to all the gathered members present on the basis of seniority or political hierarchical positions.

<sup>4</sup> *Thing-bompa, thing-tick pot* and *sackpoi*: This is a very important custom where special sticks called *sackpoi thing*, a symbol of sceptres or scroll sticks. This *sackpoi thing* is kept in a small basket on the left side of the veranda of *Luplak's* house. These sticks are taken down on first day and last day of the *Innnampe* *Rin* festival, by which the political portfolios of the council of elders are counted, distributed and re-assigned accordingly by the *Zupai* placing on the ground. The stick of the unoccupied post is removed separately from the row positioned. The Meitei called it *Cheithapa* or *Cheitharol Kumpaba*, counting of the years by stick (see S.N.Parratt 2005).

<sup>5</sup> *Sikan-chei*: It refers to a kind of special cane-stick specially used by *Pakhanglakpa* or the *Tangnga-rinta* leaders for disciplined any wrong-doers among the village youth who disobeyed the socio-religious norms. This particular cane-stick is similar in usage like the baton use by the policemen.

<sup>6</sup> *Shangphai*: It is the largest standard measuring basket of Chothe, approximately about 2 ft. in diameter and 1½ ft. High (see Pic.92). The paddy is always measured in basket by levelling with a bamboo pipe call *Utong*. Rimlil Marim (56/M) of Lunghu said the term *Shangphai* is originally a Chothe word, although every Meitei now use the term synonymously. According to him the Chothe call rice or paddy as “Shang” while the Meitei call it as “Phou”. Therefore, he says that many indigenous Chothe or tribal words and terms have been absorbed by the Meitei in their language since early days in their social discourses, and so also the tribals have borrowed the Meitei words, now being a dominant community in the state.

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**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**CHOTHE MYTHOLOGY: THE BASIC FOUNDATION**  
**OF BELIEF AND PRACTICES**

**4.0 Introduction: Myth and Legend**

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines myth as ‘a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena, etc. It is a traditional story accepted as history; which serves to explain the world view of a people and usually connected with religion’. Therefore, the story of a person or people related with an event after many years becomes history, the history becomes legend and thereafter, the legend becomes a myth. In Greek *muthos* means, just a tale, or mythos something one utters, in a wide range of senses: a statement, a story, the plot of a play. But for Plato, the first known user of the term, *muthologia* meant no more than the telling of the stories, like the Greek tales of Perseus and Medusa, Odysseus and the Cyclops, Oedipus and Iocaste or Hermes and the cattle of Appolo (Kirk 1998: 8). But Stith Thompson (1955) argues that myth is somewhat different from an ordinary folktale. Accordingly he defines myth as something that “has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth” (1955: 484). But it is seen that the distinction between myth and folktales is very narrow as often found confusing with one another because the folktales of some primitive societies are also connected with gods and demigods. The folklorist considers all myths as religious (sacred) stories, but not all religious stories are myths; religious stories that involve the creation of the world (like the story in Genesis) are myths. However, religious stories that do not explain how things came to be in their present form (i.e. the legendary stories like hagiographies of famous saints, heroic persons) are not myths. It is stated that it is the early Christian theologians of the Greco-Roman, who first started to use the term “myth” (Greek *muthos*) to mean “fable, fiction and lie” (Eliade 1968: 162). So, any mythical story is viewed by the Christian as a lie or a false story and negates their views.

According to Malinowski and Mircea Eliade one important function of myth is to provide an explanation for rituals. Eliade notes that, “in many societies rituals are considered important precisely because they were established by the mythical gods or heroes” (1968: 7). But Robert M. Wallace (1987) says that Blumenberg suggests we shall discover myth, in

its own way, also seeks to produce a mastering of reality without which human life would be impossible.<sup>1</sup> This is why, every community or society or country has its own story, history, legend and myth in different forms that resulted out of historical eventful incidents comprising things like, the first man and woman, a great warrior, a great religious reformer or political leader, a famous hunter, a skilful magician that can be distinguished from one another. All these stories may not necessarily have a connection with gods and goddesses or nature-myths or myth-rituals but are accepted as great tales because of the intervention and connection with gods in their experiences and overcoming the hurdles. In short myth can be understood as a complex story of a person and its surrounding compressed into a simple mythical story related with gods and goddesses or creation of the world while the others may be considered as folktales or history. Levi-Strauss (1972) in *The Structural Study of Myth* asserts that ‘myth of one culture is astoundingly very similar to the myth of a different culture’, this he believes and proposes that there must be some universal law which guides basic human thought. This ‘universal law of basic human thought’ is seen in the mythical concepts of cosmology, animism and totemism like Oedipus, Zuni and Hopi origin myths. According to Levi-Strauss each myth may seem unique, but it is this particular principle of universal law of human thought that shows seemingly similar elements with one another which he says was based on the criteria that “mythical thought always progressed from the awareness of oppositions toward their mediation” (1972: 299). In other words, myths consist of (1) elements that oppose or contradict each other and (2) other elements that “mediate” or “resolve” those oppositions (ibid:). This similarity principle of universal law of human thought does not necessarily mean that all myths of different cultures of the world are exactly identical and have same functions, rather he means that most myths that oppose, contradict, mediate or resolve follow a similar framework or trend in the construction of beliefs and ritualistic practices (ibid: 300). This assertion is criticized by Malinowski and G.S. Kirk that despite the similarity, many elements contradict itself. Therefore, William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt states that the term “myth”, should be used advisedly as a convenient general label for an enormous diversity of narrative styles, contents, forms, and functions (1972: 249).

In a sense, it is believed that a large part of mythology is based upon a belief in ‘souls or spirits’ that is ‘animist’ or ‘animism’. Myths that portrayed plants, inanimate objects, and non-human animals as personal beings are examples of animism in its more

restrictive sense. But a large amount of mythology focuses largely on corporeal beings rather than spiritual ones, the latter may be entirely absent in some cases. For example, the mythology of the Australian Aborigine largely focuses on corporeal, non-spiritual beings. The later mythology began to include numerous complex ideas about future life and purely spiritual being, as a result the overlap between mythology and animism widens. So, it is believed that a rich mythology does not necessarily depend on belief in many spiritual beings but on the criteria of possessing certain religious elements of supernatural characteristics, thus the idea of spirituality emerged only at the later period. Such features are observed in the context of the Chothe tribe too.

The Chothe belief is polytheistic; they thus worship a host of cosmological gods, nature gods, house gods, village gods, forest/land gods and river/water gods. These are like *Thangvan-Rengpa* (Heavenly King) or *Chung-Pathein* (Almighty God), *Tui-pathein* (Water God), *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa* (Rain God), *Sanamahi* (God of Wealth), *Leimaren* (God of Fertility), *Bumbu* (deities of village gates/directions) besides many other gods and goddesses. Similarly, various British Political Administrators like; M. McCulloch, T.C. Hodson, J. Shakespeare, William Shaw, and national scholars like T.C. Das, A.S. Ansari, M. Kirti Singh, T.C. Tensuba and H.M. Bareh remark in their anthologies, ethnographies and books that the Chothe worship the gods of *Pu Lungchungpa*, *Pakhangpa*, *Pu Soraren*, *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren*. They also believe in totems, superstitions, dreams and magic.

The most important fundamental principle of Chothe indigenous religion lies in the doctrine of avatar or reincarnation or re-birth of their Supreme Guardian God *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa* that form the base of their animism or ancestor-worship practiced till today. Like many cultural myths of the world, the Chothe mythology also has its own distinctive genealogical myth which mediates or resolves their mythical belief in the person of “Chothe Thangmei/Thangwai Pakhangpa” the legendary king of Manipur.

According to their genealogical myth, the Chothe from time immemorial believe that they are the descendants of their God *Pu Lungchungpa* (the Dragon-Python God also called as *Ruipi Santai rengpa*) the Principal Heavenly Guardian God who saved and protected them from the clutches of the lower gods and also from the ferocious Tiger King *Kamkeirang-rengpa*. This genealogical myth is built around the mystical personality of the Dragon-Python God (Water or Rain God) entrusted by the Divine Heavenly God (*Thangvan rengpa*) to be the protector and benefactor of the people who blessed his descendants

according to their own personal attributes. The story centres around three characters i.e. the Celestial or Heavenly or Abode gods, the Lower gods and Mankind, which is a triangular entity represented by the dragon, the tiger and the human being, symbolising the good, the evil and the innocent man. This triangular or the trinity concept is also found in other religions of the world. Subsequently, after many centuries the Dragon-Python God (*Pu Lungchungpa* or *Ruipi Santai Rengpa*) fulfilled his promise by interceding in the human form and resolving himself as the avatar or Divine-incarnate in the mystical person of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (Meingai)*. The Pakhangpa's mysticism re-instills their religious zeal because of his manifestation to the promised made earlier that he will come and dwell with them when they live a settled prosperous life. But when Pakhangpa appeared to them as a strange mysterious young man and fell in love with *Daishin* the eldest daughter of *Surou (Tarang)* chief of the Chothe village the people failed to acknowledge him as their Divine-incarnate because of his anonymity. The people unaware of His divinity as the avatar during his childhood branded him as an illegitimate child, and ignorantly banished him and his mother from their country. When he grew up, he asked his people to perform certain rites and rituals to absolve themselves from the sins of ill-treating him. Therefore, some rituals like *tuihumpa* (rite for the water), *lamleh thoipa* (village gate rite), *punningpa* (born again rite), *ta-sanpa* (divination) and taboos (*ashei-asi*) which are practiced even today, are based on their myths and legends.

We also find some similarities of the *Chothe genealogical myth* with some of the other tribals of Manipur particularly the Old-Kuki tribes like; Kharam, Koireng, Anal, Lamkang, Tarao, Chiru, Kom, Aimol, Maring and other communities in different literatures. For example J. Shakespeare mentions that the Lamkang originated from a place “on the *Kangmang* hill, away to the south, there is a cave, out of this came a man and woman, and were eaten up by a tiger that was watching. A god who had two horns, seeing this horrible sight, came out and drove away the tiger, and so the next couple to emerge escaped and became the ancestors of the Lamkang” (1912: 150). Accordingly Mrs. Y. Tharaklei (96/F) on the basis of folktales says that, “the Maring came out of the cave only after a bull that belonged to Chothe chief pushed out the rock that covered their cave for which they had paid thirty pieces of silver coins to the Chothe chief”.

On the other hand, there is also a close affinity between the Chothe indigenous religion and that of the Meitei *Sanamahism* religion as both the religions begin with

Pakhangpa the legendary or historical king of Manipur, who is known to the Chothe as *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* and to the Meitei as *Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa*. Both the Chothe and Meitei consider him as their divine or mythical ancestor king.

The concept of spirituality though, was in existence from the beginning and it was strengthened through Pakhangpa, who is also considered as the avatar with super natural power. K.C. Tensubu remarks that, “the god Pakhangpa is believed to be a Dragon-Python” probably for his mysticism (1993: 46). Further, N. Sanajaoba also points out that, “Pakhangpa has a supernatural power to transform himself into anything like a stone, a tiger, a dog or a human being, and can even take human birth at any time and place” because he is endowed with divine supernatural powers (1991: 104). Therefore, from the above perspectives the Chothe socio-religious historical myth can be divided into two categories on the basis of the historical period; “Chothe Genealogical Myth” and the legend of “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa” since the elements of opposition and contradiction found in a myth fits into the Levi-Strauss’ paradigm in the legends of resolving.

This particular chapter focusses on the *Chothe genealogical myth* and the legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* which is the foundation of their religious beliefs and practices. The oral history on *Chothe genealogical myth* and the legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* provided by different Chothe village elders; H. Thambaljao, Y. Maipak, Y. Tomalsingh, H. Jaikan, Pr. Roushi, Mk. Neilut, Pr. Wailum, Pr. Herachou and Pr. Chandbabu (Vincent), besides many other elders and leaders are elucidated below. The Chothe genealogical myth contains almost every element of a religious myth which is evolutionary in its nature (nature-myth) that resolves or mediates in the legend of Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa. This genealogical myth is also based on the recorded work of Khiyang Manjou of Khongkhang titled as, ‘*Chothe Athouna*’ (*Chothe’s origin*) written in the Chothe language. Similarly, the legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa*, besides the oral history, is also based on the titled of sacred manuscripts, *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* which the people have preserved and kept secretly for many centuries. Important manuscripts like *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)*, *Cheitharol Kumpaba (ChK)* and other available literature of Manipur are also referred to construct a coherent legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa*.

#### 4.1 Chothe Genealogical Myth

The *Chothe genealogical myth* is deliberately elaborated because no literature exclusively studies the Chothe indigenous religion apart from other socio-cultural aspects. Another important reason is that readers can sufficiently analyze the evolutionary development of the Chothe socio-religious and historical aspects to clearly understand their culture from the light of their indigenous religious beliefs and practices. The deliberate elaboration is also in line with Clyde Kluckhohn who critically remarks that the writings of J. Frazer, E.B. Tylor, E. Durkheim and others provide insufficient primary data or description in their books to substantiate for their arguments, and considers that they have analyzed it from the peripheral points which the readers are made to believe with their hypotheses (1972: 98). Therefore, this descriptive study, it is hoped will help readers analyse the subject from different perspectives depending on the nature of his/her interest.

**The Genesis of Mankind:** According to *Chothe genealogical myth* ‘in the beginning, there were no human beings between the abode of gods i.e. Heavenly and Earthly kingdoms’ (*Amating-nga Thangvan-Shimlei anih kai hinna ‘mamashi’ tapa hi amphuino-e, leihu mani chakka amphui-a*). But one day, all the higher and the lower gods assembled at ‘the centre of the universe where the light and the darkness (sun and moon rises) originates’ (*Koikung suhlam shimni suknamun*) to find out the most rational creature to serve them and to lighten the burden of the lower gods, who have been complaining of their heavy workload. So, the lower gods first brought the fish (*Ngavok or Sp.Channa punctatus*), but the higher gods examined it and were not satisfied with it, so it was sent back into the water. Next, they brought *Ajongpa* (a monkey) but still the higher gods were unhappy and dejected with the ugly physical appearance of its tail and body hair, so they took it back to the forest and left it on a banyan tree. The lower gods were unhappy as they were unable to please the higher gods so they finally decided to create a human being. They created a man (*a-pa*) and a woman (*numei*) in their own form called them “*Mamashi*” (human beings). The higher gods seeing the beautiful creations gladly accepted and gave them the breath of life. Thus, mankind came into existence, and hence they were kept at *Koikung*, the centre of the universe or earth.

**The Division of Mankind:** Since, the lower gods were responsible for the welfare of mankind they began to use this human being according to their own wish and will. Subsequently, it is said many of the lower gods began to fear that they might be attacked sooner or later by human beings as they became populated, powerful and unruly. Therefore, they decided to destroy mankind before they would be subjugated. As a result, the Heavenly King (*Thangvan rengpa*) and the mother of Earth (*Shimlenu*) decided to have their own child in case the lower gods determined to do away with the human being. But later the two powerful gods bore a lovely son. Similarly, it is said that the couple i.e. the Moon (*Tha-pa*) and the Sun (*Ni-nu*) gods also bore a beautiful daughter whose face shines like gold. Since then, both the children of the abode or powerful gods were lovely and beautiful they became apprehensive that some of the wicked lower gods might steal their children and claim them as their own. Hence, both the children were secretly hidden inside a rock and both grew up eating the cloud shoots or dew (*Sumphai adon*) growing above the rock (*Lungpi*) every morning. In the mean time, as the human population substantially increased and became chaotic, unruly and powerful the lower gods ultimately decided to divide them into clans (*phung*) instead of destroying them. Thus, mankind was divided into different clans and scattered to different directions of the world.

**Disappearance of the Child:** The Heavenly and Earthly gods too decided to give their beloved son to the lower gods so that they could also give him a name and a clan among human beings. But when they went to get the boy, he had already disappeared from the hidden place and was nowhere to found, this upset his parents. Meanwhile, the Dragon King or the Rain God (*Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa* or *Ruipi Shantai*) and the Tiger King (*Kamkeirang rengpa*) were on their way to the abode council house to demand their human share as both of them did not get their share due to their absence on the day human distribution. When the Dragon King, with his assumed son the Bottle-Gourd (*A-Uum*), was on his way to the house of council they suddenly heard a child's cry from a brook side. When the bottle-gourd (*Uum*), out of sympathy, was persuading the Dragon to take the child along with them, the Dragon saw the Tiger wagging its tail from afar and approaching. The Dragon not willing to disclose to the Tiger about his discovered child he quickly wrapped and hid it inside the cave.

**The First Agreement between the Dragon and the Tiger:** As soon as the Dragon met the Tiger, he enquired from the Tiger, who replied, he was also on his way to the abode council's house to claim his human shares, so that he can also bring up the humans as his descendants. The Tiger who felt humiliated, expressed his resentment to the Dragon accusing the lower gods for ignoring him and also taking the decision of human distribution without consulting him. The Dragon disclosed to the Tiger that he also did not get his human share and was not informed about it, so he has decided to destroy all of mankind with landslides. Immediately, the Tiger interrupted and said that he also had thought of killing and sucking all the gods' blood. But the Dragon calmed him down telling him that the gods might overhear their plans and he being a carnivorous animal would not be able to kill all the gods unlike him, so instead he requested him to do his favour. Hearing the Dragon's words the Tiger boldly asked whether he had denied any of his requests. But the Dragon re-affirmed his stand that he could not trust the Tiger because "carnivorous animals are forgetful". So, he asked him to swear that 'if any of the two breaks their promise all his thirty-two teeth will fall' (*I-hongnga aluita shaita ngak-nenapa meeha aha somthum ani tickhap su-o, ta washak ke*). Then the Dragon brought out the hidden child and gave it to the reluctant Tiger and requested him not to go to the council house anymore instead to take care of the child until he returns, in case they did not get their human share he would bless, protect and multiply the children as their own descendants.

**The Gods Submit Before the Dragon King:** Then, when the Dragon reached the abodes' council house he saw all the gods in chaos, afraid of the Heavenly king (*Thangvan*) and the Earthly queen (*Shimle*) because they already knew their secret child had disappeared from their hidden place and that both might punish them to death if they did not find the child at the earliest. It is said in the midst of the commotion a decree was also announced that whosoever informed them about the whereabouts of the child or admitted to taking the child would be forgiven. Learning the information, the Dragon took advantage of the situation and appeared before the scene and threatened all the gods who assembled there that he had conspired with his other six powerful great kings (gods) to punish all the culprits for stealing the Heavenly and Earthly gods' child and kept him hidden near a brook. Besides, he also said that his friend, the Tiger King (*Kamkeirang*) has decided to kill all of them for ignoring his status. All the gods, then, bowed down before the Dragon King (*Ruipi-Santai*) and

requested him to have mercy on them by sparing their lives. Taking advantage of the situation, the Dragon asked them to surrender everything to him including their human shares to save themselves otherwise he would join with the powerful gods and the Tiger and destroy the whole earth by landslides separating the gods and the human beings forever. Before he could finish talking, it is said the lower gods trembled in fear and ceded themselves before the Dragon seeking apology and acknowledging him as a great god who could do anything and everything like any other powerful great gods.

**The Second Agreement between the Dragon and the Tiger:** Accordingly it is said that when the Dragon returned from the heavenly council meeting he told the Tiger not to worry anymore because all the lower gods had submitted themselves before him and so all the human beings including the child belonged to them now. But the Dragon said to the Tiger that since both of them cannot bring up the child together as they lived in different places he will bring up the child under his protection and blessings as their own descendant. Further the Dragon said that the two of them (i.e. the Tiger and the child) might commit mistakes against each other and kill one another in the near future, so the Dragon asked the Tiger to swear to the child before him that he will not harm the child. Accordingly the Tiger swore saying, “My human grandson, if I, your grandfather happen to kill you mistakenly let your gods who created you kill me. But even if I die let your gods re-incarnate me from my bones in the next re-birth” (*Katu mamashi unga-o napu keina ihongnga nangta thet-man a-lechu, katu navon choih ngeina napu keita that shuh-o, chutihleiko napu keichu voiha thileko voiha saruh ha navon choih ngeina ringthou pishi suh-o*). Similarly, the boy also swore to the Tiger after which both bid farewell by slightly bowing at each other and parted.

**The Dragon Becomes the Principal Guardian God of the Heavenly Child:** Then, the Dragon took the child to the Heavenly abode where the seven powerful celestial gods live, and requested the Heavenly king and the Earthly queen to release the Sun, the Moon, the Storm, the Fire and others from since he had found their beloved son beside a brook, otherwise all the lower gods and human beings would die of suffocation. On hearing the good news the Heavenly king and the Earthly queen granted the Dragon’s wish and the world was restored to normalcy. Thus, on the basis of the decree the Dragon became the

Principal Guardian God and the first mythical ancestor of the Heavenly and the Earthly gods' child "Ka-chokte / Ka-choite".

**The Dragon Names the Heavenly Child, *Kachokte (Kachoitte)*:** The Dragon King then took the child to his cave and gave him a name. He said "My dear grandson since I, your grandfather, have brought you this far from the brook by holding you and stirring the gods, you will need a name to identify your settlement later when you have many descendants. So, I have named you as, "Ka-chokte/Ka-choite" meaning, 'the child that I held or stirred' (*Katupa nangchu apuna kuiput kuilei yaiya kachokka kaluih phaosouchu, katu naramingangchu anungtinga natu-nate ngei pha-mungtinga dangnata apuna naraming "Ka-chokte or Kachoitte" ta bohshingnge*). Henceforth, the descendants of *Ka-chokte* or *Ka-choite* became known as *Chokte = Choite = Shote = Zote = Chawte = Chote* and *Chothe*.<sup>2</sup>

***Kachokte* Marries *Thanidam*:** After many years *Kachokte* or *Kachoitte* grew up to be a strong, young handsome man, but the Dragon King seeing him always alone felt sympathy and so, decided to find a suitable girl for him. Hence, after a long search he finally found a girl who was the secret daughter of the Moon and the Sun gods. The Dragon approached his friends, the Moon and the Sun gods, and sought the hand of their beautiful daughter for *Kachokte* with an assurance that he will bless and protect them as his own children throughout their lives. The Moon and the Sun gods became subservient to the proposal and so the Dragon brought the girl along with her helpers across the big river on his back and introduced her to *Ka-chokte (Kachoitte)*. The Dragon on this day itself gave her a name telling her that since her parents the Moon and Sun were very apprehensive and worried when he initially approached them, but since they are now happy, he will name her by taking both her parents names as, "Tha-Ni-dam" (*Thanidam*) literally, 'the Moon and Sun are alright'. Thus, *Thanidam* was named, and thereafter she marries *Ka-chokte's* and became his wife.

**Beginning of Veneration, Divination and Ritual:** Later on the Dragon King (*Ruipi Santai* or *Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa*) called upon the two grandchildren and instructed them on the basic socio-religious and cultural norms that they should adhere to in the future. Accordingly, he first asked them to venerate to the rock before they gathered any food

(cloud shoots or the dew) growing 'above the rock' (*Lung-chung*) by invoking both their parents' names i.e. *Thangvan rengpa - Shimle rengnu* and *Thapa - Ninu* and allowing them to gather food every morning. Secondly, the Dragon brought a rooster and a hen, and explained that if the rooster crowed they would know that it was morning and that he was awake, and that the hen would lay about 15-16 eggs, it would be helpful for them in many ways. So, if they needed anything from him in future they should always offer a chicken by cutting into seven meat shares (*salam sari*), only then would he be pleased and oblige their request. Thirdly, the Dragon asked them to consult with the chicken-leg divination (*Aike-jan*) if they wanted to know the signs of his approval or disapproval to their request, then, if the right leg of the fowl overlapped the left leg it would indicate a positive sign but if the left leg overlapped the right it would indicate a negative sign, and the degree of his approval and disapproval would depend on the nature and degree of overlapping. Later, it says that he also taught them how to harvest and adopt some customary norms so that they would be able to know the passing of the seasons, months and years.

**Descendants of Chothe (*Ka-chokte* and *Thanidam*):** Accordingly, it is said that *Ka-chokte* (*Kachoite*) and *Thanidam* became prosperous and bore five sons and two daughters. But another version said it was seven sons. They are (1) Hiyang (*Khiyang*), (2) Yuhlung, (3) Makan, (4) Marim, (5) Athao, (6) Parpa and, (7) Rangshai, and the two daughters are; (1) Singinluh Singinthum and (2) Chonginglu Chongingchong. The first version said seven children while the second version makes nine children altogether. Accordingly the Dragon King after carefully examining each of them after birth, he named and blessed them. Hence they became the first descendants of the Chothe clans.

It is said that the Dragon named the first son as *Aihung* (lit. rooster's crow) because he was born at dawn when the rooster crowed and told his parents that he is named as *Keyang* (*Khiyang/Khiang/Hiyang*) meaning, 'relief after parturition' as his mother relieved herself after giving birth, and that his name will also bear his clan's (*phung*) title. Thus, the first son came to be known as *Aihung Khiyang* (*Hiyang*). Similarly, the Dragon named the second son *Zurung/Zulung/Yulung/Yuhlung* (lit. intoxicated with wine) because he was born when his parents were brewing wine (*Zu*) and were drunk. But the Dragon also assured his parents that he would grow up to be intelligent, a capable leader and a good administrator because of his calmness. Likewise, the third son was named, *Makan* (one who stops the

fight) because he was born at the time when his father was stopping the fight between his two elder brothers i.e. *Aihung* and *Zulung*. The Dragon remarked that the child would be a great craftsman as his hands move constantly. Since, the fourth son was born when they were happy and having fun the Dragon named him *Mareem/Marim* (merry or happy) and assured that the baby would grow up to be a great *theimpu* (priest or magician) where all the gods and human beings would fear him because he was sound asleep when the parents brought him. The fifth son was named as *Athao* (fatty or oily) because he was born during the spring festival when his mother was preparing a special dish with linseed oil (*Saningtha sathao tha kamma soiya amleiya*) to offer to the gods as part of their custom, so the Dragon assured them that he would grow up to be a great warrior.

Later two sons i.e. the sixth child was named as *Parpa* (blooming) because he was born when the flowers were blooming and assured them that he will be wild and free. The seventh child was named as *Rangshai/Riangshai* meaning, erection of a stone, as he was born during the time of man-animal conflict, where the Dragon assured that he would grow up to be in the forefront in times of war to defend his people.

Since, the sixth or eighth child was a daughter; she was named as *Sheinu Shingingluh Shingingthum* (long sweet-scented linseed) by the Dragon assuring her parents that whatever food items she prepared with her hands would always taste good and pleasant, since she appeared quiet and composed with her folded hands, even in her mother's womb. The last seventh or ninth child was called *Chongnginluh Chongnginchong* (wealthy and prosperous). Since she was born when all of them were happy and content with their lives the Dragon assured that she would grow up to be a very beautiful girl, like an emerald and she would be creative and an excellent weaver which was indicated by her palm. These are some of the prominent personal characteristics the Dragon King endowed and blessed the first descendants of the Chothe with.

**Dragon Arranged Marriages:** With the passage of time the sons and daughters of *Kachokte* and *Thanidam* grew up and the Dragon King arranged marriages for each of them accordingly. They say that *Aihung*, the eldest son married *Shinrung*, *Zurung/Yulung* married *Paihudam*, *Makanpa* married *Theishinni*, *Marimpa* married *Tuanshinni* and *Athaopa* married *Neiamni*. But the wives of *Parpa* and *Rangshaipu* cannot be ascertained.

**The Dragon's Blessing:** It is said when the Dragon finished providing each of them with a wife he called them one by one and blessed each one according to their own inborn personal traits, attributes and charisma which the Chothe believe is still visible amongst the members of each clan. *Aihungpa Khiyang*, the first the eldest son was blessed with an assurance to be his right man who would shoulder every responsibility by overseeing the welfare of his people and decide internal issues as the head of the lineage/tribe on his behalf. The Dragon then blessed *Zulung/Yuhlung* saying that he would become a potential leader and chief of his people since he had the diplomatic skill and so he would assist his elder brother in decision making. However, the Dragon cautioned him that since he was clever and intelligent he would definitely have some jealous enemies who would obstruct his path but he would outwit them. In case of any serious trouble he would personally come and help him. Further, the Dragon instructed him to give the chicken's liver and heart to his elder brother in any sacrificial offerings. Similarly, the Dragon blessed *Makanpa* and told him that he should take the magical strength of his grandfather the Tiger (*Kamkeirangpa*) and provide all the necessary weapons like swords and spears to all his kin members so that they would be able to defend their country with his powerful weapons. Besides, the Dragon asked him to make sacrificial offerings to the Tiger at the beginning of every year so that his weapons would remain strong like the jaws and claws of the Tiger and would bring his people back home after battle. Further, the Dragon suggested that if he maintained a close relationship with the Tiger by offering gifts annually the Tiger would reveal his secret techniques of warfare and also improve his craftsmanship, and so also his heavy heart and depressed mind would be unfolded and he would live a prosperous life with many descendants. But the Dragon cautioned him that the lower gods and neighbouring people would together wage wars against them out of envy, and so, if he wanted to be successful in such battles he would have to perform the annual rite to the Tiger since the power and strength of his weapons lie with the Tiger.

The Dragon then called upon the fourth son *Mareempu (Marim)* and told him that he would be the priest of his people because he has been blessed from birth with the power to dispel and cast away evil spirits with his powerful magical charms, and that his magic would be one of the most powerful of all mankind and even the gods would fear him. He was also reminded to perform all the necessary rites and rituals according to the divination instructed to him. Likewise the Dragon also said to the fifth son *Athaopa* that since he is strong and

brave he would be a great warrior, and therefore he should defend and protect his village in the absence of his brothers so that savage and barbaric people would not be able to enter the village. Moreover, his descendants would enjoy fame and popularity by outshining others and his daughters would be well known for their beauty.

Like the sons of *Ka-choite* and *Thanidam*, their daughters were also blessed by the Dragon. The Dragon said that *Shinginluh Shingingthum* would be like the grandmother of the house, and whatever food or drinks she prepared would always taste good and pleasant and no one would be able to compete with her in quality and taste. Similarly, the Dragon blessed *Chongnginluh Chongnginchong* and told her that she would be creative and weave beautiful clothes for her brothers and kin, and the first cloth would have to be named as “*Amtin-amvai* or *Awa-ampi*” meaning, ‘pure bright motif’ or ‘mother of all bright motifs’ and the rest could be named according to their motif.

**The First Ancestors of the Chothe:** Thereafter, it is said that the first ancestors of Chothe had many children. *Shangthun* (the rice carrier) was believed to be the eldest son of *Aihung Khiyang*. *Tangkip*, the eldest son of *Zurung* was considered to be the first leader and chief or *Hulak* of Chothe. *Kansuh Kanrung* the best craftsman of the people was believed to be the eldest son of *Makan*. *Lakung* or *Rukung* became the first *theimpu* (priest or magician) was considered as the eldest son of *Marim*. It is said that the fifth son, *Athoupa* had three sons, viz. *Theirang*, *Mushin* and *Tubei*.

**Preparation inside the Cave:** Many years later, the cave became overpopulated and congested so the Dragon King asked the giant monkey to remove the slab of rock that covered the opening of the cave, so that they could come out and live on the surface of the earth freely. Accordingly, the monkey opened the cave and the people of the Chothe began to move out but soon the Tiger, *Kamkeirangpa* began to kill them because he could not recognise them as his descendants. So, all the surviving Chothe returned to the cave and the monkey immediately closed the opening of the cave. Henceforth, they lived for another seven years inside the cave again and during those days the Dragon told them his plans of how to overcome the ferocious Tiger and how they were supposed to live later. So, the Dragon asked *Chongnginluh Chongnginchong*, the youngest daughter to weave a cloth copying his pattern or stripes and wear it so that they might dupe the Tiger from attacking

them. Then, he asked *Shingngin luh Shinginthum* to brew wine (*zu*) for him and his friend, the Tiger. He also told *Kansuh Kanrung*, the eldest son of *Makanpa* to make swords and spears. Finally, the Dragon King assured his people that he would come and live with them when they would lead a prosperous and well established life.

**The Mythical Cave (*Huipithoranga*):** Thus, after seven years the Dragon once again instructed the giant monkey, the guardian of the cave to open the cave. When the cave was opened *Kansuh Kanrung* of *Makan* wrapped in the *ava-ampi* shawl first sneaked out and faced the Tiger by holding his sword in his right hand and offering the wine (*zu*) to the Tiger. He told the Tiger that the wine was a gift from the Dragon King (*Ruipi Santai rengpa*) his friend. *Kansuh* also told the Tiger that his headgear and his body patterns i.e. his *ava-ampi* shawl motif matched with his body pattern, and so also it was similar with the stripes of his grandfather the Dragon King. While the Tiger was baffled, bewildered, drunk and confused about the patterns, *Kansuh* promptly told the Tiger that they belonged to the same clan since both their patterns are similar, and asked the Tiger why he wanted to kill him and his people. After convincing the Tiger of their oneness, *Kansuh* asked the Tiger to swear that in case if he (the Tiger) happens to kill *Kansuh* and his descendants in the near future all his thirty-two teeth would fall and so would it be with him too if he (*Kansuh*) killed and ate his (the Tiger) descendants. While *Makan Kansuh Kanrung* was conversing and distracting the Tiger all the Chothe men and women come out of the cave and that is how they began to live on the surface of the earth. Henceforth, the cave was known as “*Huipithoranga/ Hurpithoranga*” (lit. the cave where the five brothers came out).<sup>3</sup>

**The First King *Tangkip Yulung*:** It is said that as soon as they began to settle on the surface of the earth there arose a leadership conflict amongst the eldest sons of the every first generation. *Lakung Marim* claimed leadership on the grounds that he had cast away the evil forest spirits with his magical power from the chosen settlement. *Theirang Thao* claimed leadership for killing the Tiger, *Kansuh Kanrung Makan* for outwitting the Tiger and *Tangkip* because of the assurance given by the Dragon King. As they could not come to a consensus, all agreed to a bet that whosoever sees the Sun first on the next morning whether elder or younger would be declared as their first king or chief. Accordingly, when the rooster crowed at dawn all the five brothers went in different directions in the darkness

to see the dazzling Sunlight. *Kansuh Kanrung Makan* went towards west, *Lukung Marim* towards north and *Theirang Thao* on the south. *Tangkip Zulung* went east and climbed up on the top of a banyan tree, and found the morning's sunrise first. Therefore, on the basis of the agreement *Tangkip Zulung* became the first king (*A-reng*) of the Chothe people. Accordingly, it is said the Dragon instructed *Lukung Marimpa* the priest to perform the sacrificial offerings to the seven celestial great gods and also seek the chicken-leg divination on *Tangkip*'s coronation.

**From Myth to Legend:** According to Chothe village elders, a popular folktale called '*Shangtum shang*' describes an event that occurred during their migration. It says, the bundle of paddy (rice) given by the Dragon King to *Shangtum*, the eldest son of *Aihung Khiyang*, was lost during their journey, stolen by a rat. As they were in trouble, they reprimanded the Forest God and through his advice they smoked out the rat with chillies, and got back their paddy. Similarly, at another stage of their migration, another bundle of their paddy was carried away to the other side of a big river while crossing it. Being helpless, they called the rat for help, and the rat brought it back for them. It is said that it took them seven years to complete the paddy plantation, when the paddy plants began to fill its ears, *Lungkung Marim* offered the "Shanghong lethoi" (thanks giving rite of paddy) in honour of their Powerful gods. Not forgetting the rat, the Chothe also put aside a small basket of paddy for the rats after each harvest; if this is not done they believe that the rats attack their rice-burn. This belief and rite was institutionalised and is still practiced by some Lamlanghupi.

There are many genealogical myths and legends relating to their sojourn during their pre-historic migration period similar to some other ethnic groups. Since there is no any written record or work done on the Chothe pre-history, it is very difficult to clearly distinguish or differentiate between their myths and legends. However, on the basis of their phase of migrations their socio-religious history may be broadly divided into pre-history (myth) and history (legend). Their genealogical myth (origin) begins from *Huipithoranga* the mythical cave (place of origin) to *Lungleh-Waishu* (Lungleh in Mizoram) and up to *Lungsukbung* (*Nungsuk ching*) near Leimatak river basin (south-western region of Manipur).

#### 4.2 Brief Analysis of the Chothe Genealogical Myth

There are several important elements that reflect the many religious aspects from this genealogical myth apart from various other factors of socio-cultural and historical accounts.

Some of the prominent features that have religious significance under this study are:

1. The *Chothe genealogical myth* portrays how the world originated and living organisms and creatures came into being stage after stage before mankind's existence. According to this, in the beginning the empty world was filled only with energy or spirits and with the combination of the seven basic cosmic and natural elements the first form of life began from water. The first water creature was believed to be a fish (*Ngavok* = dogfish, *Spe. Channa punctatus*) then, come the land creatures like apes (*Ajong* = monkey). The last stage in the creation by the Heavenly Supreme gods is believed to be mankind (*Mamashee*).
2. The Chothe genealogical also describes its genealogical origin. The Chothe mythically believe that they are the descendants or progenitors of *Ka-Chokte* and *Thanidam*; the son of the Heavenly (*Thangvan rengpa*) and the Earthly Queen (*Shimleinu*), and the daughter of the Sun (*Ninu*) and the Moon (*Thapa*) gods, and the Dragon King (*Lungchungpa*) as the Principal Guardian God, the protector and benefactor of the people. Thus, the tribe's name, "Choite or Shote or Zote or Chawte or Chote or Chothe" is derived from *Ka-Chokte/Ka-Choite*. It also describes their primitive cave lives at *Huipi /Hurpi/ Chinlung*.
3. Besides, the Dragon (*Lungchunpa* or *Ruipi-santai*) being considered as the Principal Guardian God, the sole protector and defender of the Chothe, the Dragon is also considered as mediator between the Supreme or Almighty Heavenly-Earthly Gods and the mankind. Of all the Celestial elements, the Chothe believe the Heaven (Sky) God as the most powerful god, known to them as *Thangvan rengpa* or *Chungpathein*, to the Meitei sometimes he is known as *Pu Soraren*, the controller of human destiny. Since the rest of the cosmological or celestial gods are invisible, the Dragon god is considered as the mediator between the two worlds. G. Elliot Smith (1919) in his book *Evolution of the Dragon* says that in China the Dragon is considered as the earliest mythological beast symbolising fertility of the earth and power of the emperor. According to the Chinese myth there are fifteen meaningful gods in order of personal involvement. One of it is the *Lung-Wang* or the Dragon King, the Ruling God of the sea because he controls the

weather especially the rain. He appears in the human form but can transform into a Dragon, especially when he makes rain and thunder. There are many folktales about his colourful life reflecting like a rainbow and an elaborate golden palace beneath the sea and his symbol seems to be one of the most popular symbols found in almost all ancient Chinese temples (Channa 1998: 143-144, 156). Similarly, the Chothe also address the Rain God or Sea God as “Lung-chung-pa” (lit. as the god above the head or rain). The term ‘rain’ in Chothe is “Ru” or “Lù”, and ‘above’ is “chung” or “van”. Like the Chinese, the Chothe also worship and revere the Dragon God as their Supreme Guardian God on earth since early days. The deep-pink or light reddish colour motif of their main traditional shawl “Awa-ampi” is assumed to be the pattern and colour taken from the Dragon-Python God. Likewise, the “Rainbow” the radiance of Dragon is considered as their emblem.

4. Like any other religions of the world, the Chothe religion also believe that certain numbers are very important, sacred and profane to them. To the Chothe the number “seven” (7) plays a very significant role especially in their ritualistic activities because they believe in the seven Celestial elements or natural gods identified as (1) The Heaven, (2) The Earth, (3) The Sun, (4) The Moon, (5) The Fire, (6) The Air or Storm, and (7) The Water or Rain, in which all forms of lives depend for their survival. The religious philosophy behind these seven Celestial or natural elements is that all these elements together created the human being, shaped and formed the world for their existence, and their seven clans represent the seven Celestial or natural elements. Even the Khasi of Meghalaya consider number seven as important in their religious affairs because they are the descendants of original seven household units “Ka khun Ki Ksiew U Hynniewtrep” (Nongkynrih 2002: 131). The belief in numbers as sacred or profane is found in almost all walks of life from individual to cultural perspectives. For example, the Christian believe that triple six (666) is the number of the beast or Satan. To the Hindu astrologers all numbers have their own significance depending on the individual personality (rashi). Likewise, for some cultural groups ‘odd numbers’ like one, three, five, seven, nine are considered good and sacred, while ‘Even Numbers’ like two, four, six, eight are bad or profane. In any Chothe ritual activity, the ritualistic items should be in odd number like, one, three, five or seven reflecting the concerned cosmic-elements to be addressed.

5. The genealogical myth with the Dragon and the Tiger portrays the nature of conflicts in life. The conflicts and mistrusts that exist between the two animals are believed to have passed on to human beings and they continue to exist in different forms even today. Therefore, the Chothe believe that if two good friends have opposite characters like the Dragon and Tiger they will always be in conflict. The Chothe Lamlanghupi elders; M. Khundo and H. Ibochou gave an interesting story about the relationship between the two animals. They say some twenty years ago particularly in the months of March-April and before full-moon they used to see a Tiger's footprints that was believed to have come down from the western Leimaton hills to their sacred-grove to pay homage to Lungchungpa or *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa*. On such nights the atmosphere is unusually still; by midnight the village dogs bark and howl in the direction of the sacred grove sensing the Tiger.
6. The Chothe still believe in the Dragon's blessings bestowed upon each of their first ancestors with distinctive personality characteristics. Such distinctive personality traits and charismatic characters are claimed to exist in some of the clan's members even today. For example, most of the *Makan* men are said to be good craftsmen and artistic while their girls are strong and hard working compared to other clans members. The *Thao* men are brave and courageous and outshine others in sports and games, and their girls are considered beautiful and seductive. For example, *Thaowon Samtharnu* (Nungthil Chaibi) wife of King Charairongpa was said to be exceptionally beautiful. *Yuhlung (Zulung)* men are generally considered gentle, humble and diplomatic and often become the first person to obtain a new status while their girls normally seem to control their husbands. *Khiyang (Hiyang)* men often occupy high status in the village and their girls are brave and defensive. *Mareem (Marim)* has the record of being powerful and skilful in magic and their girls are said to be introverts and clever. *Parpa* men being born free during spring season love leisure and an easy life while their girls are said to be hardworking, bold and dominating. While the *Rangshai* men are considered argumentative and ill-tempered but their girls gentle and soft.
7. The most significant belief of the Chothe is in the assurance given by the Dragon King (*Lungchungpa*) before they came out of their mythical cave, that he will come and dwell with them when they live a prosperous and well settled life. These prophecies are believed to have been fulfilled and have manifested themselves after many centuries in

the person of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* (*Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa*) the legendary king of Manipur. Signifying the life after death or the existence of soul. But initially they did not recognise him as their Divine-incarnate and ill-treated him during his childhood as they were unaware of the specific time, place, how and when he would appear to them. The *Chothe Genealogical Myth* of avatar or re-incarnation is in part seen similar with the birth of Jesus Christ and also to the Lord Krishna. This law of similarity of myth is explained by Claude Levi Strauss (1972) as the universal law of human thought in his study of myth.

### **4.3 The Legend of Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa**

The *Chothe genealogical myth* is based on the Dragon and Tiger Myth like most of the Sino-Tibetan speaking groups of people. The Chothe firmly believe in the cosmology and ancestral-spirits. They believe to have migrated from *Huipithoranga* a mythical cave to *Lungleh-Waishu* (Lungleh in Mizoram), and then moved to the present region. As the legend begins where the myth ends, the Chothe legend also starts with the legendary King “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa” or “Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa” probably believed to have existed before 700 A.D. The Chothe folklore elucidates the genealogical history of *Pakhangpa* but the later part of his life story is not very clear to them since they do not maintain a written record. This legendary King *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* is considered as the avatar or Divine-incarnate of *Pu Lungchungpa* or the Dragon-python their Principal Heavenly Guardian God, the protector and benefactor of the people. This legend re-instils the Chothe mythical religious beliefs and practices. According to them *Pakhangpa*, their Divine-incarnate or Supreme Guardian God is always with them and His earthly resting abode is identified with a sacred-grove or banyan tree. The present sacred-grove of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* is at Khuman an old settlement of Lamlanghupi village, Bishnupur.<sup>4</sup>

Though the *Chothe genealogical myth* is similar to other indigenous communities of Manipur especially the so-called “Old-Kuki” tribes like Kharam, Koireng, Kom, Anal, Lamkang, Maring, Tarao, Moyon, Monshang, Aimol and Chiru in its origin, the acceptance of the Chothe Pakhangpa as the Divine-incarnate of the Dragon-Python God is not found among these tribes. The Chothe consider *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* as the reincarnate of their god the Dragon-Python God (*Pu Lungchungpa*) and revere and worship him as their ancestor god for his extra-ordinary greatness as a king and for his mystical personality. He is

known to various Meitei clans by eighteen different cognomens of Pakhangba and the most common one is *Nongda Leiren Pakhangba*. Like the Chothe, the Meitei also revere and worship him as their mythical and first historical king of the Imphal (Kangla) kingdom but call him *Nongda Leiren Pakhangba/pa* though he is originally known as *Chothe Thangmei* or *Thangwai Pakhangpa*. It is important to note that many among the Meitei are confused and ignorant about the real identity of his parents and childhood history because the available written records are mostly about his kingdom.

Therefore, in connection to the above, some Meitei scholars have tried to link their Meitei mythical story of “Atiya Guru Sidaba” or “Kuptreng and Sentreng” with Pakhangpa but in futility as they failed to establish the Pakhangpa’s origin and his parentage. The various contesting opinions about Pakhangpa and his cognomens from different sections of Meitei further denied an acceptable version about the genealogical identity of Pakhangpa even within themselves as the constructed evidences of his origin and parentage are incoherent with the folklores. Many historians have speculated about his origin and parentage by constructing various myths and legends around his mysterious personality in different ways but the origin and parentage of Pakhangpa is still shrouded in mystery in the context of the religious history of Manipur. This prevailing speculation is pointed out by Prof. Gangmumei Kabui, a renowned historian of Manipur: “Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was a prince of mysterious origin, opinions about his origin and parentage runs from him being an Aryan prince from upper Burma to an adventurer from the Brahmaputra valley or the Himalayas to Divine-incarnate to put an end to anarchy in the land or an illegitimate child of a clan chief, made a ruler by his foster father” (2003: 75). Further G. Kabui says that, “the chronology of Pakhangpa is one of the most controversial issues in the history of Manipur” (ibid: 90). This is probably because of his enigmatic personality. But the Chothe consider Pakhangpa as the avatar or Divine-incarnate of the Dragon-Python God born by a Chothe lady. Therefore, the Chothe adore, revere and worship him as their Ancestor God the Supreme Principal Guardian God the protector and benefactor of the people.

#### **4.3.i The Oral History of Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa**

The legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa*’s origin, parentage and his background in the oral history as described by different Chothe village elders; H. Thambaljao, Y. Maipak, Y. Tomalsingh, H. Jaikan, Pr. Roushi, Mk. Neilut, Pr. Wailum, Pr. Herachou and

Pr. Chandbabu, besides many other elders and leaders is lucidly explained below. In the subsequent discussion, the oral history clears some confusion found in the *CTP*, *MNL* manuscripts and other literature relating to the history of Pakhangpa. According to Chothe oral history:

*“Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa was the son of Daishin the eldest daughter of Yulung Surou (also known as Tarang, Nungkarakpa and Sanarakpa) one of the greatest chiefs of the Chothe. Surou had two beautiful daughters namely, Daishin and Joushin. As he was getting old, their Principal Guardian God Pu Lungchungpa or Ruipei Santai or the Dragon-Python felt sympathy on him because he was the only descendant left in his family line after all his kin members died fighting in different battles. Moreover, Surou was a good man, so, the Dragon-Python decided to bless him. Therefore, the Dragon-Python God transformed into human form and disguised himself into a strange young handsome man and appeared before Daishin in her parents’ jhum field while she was working. This mysterious young handsome man, who introduced himself as stranger, started frequently visiting Daishin in the jhum field. Thereafter, she fell in love with him. Later, when her father Surou came to know that she was impregnated by this mysterious young man, and she could not specifically identify him, he got infuriated and restless. In order to find out whether he is a demigod or human being, her parents asked her to pierce the mixture package containing turmeric, garlic, ginger, snail, etc. when the mysterious young man came to visit her again in the jhum’s hut. Daishin, on her parents’ advice pierced the mixture package and when the liquid dropped down on the mysterious young man, he could not bear the smell and was burnt by the mixture. He rushed to the nearby brook and disappeared forever, testifying that he was not human, but a divine being. Joushin the younger sister, who was working in the same field saw from a distance the strange young man transform into python (the tail) when she suddenly happened to look out in response to her sister’s screams. When they reached their home Joushin informed her parents about the incident. On learning the news, Daishin was prohibited by her parents from going to the jhum field from that day onwards, Daishin spent the rest of her days weeping. It is also said that she escaped many times from her house and took refuge among the neighbouring villages expecting to find her strange lover but he never showed up anymore. However, her lover appeared in her dreams assuring his existence and protecting her and the unborn child with different signs, directing and instructing her about the do’s and don’ts of food habits and other religious taboos, which*

*she should observe during her pregnancy. After nine months Daishin gave birth to a son called Thangmei. But later because of his protruding tail he was nicknamed as Meingai (tail-man). Since the mysterious young man did not appear anymore after the incident to claim Daishin as his wife, Thangmei was considered as an illegitimate child by the society. Therefore, great Surou, in order to save his image and status, attempted to kill the child three times not knowing about the child's divinity and supernatural powers given by the Dragon-Python God.*

*In the first attempt, Surou took Thangmei (Meingai) into a deep forest and left him alone to die. But his mysterious father, the Dragon-Python God appeared as strange old man and rescued him with his old friend, the Tiger King (Kamkeirang rengpa) who helped him take the child to the village area. It is believed that when a tiger approaches the child's cries worsen but it stops after seeing the wagging tail of the tiger. So, the child slowly followed the tiger's wagging tail and left him in the middle of the village road. As soon as the tiger left, the child began to cry and this was heard by some villagers who identified him and took him to his mother. As Thangmei grew up he became notorious and often created problems among his friends, especially while playing, because of his extraordinary strength and power. So, his friends often refused to play with him. Therefore, he always stayed alone and sometimes played with his grandfather.*

*The second attempt was made when Surou and his grandson Thangmei went to a forest. They said that when they were climbing a steep mountain Surou on the pretext of his foot-slipping pushed down a big boulder with his leg to kill Thangmei but the child escaped by deflecting the boulder with his hand.*

*Surou made the third attempt when the young innocent boy Thangmei Pakhangpa followed him into the deep forest to fell trees. It is said that when the tree which Surou was cutting was about to fall, he asked the boy to stand in the way of the falling tree and catch hold of it. Accordingly the boy did so by going in direction of the falling tree. So, Surou returned home thinking that young Thangmei Pakhangpa might have been crushed to death by the tree. As the boy did not return home till late evening, his worried mother asked her father about her son but her father told her that the young boy had left ahead of him and he must be playing with his friends. So, his worried mother searched the whole village but could not find him. But surprisingly, late in the evening, the young Thangmei returned home with a log of the tree and asked his grandfather where to put the log, as suggested, he*

*dropped it down at their front courtyard. That night, young Thangmei told his mother the strange dreams he had during the day while he was crushed to asleep by the falling tree. Hearing the story, his mother realised that it was his mysterious father the Dragon-Python God, so she ask him not to be afraid of it nor disclose it to anyone.*

*As the pressure of the village was mounting on Surou, the village chief, to decide on the fate of his daughter for bearing an illegitimate child, asked his daughter Daishin and young grandson Thangmei Pakhangpa (Meingai) to leave the village. He gave them a hen and a rooster, and instructed them to move north and perform an egg-divination (artuisan) and settle at the place where the rooster crowed. Accordingly, it is believed that Daishin and young Thangmei moved north and settled near Langthabal on a small hill-slope where the rooster crowed. They also said that later his grandfather sometimes visited them carrying with him some ropes, bamboo baskets, fat for lighting and some clothes for them. But during the inter-tribal wars in the northern region, Thangmei and his mother moved down south and took refuge at Moirang. In due course, he had become one of the greatest kings of Moirang after Thangwai Kongding. Legend says that after he consolidated all the small kingdoms in the south, he marched north and established a new kingdom by defeating his rivals and subjugating all other neighbouring groups, who thereby became the first sovereign ruler of entire Manipur valley as “Pakhangpa”.*

Though Chothe oral history does not give much information about Pakhangpa after he and his mother left the village but it is clearly revealed in the *MNL* that Pakhangpa (Meingai) was a great warrior in Moirang commonly known as, “Thangwai Atengba” meaning, ‘an aide of King Thangwai Kongding’. Later he succeeded Thangwai Kongding and became one of the greatest kings of Moirang and acquired the titled “Thingkri Nachouba” after defeating the great Chothe King Natoi Nachoupa in the fierce battle of *Chothe Nungsuk ching (Lungsuk)*. Thereafter, one by one he conquered, consolidated and subjugated all the small southern kingdoms into one big principality of Moirang. Later he mobilized a huge number of soldiers from the south, and then marched towards the north and defeated the Khaba-nganba (probably Maring) and brought them under his direct control. Pakhangpa then brought Moirang principality of the south, the south-western kingdoms (Chothe, Kharam and Koireng), the north-west kingdoms of Luwang (Liangmei) and the north-east kingdoms of Angom (probably of Tangkhul) under one administration.

Thus, Pakhangpa became the first Sovereign-Ruler of the entire Manipur valley and the adjoining hill-kingdoms. According to some Chothe elders, their folktale mentions Pakhangpa's relatives and three elders assisting him on his coronation day as per the custom and tradition. This could be the reason why tribal participation is a must in a Meitei king's coronation ceremony and other important ritualistic ceremonies (Kabui 2003: 84; also see Chothe chief's coronation ceremony in Chapter - 3).

#### **4.4 Analysis of Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa**

To construct the socio-religious history of Chothe in the mythical person of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* (their ancestor god, the avatar of *Pu Lungchungpa* the Dragon-Python God) and that of *Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa/ba* (historical king of Manipur) to be one and the same person, we need to de-construct the socio-religious histories of the Meitei mythology from the available literature and compare the contrasting views with that of the Chothe oral history and the *CTP* manuscripts with respect to his identity i.e. origin, childhood background and genealogy or parentage for its authenticity.

##### **4.4.i Literature on *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa***

There is a very small amount of literature available on Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa which gives the account of his origin, parentage and background. The available writings are the record materials of Kh. Manjou, *Chothe Athouna (Chothe's origin)*, the ancient sacred manuscript of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)*, *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)*, *Cheitharol Kumpaba (ChK)* and few remarks found in some books written by various British administrators and scholars like; J. Shakespeare (1912), William Shaw (1929), M. Kirti (1989) and K. Mangpu (2002). Except for Kh. Manjou's manuscript the all rest are written by outsiders. The *CTP* sacred manuscript is written in ancient Meitei script (*Meitei-Mayek*) in paragraph form on a folded scroll paper accord with 167 paragraphs without the author's name. On its reverse is the transliteration into Bengali script. This *CTP* manuscript along with some sacred archaic materials is preserved successively by the village deities' keeper (*leihu jokpa*) of Lamlanghupi Village Council. There is also a copy of the translation of the original manuscript written in Bengali script which is retained by each village chief successively along with the two celebrated necklaces related to the folktale, *Shantheihoi and Yangngeir (Lungthun maythanu)*, (see Pic.18).

A closer look into Chothe oral history, the manuscripts of *CTP*, *MNL* and other literature available seems to unveil one of the most controversial socio-religious histories of Manipur: the origin and identity of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* or *Meingai* or *Thingkri Nachaoba* or the so called *Nongda Leiren Pakhangba*, whose childhood and parents' identity is shrouded in mystery.<sup>5</sup> The above available literature may serve as the basis to fill up the incomplete history of the *Pakhangpa* or the first Sovereign Ruler of Manipur. They also highlight the similar beliefs of the Chothe and Meitei in the realm of animism, ancestor-worship and socio-cultural relations since early days. Based on the Chothe oral history and other secondary sources we shall analyse the elements of Chothe Pakhangpa's origin, identity and background, and also examine the identity of his parentage and his wife, Leima Sunurembi or Laisana and thereby re-construct the socio-religious history of Chothe and also the Meitei.

#### **4.4.ii *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa: The Sacred Manuscript***

The sacred manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* is in ancient language written in *Meitei-Mayek* (script) by unknown author in 1870 A.D. The reverse side of the manuscript is the transcription of the same story in Bengali script. There is also an abridged text of the sacred manuscript written in Bengali script under the same title.<sup>6</sup> Like any ancient manuscripts of the Meitei, the statements are in the form of questions, interrogative remarks and phrases which make it very difficult for readers to comprehend the semantics and syntax of the text. It is very cryptic, poetical and often in rhyme with deep underlying meanings.

The original *CTP* sacred manuscript has 167 paragraphs. The manuscript starts with the introduction (Para: 1-2) that, *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* is a sacred manuscript which records the origin and identity of the Chothe. The story is a very old history that had been destroyed during the Sanskritisation (Vaishnavism) movement and was hidden from public knowledge in the early part of the eighteenth century. The author has re-constructed it with much difficulty from a few reliable texts obtained after an extensive search. During his investigation tour the author met an old man, the elder son of Khaibam Yaimou Sagei (probably a priest) near Khujuman road (a village in Bishnupur). This man told him the story of Chothe Pakhangpa from '*Tej Kumari*' manuscript, but he found the story was incomplete. After searching further, he luckily met another man from Nagamapal (Imphal) and who provided him a very good ancient manuscript called '*Sahui Loirempa Moirang*

*Kanglarol'* that features more information about the history of Chothe Pakhangpa's origin and identity".

Hence, it is seen that the sacred original manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* is one of the most important historical accounts of Pakhangpa compiled by him (anonymous author) based on oral history and other archaic materials with much difficulty (see Pic. 8 & 10). This manuscript is still preserved by the Lamlanghupi village council as a sacred document and is shown only to a few selective villagers on certain auspicious occasions after performing a very strict ritual. In other words, neither any researcher nor outsider has had any access to this manuscript till today except S.N. Khelchandra who abridged the sacred *CTP* manuscript.

The abridged text of the *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* has ninety-three (93) paragraphs, translated by S.N. Khelchandra and the cover page in free translation reads:

*"This is an important book which was initially written in ancient Meitei-Mayek (script) and rewritten into Bengali script. The writing was completed on Saturday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the first month of July-August 1870 A.D."*

*(Aruba leirikne, Meitei ariba mayektna eirambadagi, Bangla mayekta ethokpane. Kristabda 1870, gi Thawan ahanba humni panba, thangja numitta eiba loijabane), (see Pic. 9 & 11).*

The period given in the manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* indicates that the anonymous author must have probably compiled and re-written it during the reign of King Chandrakriti (1850-1886) which is believed to have been destroyed during King Garib Niwaz or Pamheiba (1709-1748) during the Sanskritisation process.

The *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* specifically indicates that Pakhangpa was one of the greatest kings of Moirang in Chapter - 19, titled, '*Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa: Thinkgri Nachaoba*'. Since, the book does not record the period of any of the kings or dates of the events, some scholars consider it a collection of fables. But one cannot deny the large amount of invaluable information provided by this manuscript that describes holistically the early culture and history while some even argue that *MNL* is much earlier than the *Cheitharol Kumpaba (Ch.K)*.

Since, *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* is considered a sacred manuscript of their legendary king it begins in ritualistic recitation form like an opening prayer, as shown;

*(Hung! Hayahe, heiyao; Nahalnong Chothe Mareipung, Yangdou lammahanbu, mayum Chothe meinungthou Khunpu Tarang khullakpa, Loibi hao reima loiya Langhoinugi palem pibuknunggi, chingpal khom-ol angalla. Huiyai liklu ahanbibu phuina rakle haidabara. Adunong-gibu mayum Chothe mareipungda, Chingngu nongthou Sorarel, awang pakhang yoirenba, korou thangba nong-ningthouki, chingngu mityeng panchumpna, chingngu manongtampu, khoiyum Shingtum luroi paina, nongtamkhire haidabara. Mamon phuina monggibu, Unbi Makan lamda leiraklabada, Mamo madom shatpina, maning shumlei tallabagibu, mapal Chothe panphoilau, madu khalei pam ngapabu, Thaushiraklabada chingngu manongdamgibu, Maman marau launa heina. Namu pong-oi shaktam lep, tubi marou heina langwol phoraklabagibu), (CTP - Para: 1, p.1, abridged text).*

The above excerpt reads: *Hung! Hayahe*; once in the kingdom of Chothe, Khamlang-Taopi (Daishin) the eldest daughter of Tarang (Surou) the village chief and Lenghoinu queen of the hill people found their daughter mystically pregnant. The Dragon-Python God (Pu Soraren in Meitei) of the north-western hills while wandering around spotted Khamlang-Taopi in her parents' jhum (yam field) and her beauty captivated his eyes. Therefore, the Dragon God transformed into like a young handsome Pong man and met her in the field (CTP-Para: 1, p.1). Thereafter, he developed intimacy with her and started frequently visiting her in the jhum field. They had a physical relationship, and Khamlang-Taopi was impregnated. Tarang was so hurt by Khamlang-Taopi's pregnancy that he got angry with all the village youths for seducing and impregnating his daughter before he declared her marriageable. After being repeatedly reprimanded by parents to disclose the identity of her lover or the father of the unborn child, Khamlang-Taopi revealed that it was neither any of the Chothe boys nor any neighbouring youths from Keke Chaopapung (probably a village near Moirang), (CTP-Para: 2). Her parents became more doubtful and apprehensive about the identity of the young man i.e. his name, clan and village on hearing Khamlang-Taopi's disclosure.

Therefore, in order to find out whether the stranger was a divine being or human, the angry parents told their daughter to hang a package containing mixtures of white linseed, onion, fresh yam, garlic, ginger, turmeric, snail and eel wrapped in the wild-yam leaves in the inner roof of the jhum hut just above his usual sitting place and pierce it when he comes to visit her (CTP-Para: 3, p.2);

(*Chothe mareipung shanglou mathel lang ngambabu, thangpak mem man, thoiding ngouja, panphuk panphoi, shoikari mayangba, thilhou, chanam, lilwai khomwai, shingka shingthum, yaimu yai-ngang, tharoi khoujao, ngaparum ngaril khangkabol* )

So, when the young man visited her jhum hut and sat at his usual place he initially sensed and expressed the unusual smell but Khamlang-Taopi convinced him that the smell came from her lunch package. As instructed by her parents, Khamlang-Taopi pierced the package secretly during their conversation; few drops of the liquid mixture fell on his body. Being Divine (demigod) and endowed with some supernatural powers he could not bear the smell and burn of the mixture on his body he immediately rushed to the nearby brook and disappeared forever.<sup>7</sup>

According to the *CTP* sacred manuscript, Khamlang-Taopi was prescribed with many do's and don'ts of the food habits and other religious taboos in her dreams by the stranger (her lover) as a result it is mentioned that she did not go out from her house for the first four months of her pregnancy until she gave birth (Para: 28-32, p.16-18). The taboos instructed in her dreams are discussed in the religious norms and taboo section in the following chapter.

The *CTP* manuscript also states that Khamlang-Taopi (Daishin) gave birth to a son, who was named as "Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa". According to N. Vijalakshimi Brara, Pakhangpa is said to have been born on Thursday, the 15<sup>th</sup> lunar day of the Inga month (15<sup>th</sup> June) and all the Mangang worshipped their ancestor on this day (1998: 86). Further, the Para: 32 of the *CTP* manuscript states that *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* was named on the fifth day as instructed by the Dragon-Python God. This is in accordance to the Chothe tradition (see, child naming ceremony). The Para: 32 of *CTP* sacred manuscript also mentioned that Pakhangpa was referred as "Lairen Meitingu" (Python's protruding tail) especially by the Nangngoi people. According to the oral history "Meingai or Meitingte" means, 'a child with a protruding tail'. The protruding tail is believed to be the mark of his divinity. This particular term is seen to be wrongly interpreted by the Meitei from a different angle. According to them the term means, 'Lord of the kings'. This wrong usage and its misconception are clarified by S.N.A Parratt who states "the use of the term 'Meetingnu' (lit. Lord of the Meeteis) for 'king' indicates that the chronicle is essentially the repository of the Meitei writing of history. It reflects the Meitei viewpoint against that of the other *yeks* or clan groups, as well as of other peoples, probably pre-Meitei autochthones (like the

Chakpa and the Loi) while others are today classified as ‘tribal’ (2005: 3). Similar to the Chothe oral version, M. Kirti also remarked that “another title for the king is Lairel Meidingu meaning, ‘Lord, straight tail’, Pakhangba, being the Lord of the snakes is better known as Meidingu” (1993: 55). The Para: 25 of the *CTP* abridged text in Bengali script or Para: 2 of the original *CTP* states that one of the greatest kings of Moirang was called as “Thingkri Nachaoba”. Before he was called as Thingkri Nachaoba he was known as “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa” and his great uncle / foster father was called as “Thangwai Kongding Ahanba” and his mother was called as *Thamoirempi* the princess/queen of Chakha-khong Marimpa.<sup>8</sup>

*(Keke Moirang ningthou Thinkgri Nachaoba touna kau-ae. Thinkgri Nachaoba kaudringeidi Chothe Thangmei Pakhangba tauna kauye, Keke Moirang Chothe Thangwai Pakhangba mapanthou ningthou Keke Thangwaii Kongding ahanba kau-aena, panlem mama Chakhakhong Marimpa chanu leima Thamoirembi tauna kau-aena), (CTP-Para: 25, p.15).*

In line with the oral history the *CTP* manuscript also describes the third attempt made by Tarang or Surou to kill the boy (Pakhangpa). According to the *CTP* manuscript Tarang cursed his grandson who neither knew his father’s identity nor clan to go and catch-hold of the huge falling tree, so that he might be crushed to death.

*(Tarang makhoi shaona, pacha khangda shalai toukhangdaba-o nangbu pamel Uru tuple tare U-ngakluro (CTP-Para: 13, p.7).*

According to *CTP* Para: 14-17, ‘Tarang returned home without the boy, but the young boy miraculously survived from the incident and surprisingly brought home the big log of the tree on his shoulder and dropped down in their courtyard. This astonished his grandfather Tarang or Surou. It is said that he narrated everything about the strange dreams he had to his mother when he was knocked off by the falling tree and fell asleep. He told his mother that an old man came in his dreams and told him to pick up some particular falling dry leaves found around the area and asked him to keep the leaves on his shoulder on the side that he would carry the log’. However, the manuscript does not specifically mention which particular types of plant or leaf it was, although the old man is believed to be his mythical father the Dragon-Python God in disguise. Daishin, from her son’s dream realized that it was her lover the Dragon-Python God that saved her son’s life. The manuscript also mentions that she had many strange dreams and visions from time to time foretelling and

warning her about certain future consequences. It also mentions that she was asked to perform a ritual (*Khuiyum* in Meitei) with seven (7) eggs in her dreams in case she was shaken or frightened and fell sick (*CTP-Para: 20-22*). This indicates the spiritual connections between Khamlang-Taopi (Daishin) and the Dragon-Python God who provides instructions in her dreams as he did not want to make himself visible.

In accordance to the above, the Chothe oral history says that young Thangmei Pakhangpa grew up to be extremely notorious and a trouble maker among his friends. Whenever they played with him he often landed up hurting them. His extraordinary strength and power surprised and horrified the villagers. Unable to bear the shame due to notoriety and illegitimacy of the child, Tarang or Surou asked his daughter Daishin to leave the village with her son and settle far in the north. He gave them a hen and a rooster and instructed them to settle at a place where the rooster crowed and also perform the egg divination (*artui-san*). As ordered by his grandfather Surou, young Pakhangpa and his mother left the village and marched north, whom they believed first settled at Langthabal (near Imphal) on a mound close to the lake since the rooster crowed and also performed the egg divination accordingly.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.4.iii Other Literature on Pakhangpa's Parentage and Childhood**

Other literature that describes Pakhangpa's origin and parentage, and that supports the Chothe oral history and the *CTP* manuscript are written by; William Shaw (1929), M. Kirti Singh (1993), K. Mangpu (2001) and G. Shangkham (2006) to name few. Accordingly M. Kirti remarks that "The myth of Pakhangba recalls the association of the Meiteis with the Chothe of the Kuki groups of tribals" (1993: 153-154). The above very important statement on Pakhangpa's origin, the identity of his mother and the origin of Meitei are precisely accentuated by William Shaw's description, who wrote:

*"There was a girl by the name Lenghoi or Nungmaidenga, who fell in love with a large snake, which resided near the village. She was of the 'Chothe' tribe of Old-Kukis. To others the snake appeared as a snake but to the girl it was a very handsome young man. Eventually she became pregnant by the snake and a male child was born to her. He grew up and all spoke of him as father-less at which he used to be ashamed. His mother told him not to mind that but to go and make friends with his father, the snake. The boy was not afraid and met the snake who he caught by the neck and the snake told him many wonderful things*

*that were to happen to the boy. The boy then went and told his mother of this and she gave eggs to perform the “Arhtuisan” when searching for a new site where he was to set up a new village. He tried Langthabal first but because of inauspicious omens he moved to the middle of the valley where, on performing the Arhtui-san, he found the place suitable and he founded a village there. Thus the Manipuris were originated. At that time they live like kukis and Nagas but later a Brahmin came from the south who so impressed them with his preaching that they took on their present religion”* (Shaw 1929: 47-48).

Similarly Mangpu Kilong remarks that, “sometime in 700 A.D a Python-god fell in love with a lady - Lenghoi by name, of Chothe, a member of Old-Kuki who was renown as Pakhangpa” (2002: 42, 54). G. Shangkhram was informed by Kharam her informant that the Meitei king (Pakhangpa) was, “the son born of the Chothe lady” (2006:45). Most of the descriptions provided by these scholars (including William Shaw) in their literature are believed to be authentic as far as the sources and their writings are concerned since they are obtained from reliable local folk based on their own oral history. However, as far as the origin of the Meitei is concerned it is believed that the Meitei is a conglomeration of various old tribes of proto-Tibeto-Burman speaking groups of Manipur formed by political, economic and matrimonial relationships started since many centuries.<sup>10</sup>

However, the oral history about young *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* and his mother after they left their village and settled at Langthabal, and how he became a powerful young man in the north, the cause of his movement toward south after his defeat by the Khaba-nganba, and his alliance with the Moirang king are very vague and obscure among the Chothe people because they do not maintain written records nor do they live together. Yet, this missing life history of Thangmei Pakhangpa in the Chothe oral history and his kingship at Imphal is found recorded in many documents. His existence at Langthabal in the north, his defeat by the Khaba-nganba and refuge at Moirang, and his mysterious personality as king of Imphal (Kangla) is described by Gangmumei Kabui and W. Ibohal Singh based on the historical materials like *Cheitharol Kumpaba (ChK)* besides a host of other scholarly material. His life and battles, as a great warrior and conqueror in the south, and also as the greatest king of Moirang, before he became the first sovereign king of Imphal Manipur valley is well described in *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)*. His origin and parentage, passionate romantic relationship with Sunurembi (his beloved wife) is well elaborated in the sacred manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)*. The evidence available in the above

mentioned literature may clear some of the prominent features of doubt and confusion of Pakhangpa amongst various people of Manipur is discussed below.

The cause of Pakhangpa's movement toward south, Kabui writes, "According to *Chakpa Khunta Khunthok*, Nongda Leiren Pakhangba, when he became of age, fought against the Khabas under the leadership of Khaba Nungchenba. In the struggle, Pakhangba was defeated by Khabas (Khaba-nganba) and Pakhangba was forced to take refuge in Moirang principality" (2003: 83). This apparently suggest that Chothe Pakhangpa, after being defeated by the Khaba-nganba the northern (Koubru) group, fled south and aided or made alliance probably with King Thangwai Kongding the elder son of former Moirang King Tushemba. Subsequently, Pakhangpa's mother Khamlang-Taopi, being beautiful might have either agreed or was forcefully married to Thangwai Kongding or became one of his concubines in order to help her son and the name Khamlang-Taopi was also changed to "Thamoilempi" in the manuscript *CTP* where Thangwai Kongding is referred as the foster-father or guardian (*Mapan-panthou*), (Para: 58, 61, p. 30).

But the story of how Pakhangpa perfectly engineered and became one of the most successful and the greatest kings of Moirang and how he acquired the new name "Thingkri Nachaoba", and his treaty "Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou" (the elongated inter-locking field) in the south with Thokchao the eldest Angom prince is well elaborated in *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP, Para: 90, p.46)* and *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)*. His treaty at *Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou* proved to be one of the most fortunate events that led him to be the greatest kings of Manipur by defeating Khabas.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4.4.iv Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)**

The manuscript *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* is also considered as one of the most important historical texts of Manipur. The nineteenth chapter titled '*Chothe Thangwai Pakhangpa: Thingkri Nachaoba*' exclusively deals with Pakhangpa describing him as one of the greatest kings of Moirang, the ancestor god (*Purek lai*).<sup>12</sup> The same account is also found in the *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* manuscript. According to *MNL* and *CTP*, Pakhangpa was also known as, "Purek lai Thangwai Atengba" meaning, 'the ancestor god who aided Thangwai' (Thangwai Kongding the eighth king of Moirang) because he helped subjugate the people living on the south and western areas of Moirang which King Thangwai and his predecessors could not do (Singh 1982: 90, *CTP-Para: 83, p.*

43). *MNL* also gives detailed accounts of his conquests, successful expansion of his kingdom and the titles he acquired after defeating his rival kings in the south and south-western region.

Pakhangpa, after his victory over Koireng, Kharam and also Chothe (by defeating the great Chothe King Natoi Nachaopa in the fierce battle of *Nungsuk-ching* or *Lungsuk*) of the south-western kingdoms, started his campaign against the small kingdoms in the south and south-east region on *Sugunu Ewaita* and *Ashong Khunlen* who gained complete control after devastating battles.<sup>13</sup> According to *MNL*, Pakhangpa plundered and burnt the entire village of Ashong Khunlen a village beyond Sugunu Ewaita inhabited by Poirei, the huge and brave warrior and also the youngest son of queen *Peyai* and defeated his brave King Salikpu and gained control over them (Singh 1982: 95-96, *CTP-Para*: 88-89, p.45-46).<sup>14</sup> Thus, the manuscript describes how Pakhangpa brought all the southern principalities directly under his control by breaking all the ancestral socio-political equations and ties.

*Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* like the *CTP* manuscript states that after unifying all the southern principalities Pakhangpa accepted a truce with Thokchao, the eldest son of Kouburel Angom-Ngagi of the northern kingdom and a treaty was made between them at *Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou* near Khuijuman (Singh 1982: 97, *CTP- Para*: 90, p.46).<sup>15</sup> This alliance treaty between the two leaders can be considered as the turning point in the history of Manipur as it resulted in overthrowing the rival Khabas by the combined forces. As G. Kabui says, while staying in Moirang, Pakhangpa organized support from Moirang Chaopa Mathipa and Sapon Sanoupa who whole heartedly helped him. The forces of Moirang for Pakhangpa defeated the Khabas and completely destroyed them. Some Khabas surrendered to Angom Puleiromba, some fled to hills and became Tangkhul (Kabui 2003: 83, see also Kamei 2004: 46). Thus, Pakhangpa put the power of Khabas in the north to an end and established his historical kingdom at Imphal (Kangla).

#### **4.4.v Meitei Mythology**

According to Meitei mythology, there are four Pakhangbas, viz.; Loimanai Pakhangba, Leinung Lonja (*Ariba*) Pakhangba, Lolang Pakhangba and Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is considered as the historical King according to *Cheithourol Kumpaba* record, while the rest are considered as mystical Pakhangbas, besides the other eighteen cognomens, given below (Kabui 2003: 75). One of the most popular

mythical versions which tries to construct a connection between the mythical *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangpa* and the legendary King Pakhangpa is the *Sanamahism* religion. According to this version, *Atiya Guru Sidaba* the Supreme God and the creator of the Universe, and his wife *Leimaren Sidabi* had two sons, the elder is known as *Ashiba or Kuptreng* or *Sanamahi* and the younger known as *Konjin Tuthokpa* or *Sentreng* or *Pakhangpa*. One day their father, *Atiya Guru Shidaba* floated down the river in the form of a dead cow to test the faith and wisdom of his two sons. *Sanamahi* thought the cow was already dead and stinking so did not bother but *Sentreng* recognized his father and performed the funeral rites. Based on this he is known as *Pakhangba* (lit. one who knows the father). Again their father asked both of them to go round the universe and whosoever wins the competition will succeed as king. While *Kuptreng* attempted to cover the entire universe, *Pakhangpa* on the other hand went around his father's pedestal seven times on the advice of his mother, as he was considered to be young and weak. Thus, *Pakhangpa* became royal king of the earth and *Sanamahi* was made the house or family god (Kabui 2003: 57, Singh 1986: 396-7).

Many scholars like, K.C Tensuba attempted to clear such mythical and historical uncertainties by asserting that, "N.L. Paakhangba was not that Paakhangba, the younger brother of Sanna-mahi the son of Yaibirel Sidaba and Leimarel Sidabee, which was in fact, not historical but something like a religious story reflecting the concept of the creation of life of the earth" (1993: 137). Similarly, Gangmumei Kabui affirms that, "The tradition of *Pakhangpa* as their divine King of the earth and *Sanamahi* as spiritual deity of the Meities perhaps was a myth created by rulers of Ningthouja dynasty founded by Nongda Leiren *Pakhangpa* in the late historical time to give a garb of divinity to the king" (2003: 57). On closer look, W.I. Singh says that there are eighteen cognomens of *Pakhangba* as mysticism seen from different accounts by the Meitei that began by 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in the pursuit of Tantric culture, in order to please the autocratic rulers of the kingdom. The eighteen cognomens are; 1). Nongta Tukuplik, 2) Nongtreng Apumba, 3) Leinung Lonja Ariba, 4) Laloyang Tanouba, 5) Nongpok Poklen, 6) Umtha Ningthou Yoirma, 7) Chingwang Ningthou Atenba, 8) Laiyingthou apanba, 9) Ching-U Langba Apanba, 10) Leinung Longja Pakhangba, 11) Lai Pakhang Atengba, 12) Tangja Leela Pakhangba, 13) Lolang Pakhangpa 14) Tubi Yoi Nongta, 15) Nongta Lairen Pakhangba, 16) Ningtem, 17) Sa and 18) Javista (Singh 1986: 271-272).

G. Kabui, one of the most renowned historians of Manipur has also come to the conclusion that, “The origin of the Meitei is shrouded in mystery and the study on the subject is greatly influenced by the religious faiths and the political ideologies of the Meitei themselves, thus making the problem highly speculative and controversial” (2003: 15, also see notes on Meitei and Poireiton). Such speculation and controversies may be further analysed incorporating the oral history, the sacred manuscript of *CTP* and other available literature.

#### **4.4.vi Pakhangpa’s Coronation at Kangla (Imphal)**

According to G. Kabui soon after the defeat of the Khabas and the Poireiton groups, Pakhangpa was crowned as the New Sovereign-King of Kangla (Imphal) by the three great leaders viz.; Puleiromba the Angom chief, Luwang Langmaiba (Luwang priest) and Ningthem Apanba of the Mangang (the ruling prince of Mangang) by pouring Nongjeng pond water on the body of the King Thangmei Pakhangpa and Queen Leima Sunurembi or Laisana (2003: 84-85). He also states that many of his leaders and relatives attended his coronation ceremony, as it was performed in the indigenous manner. The manner described by Kabui according to the *Chakparol* text says, ‘Kansuroi a leader of the Chakpas sent four persons namely Chakmaringba, Langmaringba, Mungmaringpa, Ngangan maringba to call Pakhangpa from Langthabal to Kangla for the coronation where they guarded Pakhangpa during the coronation ... All the people were invited to the ceremony and Pakhangpa, along with his queen Laisana, were formally coronated.<sup>16</sup> According to, ‘*Shanglen Puba Puya*’ the coronation ceremony was performed on the first Saturday of Kalen (June / July) the Meitei lunar calendar’ (ibid: 84-85).

According to G. Kabui, on his coronation day the poets and singers gave Pakhangpa (Meingai) the regal title “Tubi Yoinungda Nongda Lairen Pakhangpa” (lit. son of the Rain-Python God born by a Leinung lady).<sup>17</sup> It also mentions how he was given the title, “Meitingu or Meidingu” too (ibid: 84-85). Thus, we see the metamorphosis of Pakhangpa’s name from *Thangmei* to *Meingai* to *Meitingu* to *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* to *Chothe Thangwai Pakhangpa* to *Thinkri Nachaoba* and to *Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa*, and so forth according his stages of life. It also describes how Pakhangpa embraced the clan “Mangang” as one of the Ningthoujas or Royal clanships and was crowned as the first Sovereign King of Kangla (Imphal) Kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.4.vii Death**

The mysticism of Pakhangpa did not just end with his mysterious childhood activities and parentage but went on even after his death. The Chothe elders said that Pakhangpa is believed to have conspired and killed by his enemies using magical charms. While some claimed he died after he revealed his secrets to his beloved persuasive wife as he was not supposed to do under any circumstances. In this way, the Chothe believe that a man should never disclose secrets to his wife because if he does, his life will be short.

According to G. Kabui, Pakhangpa and Laisna lived in constant fear of the Khabas with great risk as he defeated them and that one Khaba rebel named Huitao Tington Khaba Tousuba ambushed and speared Pakhangpa to death by a strong sharp reed and threw his dead body into the Nungjeng pond. Another version mentions that Pakhangpa was killed by his own son Khuiyom Tompok in connivance with the Khabas (2003: 90). Even today the Chothe in their folktales speak highly of Khabas-Nganba (Maring) as a tribe, very skilful in magical practices in olden days, so also now. G. Kabui mentions that after Pakhangpa died Laisana fled and took refuge among the Angom and subsequently Khuiyom Tompok, the eldest son of Pakhangpa succeeded to the throne. These suggest that Pakhangpa was probably killed by the conspiracy of the Khabas with an internal person with some magic involved.

#### **4.5 Pakhangpa's Genealogy**

From the above it is seen that many Meitei scholars have speculated and presumed different names to construct the true identity of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* or *Nonda Leiren Pakhangba* but proved to be unsuccessful because they could not ascertain his origin, identity and parentage authentically. G. Kabui claims that the historicity of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is clearly proved by the historical chronicles and his dynasty's genealogy. But with regards to origin, Pakhangba was a prince of mysterious origin; opinions regarding his origin and parentage vary from his being an Aryan prince from upper Burma to an adventurer from the Brahmaputra valley or the Himalyas to divine incarnate born to put an end to anarchy in the land, an illegitimate child of a clan chief, made a ruler by his foster father. Thus, Kabui endorse that, "the identification of his parentage has been quite a controversial problem" (Kabui 2003: 75, 77). The confusion or controversy over the identity of Pakhangba is obvious as there is no any historical record available on his origin and

parentage other than the *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* manuscript which is kept as sacred with the Chothe until today.

#### **4.5.i Pakhangpa's Mother**

To many Meitei Pakhangpa's mother is known as, "Leinung Yaibirok". G. Kabui says that, according to *Khagemba Yangbi*, Pakhangpa's mother was *Leinung Yaibirok* one born three times as queen and married to three chiefs or kings. Similarly, *Chada Laihui*, a book on genealogy of the queens of Manipur of Ningthouja dynasty mentions *Leinung Yaibirok* as the mother of Pakhangpa, while *Pakhangpa Nongkarol* a text dealing with the death of the rulers also mentions Nonda Lairen, Pakhangpa's mother, as *Leinung Yaibirok* (2003: 76-77). According to Y.M. Singh and N.B. Singh *Meihourol Lathup Latam* a sacred text says that the mother of Pakhangpa was "Liklabicha Nungtangnu" who was illegitimately touched by Luwang Langmaiba and was forcibly married to Puleiromba, the Angom chief (See also Kabui 2003: 77).

On the basis of the *Cheitharol Kumpaba, Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* and *Leithak Leikharol* W. Ibohal Singh also describes that Pakhangpa's mother was called "Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chanu" believed to be of the neo-Tibetan or Tai or Shan groups (amalgamated old tribes), who settled around the slanting stream of the Yakha (Chakha) or Khamnung (*Kham*) areas (1986: 76-82, 266). According to the Chothe history this slanting stream probably refers to the Leimatak river basin which is in the south-western region of the state. Therefore, in accordance to the oral history W. Ibohal Singh also believes that the people of Lei-Nung or Chakha (Chothe) are groups of people who migrated to the south-western region of the state after a sequence of expulsions of the Tai by Tsi-Wang-Tsi in the 3<sup>rd</sup> B.C. who had earlier occupied the *Khampat* region of the north-western Myanmar, originally belonging to *Kham-pa* tribe of eastern Tibetan (ibid: 77-78, 146-149). In Chothe the literal meaning of *Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chanu* means, 'a lady from the interior region of Lei-nung (*Nungsuk ching*)'.

The sacred manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* states that Pakhangpa was an illegitimate son of Khamlang-Taobi (Thamoilembi) the eldest daughter of Tarang Chothe chief and queen Lenghoinu (chief's wife) without specifying his father's name, whom they believed was impregnated mysteriously by the intercession of their Principal Guardian God the Dragon-Python (Para: 1, p.1). The different names of Pakhangpa's mother

as stated above are not at all a specific names of an individual as none of them bears any true indigenous names but rather found to be common reference terminological names of an area or region with whom she associates or belongs to, which is a traditional way of identifying any person broadly by outsiders or valley people with various ethnic groups which often misleads and becomes a misnomer for the specific referred people.<sup>19</sup>

There are also similar myths found among different communities about the mother or parentage of Pakhangpa. Mangpu Kilong, in his paper *The Koms* mentions three related stories of a girl having relationship with the Python God, which is seen to be a deviation of the legend Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa as they are genealogically related. Kilong says a lady called “Chongnu fell in love with the Python God” and in another story of, *The Genealogy of Rengam the Hero* he says, “Shilnu, a girl cohabited with a Snake God, a daughter of Zetei” (probably Chote). He also mentions a similar legend in, *Sherdukpen* folktale written by N.B. Batra that, “a girl fell in love with a snake who was handsome in disguise” (2001: 42-43, see also Batra 1964).

However Kh. Manjou, Mk. Neilut, H. Thambaljao, Y. Maipak besides other Chothe village elders say that, Pakhangpa mother’s name was “Daishin”, the elder daughter of the great Chothe chief Surou (Tarang or Nungkarakpa or Sanarakpa by Meitei) and his wife Lenghoinu. Therefore, analysing the above perspectives of their oral history and the *CTP* sacred manuscript the name mentioned by William Shaw: Pakhangpa’s mother as “Lenghoi” or “Nungmaidenga” seems to have been confused with Pakhangpa’s grandmother for his close relationship (1929: 47-48, Singh 1993: 153-154). But the second name, “Nungmeidingu” which is of two terms is believed to be the common referred name used by the valley people in identifying with her parents’ place Nungsuk ching or Lungsuk, while “Meidingu” probably refers to Pakhangpa’s nickname as it is common way of addressing or referring to others in Manipur using their first child’s name instead of calling the person by their actual names, though sometimes they use birth names. The *CTP* sacred manuscript also clearly indicates that Pakhangpa was the illegitimate child of Khamlang-Taopi (Daishin) the biological mother (Para: 91-93). She even visited her village and asked the villagers to perform the forgiveness ritual with the liquor (*Wangle zu*) to exonerate themselves from their past sins; expulsion of Pakhangpa and his mother from the village (*Ipam Chothe ide khungang pumna hupna langei khumsheng khudingee ningol eina panthou khallei pamngapi loidam manung-o*), (*CTP-Para: 91-93, p.47-48*).

G. Kabui states that Pakhangpa's mother, Daishin (Khamlang-Taopi or Thamoilempi or Leinung Yaibirok Yakha Chanu) was born three times queen and married to three chiefs (kings) or was associated with three great men in her lifetime (Kabui 2003: 77, 79). First, Daishin the eldest daughter of Surou fell in love with the mythical king the Dragon-Python God or the anonymous strange young man and subsequently bore a son Pakhangpa.<sup>20</sup> Since Pakhangpa was considered an illegitimate child, she and her son were cast away from their own village. It is most probable that Daishin (Khamlang-Taopi) became one of the wives or concubines of King Thangwai Kongding of Moirang as she acquired a new name as, "Leima Thamoilempi" when she and her son Pakhangpa lived in Moirang. After Kongding's death, Daishin developed a close relationship with Puleiromba the Angom chief, for which the people considered her the consort of Puleiromba and referred to her as Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chunu (a girl from the interior region of Yakha or Chakha) identifying with her place of origin and the group to which she belonged. Except for the first mythical man or Dragon-Python King, the identity of the other two men viz.; Thangwai Kongding and Puleiromba have been established as historical kings and also as foster fathers of Pakhangpa. Some scholars claimed that Pakhangpa had a biological younger sister called, Sira Khongthingnu probably daughter of Thangwai Kongding and Khamlang-Taopi (Singh 1986: 269). Therefore, it follows from the above, that the real name of Pakhangpa's mother is Daishin, of Chothe origin/birth, the first daughter of Surou the village chief.

#### **4.5.ii Pakhangpa's Father**

Scholars continue to speculate and presume different names to identify the father of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* or *Nongda Leiren Pakhangba*. For example G. Kabui writes that according to the genealogy of the Ningthouja clan the father of N.L. Pakhangba was projected to be Sentreng, while Y.M. Singh and N.B. Singh assume that Sentreng was one of the aliases of the father of Pakhangba and that the real father was Luwang Langmaiba, and the social father was Puleiromba, the Angom chief (2003: 78). But according W. Ibohal Singh Pakhangba's father was "Likleng" alias "Luwang Langmaiba" from a royal family of the Lei-nung tribe and held the post of Tupu a designation derived from "Lambu Tupu" meaning, 'guide' or 'officer-in-charge' (1986: 274-275).<sup>21</sup> K.C. Tensuba contested W. Ibohal Singh proposition that Tupu Likleng alias Luwaang Langmaiba as the father of

Pakhangba might be a title given to one who was able to solve social problems at times, in short, a man of high thinking, *Lu* means, the head or the intellect, *Waang* means, high. While *Laang-maiba* means, one who can set someone who is trapped, free from the dangerous trap... (1993: 137). G. Kabui argues that Tupu Likleng or Luwang Langmaiba was an old man, a priest and the chief advisor who executed Pakhangpa's coronation (Kabui 2003: 85). Further W.I Singh opined, the reason for the invitation or selection for the chieftainship of the Leinung and Leihou is that Pakhangpa was the grand-son of Leihou chief and son of Lambu-Tupu (1986: 274-275). Accordingly it points, Pakhangpa's maternal grandfather Surou (Tarang or Nungkarakpa) was the chief of Leinung-Yakha or Chothe *Lungsuk ching* of Leimatak region.<sup>22</sup> W. I. Singh traces out only the maternal lineage (i.e. Likleng or Luwang or Tarang or Surou) and not paternal lineage. Thus, the identity of Pakhangpa's father is still shrouded in mystery. The most probable hypotheses with regards to the mysterious identity of Pakhangpa's biological father is that he could be either a temporary visitor or a youth from the neighbouring rival group whose identity remained concealed for fear of war or heavy penalty or to avoid the defamation of the clan because of the rigid cultural norms.

#### **4.5.iii Leima Sunurembi and Thoukham-lei**

Another significant evidence that suggests *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* or *Thingkri Nachaoba* or *Nonda Leiren Pakhangpa* to be one and the same person is that the person identified with the names is seen associated with only one girl, known differently as Leima Sunurembi or Laisana or Laisna the beloved wife of Pakhangpa.<sup>23</sup> She is considered a distant relative of Poireiton besides several other clues found in Manipur historical texts. In the south, according to *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* she was known as Sunurembi, the daughter of Hekhamba Nongyai Kokcha a Royal family of the early-immigrant of the Poireiton group by the Moirang before she was married (Bhagashore 1982: 98). Similarly, the *CTP* manuscript on many occasions states that 'Thongnang Loinempa' was the father of Leima Sunurembi of Mayang chanu (Bengali girl) after her marriage as a descendant of the new-immigrant group that migrated from the north-west and temporary occupied the southern region at the foothills of Loiching (Loiyang or Leimatol) or Lamangdong (Lamlanglon) also known by some as *Poireiton Chingkhong* in olden days, now called as Bishnupur (Para: 42, 45-47, p.22, 24-25). In the north, W. Ibohal Singh, said, according to

the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* Pakhangba married a girl named “Laisara” or “Laisana” of Tai origin who got mixed with the new-Tibetans who originally belonged to Poireiton group who came from Basa of Sena (1986: 273, 305-308). The outcome of marriage, as stated by G. Kabui, is that Poireiton ultimately acknowledged the supremacy of Pakhangpa and on his behalf, his younger brother Thongaren (Thongnang Loinempa) offered his younger sister Laisra or Laisana (Lei-sena) where she accompanied Pakhangpa to be his queen. Thus, Thangmei Pakhangpa and Sunurembi (Laisara or Laisana) were formally crowned as the new King and Queen of Kangla (Imphal) before the three great chiefs on first Saturday of the Meitei month of Kalen (June/July), (2003: 84-85).

The passion of love Pakhangpa and Leima Sunurembi had for each other is well described in *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* manuscript and also in *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* that the memento had been inscribed on a kind of rare beautiful red flower known as *Kharam Leishok anganba*, which came to be known after a decree was issued in honour of their passionate romantic relationship. Accordingly, it says when Pakhangpa returned with his army from the fierce battle in the south-west he gave his beloved girlfriend Sunurembi the beautiful red flower (*Kharam Leishok anganba*) plucked from the abandoned village gate of Kharam as gift a token of his love brought from a trip. Out of her deep admiration of the act, she thereby requested her lover Pakhangpa to pass a decree to symbolise his love for her by prohibiting any one from destroying the flower and also forbidding any women, especially the Ngangoi groups of Moirang, from wearing it on their ears, and whosoever disobeyed the decree would be penalized with severe punishment by shaving off their heads. The manuscript, henceforth says that later the Kharam red flower was renamed as “Kharam leisok anganba leima Sunurembi Toukham-lei” now commonly known only as *Sunurembi Toukham-lei* meaning, ‘the forbidden flower’ (Singh 1982: 94, *CTP-Para: 87, p.45*). Below is transliteration of the decree:

*(Hi eshabe, Moirang Ningthou (Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa) ibungo shingel leirang ashibu karamnabu asuk phajabano, leirang ashigi maong machuga karamnabu asuk chunakhrabano ko. Aduga leirang ashibu Kege pakhang kanana hek chaillambada, masam kokpagi dandhi peduna chindanaba khambe-u, aduga Ngangoi chanurasingna karigumba na-da thetlabasu momnu nuja oibesingi masam samlang adu kaklaga arumba warak cheithang phangani haina yathang louthokpiduna chindanaba warol louthokpe-u haina*

*khamjakhibagi warol hairakhi. Korou adu numitage houna Kharam leisok angangba leima Sunurembi Toukham-lei haina mingthonkhi).*

Chothe village elders say that according to their oral history, Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa being a divine person obliged not to marry Sunurembi despite the romantic affair he had because his father the Dragon-Python God instructed him not to marry any girl in his lifetime, because if he did so, he would become mortal like any human being. For this reason Pakhangpa avoided and deserted her for his heavenly abode. The incident could probably mean during his long expeditions in the south south-east and north after he consolidated all the small southern kingdoms into one administration. The *CTP* also says that Thongnang Loinempa a royal prince was in low-spirits and unhappy with Pakhangpa when he deserted her or for being ignored as an outsider. The native womenfolk also sympathised and begged Pakhangpa to accept her as his wife as they were a perfect match for each other (*CTP-Para: 29-41, p.15-21*). Further, the *CTP* manuscript describes that Pakhangpa requested the gods to create some obstacles for Sunurembi to discourage her from following him but warned them not to physically harm her in any situation. On this basis, the gods created three obstacles for Sunurembi: first, the gods sent a big flood, second, a wild-forest-fire, and third a ferocious tiger to obstruct her path. But the manuscript says because of her wisdom, knowledge, patience and endurance she could overcome all these hurdles, even the ferocious tiger ultimately gave up obstructing her path and gave way to her. Since, she had overcome all these obstacles the Dragon-Python God sent back Pakhangpa with a consent to marry her (Sunurembi or Laisana). It is believed that Thangmei Pakhangpa (Thingkri Nachoupa) accepted Sunurembi as his wife at Moirang and hence, the people of the south called her “Leima Sunurembi”. Therefore, in consonance with the available literature, Thangmei Pakhangpa after subjugating the northern groups and becoming the New Sovereign King of Kangla (Imphal) also made his wife Leima Sunurembi Queen. Thus the people of the north called her as “Laisana”, since no specific birth name is used by the Meitei as a sign of disrespect in addressing men and women of high status and also on socio-religious grounds. From the above explanation it suggests that Sunurembi/pi (Sena/Sona/Suna-rembi = queen, princess of Sena) who originally belonged to Basa migrated from Sena town of Bengal (Mayang or Cachar) a descendant of Poireiton whose predecessors were an admixture of the new-Tibetan of the south group (Singh 1986: 305-308). Thus, she is known as Leima Sunurembi in the south and as the wife of Chothe

Thangmei Pakhangpa (Thangkri Nachoupa) by the Moirang people but in the north, she is called as Laisana meaning, Queen of the Kangla principality. The change is believed to be because of the nomenclature of people used since the south Moirang people are ethnically different from the northern Imphal groups.

#### **4.6 The Secrecies of Pakhangpa History**

With regards to the identity of Pakhangpa and his genealogical relation with the Chothe and Meitei, there are several proverbs, phrases and socio-religious decrees very much alive among various old tribes of Manipur but often not shared for fear of condemnation. According to H. Thambaljao and Y. Maipak of Lamlanghupi, one of the most revered secrecies about the religious history of Manipur as told to them by early Meitei Purohits is that, “*the sacred story of Matei is kept inside the Chothe basket*” (*Matei-gi, athuppa washingdi Chothe lubak manungda lei*).

Similarly Pr. Roushi and Mk. Neilut also assert in their oral-history that “The history of Chothe ancestors is kept sacred inside the King’s basket” (*Chothe-gi puwaridi ningthougi lubak manungda lottuna thamkare*).

The above coded verses are used in Meitei language because it is the lingua-franca. The Chothe claim the term *Lubak* mentioned in both the coded verses, meaning bamboo basket in Meitei [(having the dimension of (1 x 1 ½) ft (l x b)] was made by Chothe from a particular species of the bamboo called, *U-tang* (mature wood). Accordingly they say that it is taboo for any Meitei individual to kick any Chothe man or touch him with his feet, neither should any Chothe men be used as palanquin bearers by the Meitei considering that the Chothe are their great forefathers or ancestors.<sup>24</sup> It is also said the Chothe were always treated with royalty and there was always a seat reserved for the Chothe chief/king in the King’s Court of Manipur in early days.

The confusion and contradiction that frequently occurs regarding the history of Manipur in describing the hills people is seen to be because of the wrong interpretation and references made by various ethnic groups in their own way. This common mistake had been pointed out by M. McCulloch, to how the tribals or hills people of Manipur in early days were often referred to wrongly by outsiders. He says, “all the Hao are the names used amongst the Meitei to distinguish the principal tribes, and though each of these tribes has a distinctive name of their own, often quite different from the Manipuri one, still as with the

latter all are familiar, and as it is the name a stranger would be most likely to hear and use it” (1857: 41). This is one factor, while the other factors are seen because of the interpolation, distortion and manipulation by the later kings of Manipur and the Purohits of Meitei high priest during the Vaishnavism (Hindu) movement in order to claim overall supremacy over the hills people by distinguishing themselves as the superior group. The supremacy concept of the Meitei over the hills people politically, economically and culturally may not be true as the Chothe oral history says that the reason why the Meitei established a settlement on the foothills or the valley was because in early days they were driven out by the hills people from occupying their hill territories as they were considered the later immigrant groups. But it is only in the later periods that the valley people, due to their scholastic advancement and matrimonial relationship with the hills people, began to dominate politically and culturally. No doubt, the early kings of Manipur bear indigenous tribal names, pointing to the fact, that Meitei is a conglomeration of various tribes.<sup>25</sup>

With regards to historical interpolation S.N.A. Parratt also asserts that the *Cheitharol Kumpaba (Ch.K)* the Court’s chronicle of Manipur was re-written twice; first during Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) and second at the time of Chingthangkhopma, alias Bhagyachandra (1759). She is also sceptical about the existence of this *Ch.K* manuscript to be in written form before Kyampa (1467-1508) as the standard of recording the events and deeds chronologically began in 1485 A.D after Kyampa met the Pong king of the Shan dynasty (2005: 3, 5, 14). Similarly W. Ibohal Singh also refuses to accept the year of N.L Pakhangpa’s coronation i.e. 33 A.D (76 Saka) as the first historical year considering it to be too early for reasons like geographical setting, population, genealogical calculations and archaeological findings and presumes the date should be around 980 A.D (1986: 41; Parratt 2005: 5, 18).

It is apparent from the perspective of Manipur’s history that the distortion and interpolation of the religious history of the Meitei began when Garib Niwaz’s under the influence of Shanti Das Goswami imposed Vaishnavism on his subjects against Sanamahism (the ancient Meitei religion). He even went to the extent of forcibly burning down all the ancient historical records written in the Meitei-Mayek (script) and Manipur’s history was rewritten in Bengali script (Parratt 2005: 14). The Chothe oral history too remarks about incidents where some hills people who had good relations with the predecessors of Garib Niwaz including Chothe were extremely angry and many stopped paying tributes to the later

kings of Manipur. They say their age old relationship often got estranged due to frequent imposition of taxes and edicts on them. S.N.A Parratt also asserts that the serious twist and misinterpretation of the history of Manipur began from the early twentieth century, broadly classifying into two trends, both with clear ideological agendas. Firstly, according to her, the early scholars like Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma and his disciples writing on the histories of Manipur were all highly influenced by Brahmanical Hinduism, which they somehow rectified again later. The second, real damage to the history of Manipur came from the Congress supporters after 1950 when the state merged with India and subsequent to integration of their culture with the Indian mainstream for political reasons (2005: 1-2). These evidences support our contention that the genuine history of Pakhangpa and Manipur were distorted, interpolated, misinterpreted and re-written especially by scribes as wished by the later kings of Manipur to claim the dominance and superiority of the valley people (Meitei) over the supremacy of Pakhangpa or the hills people for various reasons.

#### **4.7 Pakhangpa's Mysticism**

The sacred manuscript *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)*, the oral history and other literary works indicates the mysticism of Pakhangpa right from the time he was conceived as an illegitimate child till the time of his mysterious death. First, his mysticism began with the anonymity of his father's identity, assumed to be the Dragon-Python God who disappeared when the mixtures of turmeric, garlic, snail, etc., dripped on his body in the jhum field. Second, his three miraculous escapes from the attempts on his life during his childhood made by his maternal grandfather (Surou) who was ignorant about his extraordinary power and strength (i.e. how he enigmatically managed at the young age to return home alone in the dark from the thick forest when left to die, how he deflected the big rolling boulder from the cliff, and how he mysteriously survived being crushed by the huge falling tree). The third aspect is Pakhangpa's commitment not to marry any girl and that he would remain a bachelor throughout his life in order to immortalize himself. According to *CTP*, to fulfil his commitment he deserted his beloved girlfriend Sunurembi (Laisana) for several years and asked the gods to obstruct her path while following him. The *CTP* mentions Thongnang, Sunurembi's brother expressed his displeasure at Pakhangpa for deserting his sister and even the womenfolk pleaded Pakhangpa to marry Sunurembi (*CTP*, Para: 20). It is most probable that his commitment to bachelorhood might have led to calling

or identifying him as, “Pa-khang-pa/ba” literally in Meitei means, ‘virile youth’ or ‘bachelor’ instead of Thangmei or Meingai or Thingkri. The name also carries the same meaning with Chothe and other tribes as virile or healthy youth (*khang –thang*).

Similar to the Chothe oral history there are also many other folktales associated with Pakhangpa describing his mysticism. T.C. Tensuba mentions that says Pakhangpa was a divine being, believed to be ‘Dragon-python’ god by day and human by night (1993: 46). He also describes that Laisana was the most beloved wife of N.L Pakhangpa but she was unhappy with him because he did not invite her during the daytime transactions of the Royal Council meetings as he acted like *Lai* (god) in the affairs of administration. But Pakhangpa did not forbid her from joining them at the night-time gathering of the Royal Assembly as he acted like *Mee* (man or ordinary layman). Because of such reasons and his in-different attitude Laisana who was unhappy, offended him twice asking why he treated her in such a manner. Further she accused Pakhangpa saying that he must have some hidden wives or that she was of low origin of Poireiton, the immigrant group, and that is why he avoided her (1993: 136, see also Kabui 2003: 89). This mystical belief is supplemented by Naorem Sanajoaba that the Dragon-Python God has supernatural powers to transform himself into anything like a stone, a tiger, a dog, a human being, and could even take human birth at any time and place (1991: 104). It is believed that even after his death he is seen to have appeared in such forms at many places as a sign of his being divine and such places are treated as sacred places by the believers.

The mythical anonymity of Pakhangpa’s father plays an important role in the Chothe religious beliefs and practices systems. The Chothe still uphold their indigenous religious beliefs and continue to practice their ancestor-worship like other indigenous or Tribal communities of the world. In other words the mysticism of Pakhangpa and his paternal lineage form the basis of the Chothe religion and their belief in connection to their genealogical myth.

Thus, Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa’s birth and life is much alike in the mysticism of the Christian Biblical story of Jesus Christ who was born of a virgin (Mary) through the intercession of the Holy-Spirit, so also in the case of Krishna the Hindu god believed to be mysteriously conceived by Divine power of Vishnu or the Buddha of Buddhism. In all these cases we see that all are endowed with certain supernatural powers and considered as the avatar or the in-incarnate of their own Supreme God they believe in. Thus, Chothe ancestor-

worship from the perspective of their mythology re-instills their beliefs and practices in “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa” as the avatar of their God *Pu Lungchungpa*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Myth and Modernity*: Hans Blumenberg's Reconstruction of Modern Theory. Author(s): Bernard Yack  
Reviewed work(s): Work on Myth by Hans Blumenberg; Robert M. Wallace, The Legitimacy of the Modern Age by Hans Blumenberg; Robert M. Wallace Source: Political Theory, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 1987), pp. 244-261 Published by: Sage Publications, Inc. Stable. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/191677> Accessed: 22/09/2008 02:50.

<sup>2</sup> *Chothe*: Chothe or Chawte is considered as one of the missing clans out of their twelve clans by the Mizo (Lushei) speaking groups. The Mizo have a clan “Chawhte” who live in the south-western part of Mizoram considered a relative of the Chothe (Chawte) of Manipur. The Chawhte of Mizoram has been completely assimilated with the Mizo like the Hmar of Manipur. For example, the Hmar though a tribe in Manipur is consider a clan of the Mizo in Mizoram.

<sup>3</sup> *Huipithoranga/Hurpithoranga*: In Chothe “Hui” or “Hur” means, a hole or a cave, “tho-ranga” means, five that jumps out. This mythical hole or cave is refer by the Kuki-Chin-Mizo speaking groups as, “Chhinlung” or “Shinglung” meaning, hole or cave of a hill, claiming the place to be somewhere around in southern China.

<sup>4</sup> *Sacred-grove*: The present sacred-grove of *Chothe Thangmei/Thangwai Pakhangpa* of Lamlanghupi (Chothe) at Bishnupur has been, Ordered by the Governor of Manipur, Imphal on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2007, as the ‘Protected Historical Monuments and Archaeological site’, of No. 5/24/99-S(AC), Under Sub-section (3) of Section 4 of the “Manipur Ancient and Historical Monument and Archaeological sites and Remains Act, 1976”, published by the *Manipur Gazette*: Extraordinary. No. 145 Imphal, Thursday July, 2007. (Asadha 1929: 14). On the basis, brick fencing had been constructed around the sacred-grove as the village received financial assistant from the Govt. as per the order.

<sup>5</sup> *Thangmei*: The term, “Thang” in Chothe means, ‘virile/healthy youth’, and “mei” means, ‘fire or tail’. Sometimes King Thangwai Kongding of Moirng is also referred as his foster father probably because of his mother relationship with Thangwai, who therefore succeeded Thangwai after his dead. Thangmei Pakhangpa later acquired a new titled as, “Thingkri Nachaoba” after defeating the great Chothe King Natoi Nachaoba as the victor, as an ancient tradition of identifying the victor king. Thereafter he brought the kingdoms of Moirang, Wangoo, Ewaita, Chothe, Kharam and Koireng who inhabits in the south-western regions under his direct control by unifying into one political administrative unit (also see *CTP-Para*: 25, p.15; and *MNL* chapter -19). Much later with the treaty of *Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou* he successful defeated Khaba-nganba (probably Maring-khoibu tribe) of the northern kingdom. Thus because of his successful conquest Chothe Thangmei

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Pakhangpa was given a new regal title by the poets and singers of the valley people on his coronation day at Kangla (Impahl) as, “Tubi Yoinongda Nonda Leiren Pakhangba” (Kabui 2003: 85). But here, the word “Tubi Yoinongda” seems to be a spelling/pronunciation error in a syllable for “Leinungda Yabi-rok” (Tubi=Yabi, and Yoinongda = Leinungda) that is often identified with Pakhangpa’s mother and her birth place (origin) as, “Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chanu” mentioned in many archaic historical materials (Singh 1986: 76-82, 266; Kabui 2003: 76-77).

<sup>6</sup> *CTP*: These quotations are quoted from the abridged manuscript of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* after having read and compared the original *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* sacred manuscript with two experts namely, Dr. Lai Imo (Assistant editor of ‘Erei Leibak’, Daily local newspaper) and M. Gourachandra (founder of ‘People’s Museum, Kakching’). The reason is that the language used in the original sacred manuscript is of very ancient, cryptic and in poetry form as compared to the translated abridged manuscript which is somewhat simple and understandable in the description.

<sup>7</sup> *Khuman*: Pakhangpa clan is also assumed to be the Mareem/Marim clan or the Khuman clan of Meitei because most of their men have a kind of small-pox marks on their faces, believed to be the mark caused by the mixture liquid; turmeric, garlic, snail, yam, eel, etc., dropped on stranger’s (Pakhangpa) face from the jhum hut when Daishin pierced it connected to the myth story. But this assumption seems to be the inference version of Moirang’s people who tried to incorrectly establish the genealogy of Pakhangpa since he had lived for certain period in Moirang who are predominately dominated by Khuman clan, because he also succeeded King Thangwai Kongding (his foster father). Moirang are formerly known as “Kege” (Chinese stock). But he assumed the Mangang clan during the confederation of the royal clanship where his lineage settled around Lammangtong.

<sup>8</sup> *Chakha-khong Marimpa*: In ancient days the Meitei identified the indigenous tribes like Chothe inhabiting around Leimatak river basin as “Chakpa” where the people in general was referred as “Chakha-khong” (Chakha or Yakha-, khong means, stream, probably referring to Leimatak stream). Probably this suggests to another great Chothe chief who belong to Marim clan. From the above, it points that Pakhangpa’s mother Daishin or *Khamlangtaopi* also known as *Thamoilempi* (by the Moirang) originates from the land/area of Chothe Marimpa (*Chakha-khong Marimpa*).

<sup>9</sup> *Langthabal*: Tensuba also opined that Nongda Leiren Pakhangba (Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa) son of Leinung Yabirok, who married Laisaana, a daughter of one in the line of Poireiton, had established the first capital at Hangjing range (900 Mtr. M.S.L.) i.e. Heingaangching hill range near Langthabal hill (around Mayang Imphal), six-seven km south of Imphal (Tensuba, 1993: 134-135). The place has many religious significant as the first capital. The place is also connected in the later period with the Chothe folktale called, ‘*Asha changnu: A lady who transformed into an animal*’, where one of the king’s huge boat made by the Chothe was mysteriously lost in the northern Loktak Lake near Langthabal. It is also said that subsequently a

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group of Chothe in the later periods occupied around the place who named it as “Yangpalkung” before they further moved down south-east. This is evidently pointed out by Moirangthem Rajendra that the settlement place at Langthabal known as “Chothe Yangbi” to others was given to the first group of Meitei-Pangals (Muslim) by Khakempa in 1606 who came as soldiers after Chothe abundant the place (2000: 30).

<sup>10</sup> *Meitei*: To speak bluntly, today's Meitei of Imphal valley does not belong to one specific tribe or racial group but composite of many old and new tribes or communities formed by the process of acculturation and assimilation. No doubt, there are some who still have their own distinctive indigenous and immigrant genealogical roots. This genealogical picture of Meitei of Manipur is also pointed out by S.N.A Parratt that the Chakpa and the Loi were assimilated, while the hill peoples formed alliances with the Meitei (Meitei) or became tributaries. In which, the earlier part of the *Ch.K* is essentially the story of the expansion of the Meitei across the valley and hills of Manipur, and of the gradual acculturation and assimilation of the yeks (clans) and tribes into their kingdom (2005: 3). Nevertheless, the speed of acculturation and assimilation of the hills people with the valley people from cultural and religious point of view seem to have taken its momentum from 17<sup>th</sup> century during the Sankritisation or Hinduism process, after which only the term Meitei derives from “Mee-atei” meaning, ‘outsider or different people’, synonymously refer with the Vaishnavists.

<sup>11</sup> *Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou*: According to *CTP* after Pakhangpa finished his subjugation and consolidating all the small kingdoms in the southern region, and became king of Moirang as Thingkri Nachaoba, there was peace for certain periods of time under his able leadership. But during this peaceful period Thokchao the eldest son of Koubrurel Angom-ngagi of the northern kingdom came down and took refuge near Moirang. Thokchao for fear of aggression he immediately proposed a truce and a treaty with Thingkri or Pakhangpa came to be known as, “Taibelou Pukphat Sapeilou” (the elongated inter-locking field) which is an old place beyond the river Khoijuman (Thongjourok) between Oknarel and Thangnarel (Singh 1982: 97, *CTP*: 90, p.46). This alliance treaty between the two leaders is believed to be the turning point in the history of Manipur that resulted in overthrowing the rival Khaba-nganba (Maring) groups by the combined forces. Gangmumei Kabui writes, while staying in Moirang Pakhangpa organized support from Moirang Chaopa Mathipa, Sapon Sanoupa who extended whole hearted helped to him. The forces of Moirang for Pakhangpa defeated the Khabas who were completely destroyed by him. Some Khabas surrendered to Angom Puleiromba, some fled to hills and became Tangkhul (Kabui 2003: 83, Kamei 2004: 46).

<sup>12</sup> *MNL*: The text *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba (MNL)* of chapter -19 well elaborates the nature of its people, landscaped and its devastation, its tactics, costumes and methods of warfare. It describes how Pakhangpa ousted the great Chothe King Natoi Nachoupa and subdued him in the Nungsuk/Lungsuk battle.

<sup>13</sup> *Nungsuk ching/ Lungsuk*: According to *MNL*, Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa by breaking all the traditional political and kinship ties first plundered and burnt the whole village of Koireng and defeated their brave warrior Nunngangchong. The war was so devastated that the entire atmosphere of the area was covered with

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black smoke. It further says that Pakhangpa's name and fame did not end just there as he continued to attack *Hoirei kha pangda* too, a nearby village of Koirang (Singh 1982: 90-91). Then, Pakhangpa later gathered all his brave warriors of Kege Moirang and assembled like a fence on the border sides and attacked the great country of Chothe located on the five ridges of the high mountains separated by the five rivers and the five valleys, and defeated the great Chothe King Natoi Nachaopa in one of the most fierce and devastating battle known as, "Chothe Nungsuk ching" (*Lanpham ashida Chothe gi Ningthou Natoi Nachouba koubabu maithiba perakhi*). It says because of the fierce battle even the nearby Kharam village fled away (*Kharam khungangshu pumchai chaikhaikhi*), (ibid: 92-93, CTP-Para: 84, p. 43). Thus, it states that after defeating the great Chothe King Natoi Nachaopa one of the great kings of south-western region in the battle of *Chothe Nungsuk-ching* (*Lungsuk lai*), Chothe Pakhangpa acquired the title "Thingkri Nachaopa" as a symbol and custom of identifying the victor king, who subsequently became the king of Moirang under the assumed titled succeeding King Thangwai Kongding. However, the derivation of the name 'Thingkri' or 'Thinkgri' cannot be ascertain, but some believed that it could have derived from the nature of killing or weapon used as, "thing-ki/thingkri" means, pierced with a stick (spear), in Chothe and other similar linguistic groups.

The Chothe oral history says that Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa's attacked and subjugation on the south-western groups of people and to Nungsuk ching (*Lungsuk bung*) his own Chothe people is said to be his retribution primarily for personal reasons of ill-treatments and humiliation he and his mother suffered during his childhood. The humiliations accordingly are like rebukes, assaults, accusation of being illegitimate or fatherless child, banishment from the village, the mockery and scoffing at his protruding tail as *Meitingte* or *Meingai*. Kharam and Koirang neighbouring communities also became victims because they refused to give food and shelter when her mother Daishin escaped among these villages in search of her lover to elope. However, the last three paragraphs of CTP manuscript describes that the Pakhangpa's mother Khamlang-Taopi or Thamoilempi (Daishin) after the devastating war went to her parent's village in the Chothe country and explains about the past event and asked to perform a rite with their best wine (*wangle zu*) for the recourses (Para: 90-91, p.46-47).

<sup>14</sup> *Poirei/Poireiton*: It is believed that Poirei was a prince son of queen Peyai who was a brave warrior with huge structure. Many archaic materials also mention that they are new-immigrant group or traders from the west who tried to pass Moirang to Kabaw valley. It is most probable that after Pakhangpa defeated them and brought under his direct control he must have ask them to return to their land. So, we can presume that Poirei, or Poireiton the father of Meitei probably stayed at Leimaton foothill near old-Cachar road where the place in ancient days is known as *Poireiton chingkhong*, though the place now is identified with Bishnupur. Thereafter, due to political and matrimonial relationships with the hill people they were acculturated and assimilated as loi.

<sup>15</sup> *Angom - ngagi*: The term "Angom", clan of Meitei is believed to be a mispronunciation of the syllable by the new Bodo-Cachari (Poirei) immigrants for the descendant of "Angam Puleiromba" the great king of the north (Tangkhu). There is no specific term for 'Angom' in Meitei, but "A-ngam" literally means, 'steep or be winner', in Tangkhu, commonly used as a prefix or suffix in a person's name. Similarly "Khaba-nganba" is

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believed to be an old name for Maring tribe commonly refer by Meitei who are also known as *Poi* by the tribals or *Fhalum* by others in ancient days. Thus Khaba-nganba refers to 'Khoibu-Maring' now located in the extreme eastern region of the state.

<sup>16</sup> *Kansuroi*: There are folktales that say Makan Kansuroi was another great Chothe chief. One of their settlements called "Kansui" (Brave fighter/warrior) was posthumously named in memory of his greatness by his descendants (lineage and kin groups) during their sojourn to south-east. The name also suggest that it is purely a Chothe indigene name as seen from the genealogical myth of the first ancestor of Chothe, so also the Thao or Tao clan, and the Marim or Mareem-pa's names mentioned which should not be confused for 'Maring' tribe as the term Maring is believed to have derived much latter from the nickname "Mei-ring" (one who steal live fire), (CLAM, Souvenir 2000: 3).

<sup>17</sup> *Tubi Yoinongda Nongda Lairen Pakhangba*: See endnotes 5 above.

<sup>18</sup> *Mangang*: It is obvious that Pakhangpa by virtue of his Divine power and military skills defeated the Khaba-nganbas of the northern kingdoms and after subjugating all other small kingdoms in and around the valley, subsequently established a new confederate kingdom by combining the surrounding south, south-western and northern kingdoms at Imphal (Kangla) by affirming his clan-ship as "Mangang" among the confederate Ningthouja (Royal) clans. There are many versions about his acceptance to Mangang clan. Among the Chothe the Mangang of Ningthouja clan is equated with their Yulung clan. According to W. Ibohal Singh (1986) in the section "Mangang" he said they are groups of people who mainly inhabited in the Lammangdong (Bishnupur) area in early days, pointing to his genealogical root or origin of his birth place. But the Meitei history states that N.L. Pakhangba was considered as the founder of Mangaang Salai (Clan) although he descended from Taang-Shaang Leela Paakhangba as the ancient Meitei composed an eternal formula for the Meitei that the three prayers: (1) Prayer for Mangang kuru, (2) Prayer for Luwang kuru and (3) Prayer for Khuman Kuru were strictly prescribed for the Meitei since time immemorial (Tensuba 1993:136-137).

<sup>19</sup> *Misnomer*: The frequent misnomer, confusion and paradoxical terms, names of persons and places and its variation found in many of the Manipur historical texts is probably seen to be because of the interpolation, misinterpretation and also the nomenclature of the syllable, syntax, semantic and morphology used by the varied multi-ethnic groups in the naming system in their own ways which is often understood only by the group itself or by the regional people. For example, Pakhangpa's metamorphosis names, as some names are often confused with his posthumous names given by different ethnic groups on the credibility of an incident, his extra-ordinary feat or trademark or talent or achievement. Likewise, ancient names and places are more confusing when their meanings are not very clear and certain mythical elements are added to the name or place or story, often by the folk narrators and writers. For example, in the *CTP* manuscript Pakhangpa's grandmother named have been written as "Leng-heinu", but in Chothe and other similar linguistic groups of Kuki-Chin, a girl is often called as "Hoi-nu or Boi-nu" (sweet girl) or Thei-nu (clever girl) but not as "Hei-nu". Similarly

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Daishin, Pakhangpa's mother name as called by Chothe, is known by the Meitei as Khamlang-Taopi or Thamoilembi which is their translation and reference names identified with her birth place and personality, and linguistically it did not sound as indigenous tribal names. Probably another spelling error is "Tupu" the assumed Pakhangpa's father that has no meaning but the word "Tarpu (Tar-pu)" means, 'old-man' referred to any old man or grandfather.

<sup>20</sup> *Anonymity*: It is the anonymity of Pakhangpa father's identity and its mysticism that Chothe indigenous religion survived till today as ancestor-worshippers. On the other hand, even if Pakhangpa father's identity happens to be known by few people it must have been deliberately concealed because of the extreme rigidity of the Chothe customs and traditions or cultural norms practiced by them in the past. Another custom the Chothe follows is that if a person did not claim illegitimate pregnant lover as his wife and illegitimate child as his child within a short period, if the person is identified he is imposed with a heavy penalty of fine, but if they/she cannot identified the person or is not willing to accept he is considered as a dead man, where the mother and child is expelled from the group considered as a whore.

<sup>21</sup> *Lambu Tupu*: In Chothe and other similar linguistic groups the term "Tupu" has no meaning but if pronounced as "Tarpu" or "Tarpu-pa" means, old man, generally referred to any grandfathers, where ka-pu = my grandfather, napu = your grandfather. This term is often use as prefix in referring or addressing any old man or elderly person by others as, 'Tarpu Wailum'. Most old men generally in a society are considered as knowledgeable wise men because of their life-long experiences. Therefore on the basis, they usually hold certain position or are a member of the village council, in that case some of them are village elders or leaders designated as "Lambu Tarpu" meaning, 'old (man) geographical guide', since in early day they acted as geographical guide who explain the geography and histories of the country to any friendly foreign visitors. This suggest that Yulung Surou (Tarang) being the chief/leader of a village and being a maternal grandfather of Pakhangpa probably must have referred him as "Tarpu Tarang", while some other groups might have identified him as Luwang Langmeiba because of his close association with the Liangmei tribe. The Chothe oral history also says they have close affinity with the Liangmei and Puimei or Manipur, and Riang of Tripura and Mizoram tribes since early days genealogically, this is proven by the language and cultural similarities.

<sup>22</sup> *Luwang langmeiba*: The Chothe village elders according to their oral history says that Pakhangpa's maternal grandfather Surou (Tarang or Nungkarakpa or Likleng or Luwang Langmeiba) and his relatives often helped Pakhangpa and his mother materially and militarily. They said when Surou visited Pakhangpa and his mother he often took with him some basic valuable items like; clothes, jute ropes, fats for lighting, cane and bamboo baskets, boats, etc. for them as part of courtesy tradition. Such regular meetings suggest that Surou must have also given certain advices or act as advisor to him being a cognate relative. Such ourtesy tradition of gifts giving or exchange of gifts for the kindred groups is believed to be very common from the historical and cultural perspective. Another significant custom of the Chothe is that if the parents could not bring up their children because of certain conditions of being poor or due to daughter's second marriage the first children

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bore by husband are often taken care especially by maternal grandparents, rather than the paternal grandparents for its closeness or sometime by the closes kin groups accordance to the nature of their relationship.

<sup>23</sup> Pakhangpa's wife Sunurembi or Laisana is sometime confused with Chingurembi the wife of Naothingkhong. As W. Ibohal Singh said that Chingurembi was a Bengal princess, daughter of a Sena prince of the Senas of Bengal who first settled at Lamangdong (Bishnupur) at the time of marriage which the Poirei took as Mayang principality. In olden days the inhabitants of Bengal at Lamangdong principality were not called as Mayang but known as 'Basa' (1986: 305-308). Here it is most probable that both of them marry a Bengal girl from the same area but not the same girl, as the oral history says that political and matrimonial relationship had already taken place amongst various ethnic groups, though often discouraged.

<sup>24</sup> *Taboo*: See details, Taboo section in the following chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> Some of the early historic kings of Manipur such as, Taothingmang, Naophangpa, Sameireng, Naothingkhong, Aayangpa, Yirengpa, Senhongpa, Loiyumpa, Tapungpa, Punsipa, Marampa, etc. of the Kangla (Imphal) principality all bears the indigenous tribal names significantly pointing they originally belong to tribal groups especially the Old-Kuki groups like Chothe, Kharam, Koireng, Anal. While the names of the early kings of Moirang principality like Fang Fang Ponglenghanba, Iwang Telheiba, Laiphangcheng, Ura Ngangoiba, Laiya Punshiba, Tushemba, Thangwai Kongding, Nungnang Tomba, Thanga Ifan, Kaba Purang, etc. which are of contemporary rulers to one another clearly shows the difference in their names that they are of different ethnic groups from the linguistic view (see list of Kings, Parratt 2005: Tensuba 1993:172-73) There are many blurry legendary stories which tells about the close affinity of the early historical kings of Imphal (Kangla) with that of Chothe and other allied ethnic groups like Koireng who fought together in their territorial expansion, battles and conquest probably before seventeenth century. The disassociation of matrimonial and political ties between hill and plain people began when the latter kings are not considerate enough to give gratitudes to the hill people despite their help who began to live as independent entity without jeopardising the other groups. Now many educated people of Manipur seem to agree that the history of Meitei (Manipur) has been somehow distorted, but these people remain silent to comments about it openly for fear of repercussion.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CHO THE RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM

#### 5.0 Introduction

The Chothe believe in polytheism. Their religion like many ancient religions of the world is cosmologic, naturalistic, totemic and animistic in nature. They also believe in a host of gods and goddesses like many indigenous tribes of the world. The Chothe cosmologic, naturalistic, totemic and animistic beliefs are also similar to many north-eastern tribes like the Ao, Lotha, Khasi, Garo, Apatani, Mishmi, and among the mainland India tribes is similar to the Santhal, Baiga, Todas, Gonds, Coorgs and western societies. The polytheistic nature of beliefs of most of the indigenous tribes is related to their physical and emotional security and protection. Verrier Elwin asserts that the Baiga pantheon is exceedingly varied and elastic with no exclusiveness about it and so they naturally worship everything they can, in order to be on the safe side (2002: 54-55). A.B. Choudhuri also says that the Santhal also have a number of pantheons known as Bongas or deities apart from a host of ghosts and spirits some of which are worshipped by the community in public places while others like the Marang Buru and Gossain Era are worshipped by families as family gods (1987: 25). Such distinctive types of ritualistic offerings and sacrifices to such gods and goddesses is similarly discussed by Major A. Playfair who says that the Garo give attributes to the creation of the world, while others are for those who control the natural phenomenon like the destiny of man from birth to death as governed by a number of divinities whose anger must be appeased by sacrifice, and whose good offices must be entreated in like manner (1975: 80).

Elwin's statement on the Baiga polytheism "To be on the safe side" seems the most important aspect for many of the indigenous polytheistic and animistic believers. Similarly J.H. Hutton also points out a strong polytheistic view that the belief held by the indigenous tribes are not "mere vague imaginings of superstitious and untaught minds, but the debris of a real religious system, a definite philosophy, to the one time prevalence of which the manifold survivals in Hinduism testify, linking together geographically the Austro-Asiatic and Austroloid cultures of the forest-clad hills where the isolated remains of the original religion still hold out in an unassimilated form" (Quoted from Elwin 2002: 54). Thus, the indigenous polytheistic religion appears to be the earliest religion as it exists in its crudest form defined and structured to its best by maintaining a close relationship with nature balancing the eco-system unlike the modern religious systems.

Many such religious aspects of indigenous tribes may be testified to here on the basis of Chothe religious beliefs.

### 5.1 Chothe Pantheon

The Chothe, being polytheistic honour, revere and worship the seven primary cosmologic and natural elements of the world as their principal gods. Such a belief is also practiced by the ancient Chinese, Hindu, Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Mayan, Inca, Aztec, etc. (Ash 2006:160-163). The Chothe cosmologic and natural elements are; (1) the Heaven or Sky God, (2) the Earth God, (3) the Sun God, (4) the Moon God, (5) the Wind (Air) God, (6) the Fire God, and (7) the Water (Rain) God. Among all these gods, they consider the Heavenly God (*Thangvan rengpa*) as the most powerful and Ultimate Supreme God. Sometimes they also address their Ultimate Supreme God in many ways as *Chungpathin*, literally the Almighty God or the God of all the above or as *Apu Leihu* (lit. our ancestor god) meaning, Lord of lords. They believe that *Thangvan rengpa* or *Chungpathin* or *Apu Leihu* is the Creator of the Universe and Omnipotent God, the controller of the destiny of mankind, the giver and taker of all life forms on earth. Therefore, He, *Thangvan Rengpa* is worshipped and adored as their Ultimate Supreme God. But the Chothe believe that *Pu Lungchungpa* (Pakhangpa) the Serpent God i.e. the Dragon King God or the Rain God as their Supreme Principal Guardian God the protector and benefactor of the people on earth. In Chothe *Pu Lungchungpa* is also known as *Ruipi Santai rengpa* or the Dragon-python king. They believe that *Pu Lungchungpa* the Dragon-Python God whom the Supreme/Almighty God entrusts, is the only God among the seven celestial elementary gods that is tangible, adaptable and approachable, having equal power and potential with the other ethereal gods. The nature of the relationship maintained by Dragon Python God with the other Heavenly celestial gods is described in the *genealogical myth* as provided by the Chothe village elders. Since the Dragon Python God represents all the other ethereal gods, he is considered as the emperor of the earth and the Chothe accept Him as their Supreme Guardian God, the protector and benefactor of the people, and hence they adore, revere and worship him. From the perspective of their genealogical myth the Chothe being ancestor worshipers believe that “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa” is the avatar or the Divine-incarnate of their god *Pu Lungchungpa* who represents the Heavenly Gods on earth.

The Meitei, in general call any forest God as *Umang-lai* meaning, God of the sacred-grove (forest). But in most of the religious-historical texts of Manipur it is mentioned that the Chothe or the Meitei worship *Pu Soraren* the Sky or Sun God,

believed to be an ancient Meitei term. The *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (CTP)* sacred manuscript also refers to “chingnu nong ningthou” which in Meitei literally means, ‘the rain god/king of the hills people’ (CTP-para-1, 24, 26-29). However the Chothe elders say that *Soraren* literally means, ‘Lion King’, as ‘Sora’ stands for ‘Lion’, and ‘ren/g’ stands for ‘king’, a symbol of strength and power. According to Chothe the name *Soraren* implies *Thangvan rengpa* as the Absolute Supreme God who decides the fate and destiny of all mankind through the Dragon-Python God on earth. According to K.C. Tensuba, *Soraren* refers to the god or spirit of the sky the unlimited extent that represents the Heaven. They (early Meitei) sacrifice oxen to the Heaven or *Saraalen* in the open space (1993: 122-123). Similarly, Sushanta Talukdar also states that the ancient folksong of Bishnupriya (Cacharis) of Manipur refer a lot to *Sorarel* in the *Rain-Invoking Songs* (1450-1700) and also *Madoi-Soralel songs* (1500-1600), as the king of all the gods who has seven daughters.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in Chinese, the Dragon king is known as “Lungwang” lit. the Rain god, also known under four names of directions as Ao-shin (north), Ao-chin (south), Ao-kuang (east) and Ao-jun (west), (Channa 1998:144; Ash 2007:160). This suggests that the ancient name for the Dragon king in Chothe is also known as “Lungchungpa” signifying the Dragon-python as one of their ethereal gods. The Mayan of Mexico called it “Kukulcan” (feathered Serpent God), and the Inca of South-America called it “Kon” (God of Rain and the Southern Wind), (Ash 2007:161).

The Chothe worship, revere and adore their ancestor gods *Pu Lungchungpa (Pakhangpa)*, his wife *Pi Leima* (queen of the mother earth) and his personal bodyguard, *Potlungpa* (lit. the god who guards the rock). The thanksgiving offerings, sacrifices and divination known as *Leihu pot tampa* (lit. offering for the gods) is carried out annually at the sacred-grove to these three gods and also before and after any of their main festivals like *Innampei rin* and *Achui rin*. According to them, any false promise made by any person to their god at their deity site or sacred-grove is immediately reciprocated either by sudden death or illness.<sup>2</sup> They also worship the family gods like *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren* inside the house. *Sanamahi* is worshipped as the god of wealth and protector of the family on the extreme south-western corner and *Leimaren* (queen of mother earth) as the god of fertility on the north-west side of the house. This belief and practice is probably believed to have borrowed from the Meitei since early days. Pr. Wailum says, normally in early days the priest or the head of the family makes a morning devotional prayer as soon as he gets up outside his house or before any ritual is performed. Below is the prayer he recites:

### 1. *Inn- Thouna Ashe* (Morning Devotional Prayer of the Priest)

*“Thangvan tengpe la-i, abur hongpa sand siki le-o,  
Kaming rel-o, kaming hem-o, kaming chum...,  
Adam keita, husung relleh huiwand bummae,  
Ta-kup leh, u...rr...rr...”*.

[The free translation, “O, Almighty God the Heavenly King the one who opens the door of death and life. Say my name correctly and I will turn to you. People say that I am a curer in the village and if the outsiders hear about my successful work they flock to me because if I have said evil things in your name they all fly like u..rr..rr..” (Source: Wailum, mp3 record No. 4-2)].

Other pantheons are like the “Bambu” the gods of four directions that guards the four village gates their place symbolically represented by a stone, each near a tree. They are known as *Bambu - nashu* (east), *nata* (west), *mai or ma* (north) and *thangting* (south). The Mayan of Mexico, Belize and Guatemala call it “Bacabs” gods of the four directions - (Mulac (north), Cauac (south), Kan (east) and Ix (west), (Ash 2007:161). The Chothe perform the appeasement ritual of “Lou-houpa” meaning, ‘throwing away of the medicine’ for these four gods of direction of the village gates *bambu* on the eve of the benedictory invocation prayer before the main festival begins to protect and guard against other evil forces that try to enter the village. An offering is also first made to these four gods of directions or village gates before the village ritual of *Lamleh lethoi* (lit. road ritual) but they are not worshipped at all.<sup>3</sup> Some malevolent forest gods or spirits are called as *nom-nompa* (limping ghost), *tingricknu* (elf), *heloi* (the seven sisters’ elf). They believe that if a person happens to encounter and suffers from a certain hallucination or is in trance, divination is consulted to find out the specific deity or spirit, then an appeasement ritual is performed, but all these gods or spirits are not worshipped.

**Cosmic Worship:** From the perspective of their myth and the rites-de-passage, from their parturition rite, child-naming ceremony to the death ceremony indicates that the Chothe worship and revere the cosmologic or celestial objects like the Heaven, the Earth, the Sun and the Moon including the stars and the cosmic elements. While the rain, wind and fire are considered earthly ethereal gods or indispensable elements. The Chothe believe that all these powerful elements combine together to form what is life on earth, without which, they believe that life would not exist. They conceive that it is beyond the human mind to comprehend or explain mysterious natural phenomenon since no man can

control these elements at his own will. Therefore, they regard them as awesome powerful celestial or ethereal elementary gods and honour, revere and worship them. The believers of cosmology offer thanks giving prayers, and also seek favours of blessings for the good weather and prosperity, peaceful co-existence and also protection from their Supreme Guardian God. According to Chothe elders, their ancestors believed that, all the stars are the souls of men and bright stars are the souls of great people who died long ago and dwell amongst the heavenly gods. According to them all dead men do not go straight to heaven (*Thangvan lam*), only righteous men do so, while the wicked go to the land of dead (*Athi lam*) or hell, and some whose fate cannot be decided are stuck in the Middle-World (*Leihu lamjai*). As Durkheim rightly points out that “There is no religion that is not a cosmology at the same time that it is a speculation upon divine things. If philosophy and the science were born of religion, it is because religion began by taking the place of the sciences and philosophy” (1915: 9).

**Nature Worship:** The Chothe give due respect and reverence to the natural objects like rocks, giant trees, mountain peaks, thunder, lightning, storms or cyclones, water whirlpools, fire, etc. They believe that certain natural objects and elements also possess certain supernatural powers that can protect or destroy mankind. The forest gods comprise many benevolent and malevolent gods whom they believe reside in the rocks, mountains peaks, giant trees and spring-side or pond. The Chothe, despite showing their reverence and respect to any natural object that are considered phenomenal and awesome practically do not build a close relationship nor worship such gods, unlike their ancestors and the seven cosmological elementary gods. Any Forest God is also known as *Ching leihu* (Mountain/Hill God), Water God - *Tui leihu*, and the goddess of wealth and prosperity - *Leirema (Leimaren)*. In Meitei language *Ching leihu* or Forest/hill God is called as *Umang-lai*. Whether these gods and deities are benevolent or malevolent gods, offerings and sacrifices are made to both, whenever necessary, as appeasement rites. The water rituals of “Tuithoipa” and “Tuihumpa lethoi” are performed to the water (river or spring) gods or deities. The Chothe believe that drinking spring water from unknown source is always considered unsafe. So, one is asked to splash the water three times with his hand before he drinks to signify that he is seeking permission from that particular Water God. They believe that if one does not follow them, he is likely to suffer from certain air borne diseases like measles or viral fever after drinking as punishment by the angry water god. In such cases, a simple appeasement rite is performed by any priest at the specific site after divination. We know that the Chothe, from their genealogical myth

and folktales (*Lungkang*), also venerate and revere any unusual types of huge rocks (*Lung-pi*). When there is no rain or drought during the plantation season, the Chothe, like the Hopi tribes of Melanesia, perform a rite called *Ru kokna lethoi* (rain invoking rite) with a fowl's egg, some uncooked rice, some red flowers and a one rupee coin in the north-west corner of the paddy field invoking the Rain (cloud) God, but the dance is not performed by the Chothe.

**Ancestor Worship:** It is quite clear, from their genealogical myth and their legend the Chothe, since time immemorial, honour, adore, venerate and worship their ancestors. Their ancestor-worship system is observable in many of their ritualistic occasions, though today, it is not practiced in the strict sense. Special commemoration ceremonies are observed in memory of their ancestors like *Yairitha Rin* and *Hungdoi Rin* (*Kriton* in Meitei). The practice of honouring is also found in many of the ritualistic offerings, for example, in the benediction ceremony of the *Innampei rin* and *Achui rin* festivals and other rituals performed either by the village priest or the village chief or the *Pakhanglakpa* (the head of *Tang-ngarinta bungkung*), also offering foods and drinks to their ancestors on behalf of the community. There are also special offering of foods and drinks for their ancestors as seen in the *pheiroi-khapa* of *Lamleh thoipa* village ritual, so also, in the child-naming and the funeral ceremonies.

In the case of death or funeral ceremony, before and after the burial of each ritualistic offering, the assistant-priest loudly proclaims to the deceased (while wrapping up his corpse before taking it to the cemetery for burial) that the gifts are meant for him, his deceased friends, relatives and great grandparents, that he should give when he meet them in the land of death, as they would be asking for it. It is seen that such death ceremonies and commemorations are similarly practiced by many of the Sino-Tibetan speaking or Mongoloid racial groups. Y. Tomalsing said, "*Inn-thinkpa* the purification of house of the dead ceremony is observed on the fifth day but the main death commemoration (*theilhong*) is usually held on any auspicious day after three months but now normally held within five years for socio-economic reasons". According to him, since the main death ceremonial feast (*theilhong*) involves heavy expenditure due to grand feast and elaborate offering of food and drinks many cannot afford to perform it on time. The food and drinks are divided into three shares; the first, for their Almighty Supreme God represented by their Guardian Dragon God, the second for their great ancestors and the third, for the evil spirits. The third offering according to them is meant for the evil spirits so that they do not disturb the deceased soul on its death journey. They

say that when they perform the merit feast, similar offerings are also made to their great ancestors. They also have commemoration songs for each of their ancestors or clan heads (*meebo-la*) dedicated in their ancestors' name in honour of their contribution to the society. These songs are restricted and one cannot sing these at anytime of the season. They are sung only during the two commemoration feasts mentioned above and also during *Innampei rin* festival. In the strict sense, they do not exactly worship their ancestors in the way they worship their Supreme God *Thangvan rengpa Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa*, *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren* or higher gods but give their due respect by revering and honouring them for their great contribution in building up a strong society. They also continue to seek support in uplifting their culture and tradition and also seek protection in their prayers.

## **5.2 Concept of Three Worlds**

The Chothe believe in three worlds. According to them they are (1) *Thangvan lam* - the land of God, (2) *Athi-lam* - the land of dead and (3) *Leihu-lamjai* - the middle or the real world. The first two worlds may be equated with the Christian concept of Heaven and Hell but the concept of third world or "middle world" is vague, though found among some ancient tribal societies of the world. According to Chothe it means the special environment or place between the heaven and the hell which actually signifies the real world (earth) where the dead still continue to exist even after death. This intermediate place is understood as the middle world of the dead as they are stuck on the earth as their souls freely continue to live among the living, unseen to the human naked eye but seen by them. The Chothe believe that all the souls of the dead men do not go straight to the land of God (heaven) as soon as they die. They believe that only the just or the good and righteous people who have done remarkable service to mankind and bear a good moral record in their lifetime go to the land of God (heaven) and dwell among the heavenly God, while those who are brutally cruel with serious criminal records like murder, homicide, suicide and are disdained by the society for their cruel intentions go to the land of dead (hell). They said that certain categories of people whose lives are not as good as the first nor as bad as the second category or those who die accidentally in sleep, fire or water are considered as the intermediate group whose souls are stuck in the *Leihu-lamjai* the middle world or real world (earth) or middle-path or the intermediate free place as their soul continues to exist in the form of spirits or ghosts moving freely between those two worlds. It is believed that the professional priests and priestesses use such spirits as sorcerers to reveal the secrets of others through divination or in witchcraft,

if they can capture, communicate and befriend with such spirits with an assurance to release them when the errand is over.

The stanza of a festive song in which one can establish the existence of the Supreme God and the concept of the Heavenly kingdom as rendered by Mr. Chongdin and Mr. Wailum:

*“Kareng-ngo hang, kareng-ngo jung-nge,  
Lamal la kareng hakthing nge,  
Rengchung-nga ayang mo-ae,  
Thangvan jaiya sholhapilam mae”.*

[In free translation; the song means, ‘our king has started his journey and he is on his way to the centre of festival where we all await him. Though we waited long for him, there is still someone else above him who is still greater and more powerful than him waiting for the time, when he comes he will judge all men equally on the basis of their actions and will give eternal rest at the Centre of Heaven (*Thangvan jaiya*)’. This song indicates the existence of a heavenly world, the land of God and land of dead].

### **5.2.i Soul**

According to E.B. Tylor (1873) all living beings have a soul, “anima” or “animism” meaning, existence of soul. On the basis he propagates that belief that animism is the foundation of all primitive religions. Though many scholars argue against his concept yet many accept the fact that all living beings possess *anima* or soul. The Chothe call this anima or soul “tha-wai”, an intangible thing that resides within the body or the heart (*lung*). According to Chothe elders the day the child began to breathe from his mother’s womb he is endowed with a soul by the creator. This soul becomes active only after birth and continues to remain active in his body till his death. After death the soul transforms into a spirit. As Durkheim remarks “the soul is not in the breath; it is the breath. It is the part of the body where it resides is only one” (1915: 243). This firm belief in the existence of the soul and its significance is seen from their child-naming ceremony to the death ceremony. They believe personal rituals like, *Thawai kokpa*, *U-sil lethoi* and *Airing thapa lethoi* are rituals to strengthen one’s soul performed during one’s lifetime in different ways, and a weak soul is indicated by frequent illnesses which are believed to have been tormented by evil spirits, where appropriate rituals are necessary. The concept of soul and spirit according to Chothe is that as long as a person is alive his soul exists within his living body but once the person dies his departed soul is conceived as a spirit or ghost if it gets stuck between the two worlds of Heaven and Hell. If the soul of the

dead man could not reach either the land of God or land of the dead, his soul is considered stuck between these two worlds in the real world, where his departed soul wanders on earth as a spirit or ghost until the family or relatives pray and perform special sacrificial rituals for him. Sighting of such spirits or ghosts is described by them in many ways. Some of them say these often appear either to the family members or to their friends in their houses at night or in their dreams. Sometimes they claim sightings of these ghosts or spirits looking for food and drinks in the kitchen while sometimes these spirits try to warn of certain danger coming their way, which they are unable to understand or comprehend. The Chothe believe that when such things happens a hole is found in the person's grave from which his soul comes out and tries to live among the living as though he/she fails to acknowledge his own death. In such cases, the family members inspect the graveyard and immediately fill the hole, if found, and accordingly a proper ritual may be performed again by the village priest either at his dying spot or at his graveyard, depending upon the result of divination, so that his departed troubled soul may rest in peace. The Chothe believe that if any unnatural death like suicide occurs in a family they consider it a curse upon the family for a serious crime or blunder committed by their ancestors. If a proper ritual is not performed, it continues in the family line generation after generation. This death ritual is called *Athi thong keina lethoi* (lit. ritual for closing death's door). Such rites are often carried out secretly by the deceased's family at the earliest to save the family's reputation. This is because they believe in immortality of soul. The concept of the soul is further discussed in the following chapter under '*Death Ceremony*'.

### **5.3 Totem: Definition**

According to Emile Durkheim the term "totem" originated from the Ojibway, an Algonquin tribe of Northern America, and refers to an object of an animal or a plant whose name the clan bears (1915: 103). Similarly various scholars like, Sigmund Freud (1952) and Arnold Van Gennep (1960) have given different concepts and definitions on totem. But since, the term is loosely used by many, G. Van Der Leeuw has defined totem as:

1. the group bears the name of the totem;
2. the totem is accounted its ancestor;
3. the totem involves sundry taboos, such as
  - a. the prohibition against killing or eating the totem, except in specific cases or under special conditions;

- b. the prohibition against intermarriage within one totem group (exogamy), (1963: 79).

Besides, in its entirety, Webster's Dictionary defines totem as, "a natural object, usually an animal that serves as a distinctive, often venerated emblem or symbol - usually a means of personal or spiritual identity".

It is obvious from the above definitions that a totem is an emblem of an object such as an animal or plant or insect that serve as a symbol for a family or clan attached with a certain kind of personification. For instance, the Native Northern Americans still practice the tradition of carving their totems like eagles, crows, owls, etc., out of a wood and painting them according to their colour and thereby, paying their homage and attribution on the dead commemoration by ceremonially erecting the 'totem poles' at a particular places.

According to Chothe elders totems are not worshipped, revered or adored like the Heavenly gods but the sacredness of their relationship lies in their allegiance and adherence to the promise made once upon a time with an animal, plant or insect that originated from an incident under certain circumstances, which subsequently became their totems. They believe that after a totem helped men from the bondage of certain curse or rescues them from some unfortunate incident both agree to share the same clan by becoming like the blood brothers, thereby forbidding one another from killing and eating. According to F. Graebner, it is often believed that the ancestor of a clan was born from the animal group, but sometimes it is the other way round that at one time animals belonged to the human clan. There is probably an animistic signature when people are believed to turn into their totemic animal upon death. Often the totemic relationships seen are quite indistinct: the totem animal is regarded as a friend or companion of the clan. The rule however is a prohibition against killing or eating the animal, and also exogamy (1924: 55).

The Chothe believe that totems are sacred for those who are connected and concerned, hence they forbid or consider taboo to kill, eat or deconsecrating by the related clan members. The various types of Chothe totems with respect to their clans are provided. Totems are not worshipped but treated with respect by observance as their ancestors or relatives or loyal friends by obligating their allegiances from killing or eating as their adherence to the oath made once upon a time. Even marriage within the relative clan is usually forbidden considering the above reasons. Such belief is seen more attached with the village elders or senior citizens than the younger generations. The

youth or younger generations consider such totemic taboo and norms as superstitions because most of them are brought up in Christian families or a Christian environment.

Out of 200 respondents 102 (i.e. 51%) persons believe in totemism, while 98 (i.e. 49%) persons do not believe in it (see table 17). This indicates that half of the Chothe population still believes in totemism. The break up indicates that most of the youths do not believe it but the village elders do so. The reason is obvious: the youth or the younger generation are brought up in a Christian environment and become more scientific in their outlook due education. They consider totems as superstition despite their fathers and forefathers still having a strong attachment to it.

**Table 17 Distribution of Chothe respondents who believes in totems**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Youths (20- 40) years</i>		<i>Mature adults (40-60) years</i>		<i>Vill. elders above 60 years</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent age</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>		
<b>Yes</b>	18	8	34	8	28	6	<b>102</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>No</b>	38	14	29	6	11	-	<b>98</b>	<b>49%</b>
	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
Total	<b>78</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 5.3.i The Chothe Totems

The Chothe, like any indigenous community of the world have different types of totems. Even today, each clan maintains the obligation and allegiances to the contract made with their totem. Some totems have similar beliefs and practical aspects in the relationship with other societies though it differs in its story as the culture and myth varies from one society to another. Such variation in meanings is remarked on by Levi-Strauss (1972) who talks on similarity of myths of different cultural groups belonging to different parts of the world.

Each totem shows its distinctiveness from the other with regard to their habitat and physiology. Some of the Chothe totems are similar with some of the Native Americans or the Red Indians, Indigenous Aborigines of Australia, New Papua-Guinea of Pacific Islanders and were also believed to be prevalent throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.<sup>4</sup> On the above criteria, totems are classified into different types as: (1) land animal totem, (2) water animal totem, (3) air animal totem, (4) reptile totem, (5) insect totem and (6) vegetable or plant totem.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly the land totems are like the, beaver, otter, bobcat, bear, deer, fox, horse, cow, ram, lion, tiger, panther, wolf, bear etc. and the water animal totems comprise of the dragon, fish, frog, seahorse, turtle etc. The air animal totems are, eagle, crow, bat, hawk and dove. The reptile totems include

salamander, chameleon and turtle. The insect totems comprise of praying mantis, dragonfly, spider, firefly and butterfly. However, certain kinds of animals are symbolised as emblems and identified with a particular country like the Peacock of India, Kangaroo of Australia, the Olive leaf of Canada, etc. But such animals or plants are unique symbols or trademark representations of a country's beauty and pride for its abundance and rareness in other countries. These symbolic animals and plants however, are not considered as totems as they have no religious significance. But, the Lion of the British, Scottish and Punjabis, the Eagle of the American Army and the Dragon of the Chinese are, in the broad sense, mythically connected totems. The Chothe totems and its taboos are given below as provided by the Chothe village elders:-

1. The tiger (*Kamkeirang* or *a-kei*) is considered as the totem of *Makan's* clan: The *Makan* are forbidden from eating or killing any striped animal belonging to the tiger or cat family and sub-family. The origin of this taboo derives from their Chothe genealogical myth. Accordingly, the first Chothe man who came out of the mythical cave wearing the striped shawl *awa-ampi* is believed to be *Makan-pa*, who confronted the Tiger and promised that whosoever ate or killed any of them would lose all his teeth, since they have similar stripes on their body and so both are related and belong to the same clan. Therefore, as per the deal the *Makan* members observe the obligation as an allegiance to the Tiger. On this basis the *Makan* members even today claim that they share the tiger's character of bravery, courage and fearlessness.
  
2. The hornbill (*Phuirang*) is conceived as the totem of *Khiyang* or *Hiyang's* clan: According to them the bird is the only sister of the seven brothers connected to the folktale '*Ata Sari*' who turned into a hornbill. It says that she turned into hornbill since she could not bear the insult of her seven brothers who often accused her of being insincere and neglecting her duties despite her best efforts to serve them well. Therefore, it is considered taboo for any *Khiyang* (*Hiyang*) clan members to kill or eat any species of the hornbill family like the bulbul. Perhaps, if anyone disobeyed the contract intentionally it is believed that the person would not survive long.
  
3. The black praying mantis (*Ahang-Yuishom*) is said to be the totem of *Mareem* or *Marim's* clan: This totem is also associated with the folktale '*Shomareng*' locust king. It is said that *shomareng*, despite her hard work remained very poor because her husband was lazy, wicked and even spent all her hard earned wealth and resources uselessly. Accordingly, they said she only wears her old black sarong (*nek*)

for every purpose since she could not afford to have a new one. Because of her extreme poverty she felt terribly embarrassed to face society and so she decided to do away with her life. It is said that as she grieved helplessly praying for help she suddenly transformed into a praying mantis *Ahang-Yuishom*. Accordingly even today most of the Marim men are said to be lazy and idealist and always depend on their wives. Therefore, it is forbidden for any Marim men to kill or eat praying mantis.

4. The otter (*Sachou*) is considered as the totem of the *Thao* clan: The otter signifies a clever and hardworking person. This is also connected with a folktale known as '*Ahu maichoupi*'. It is said that when one of the lineage head of a *Thao* hosted a grand feast during the drought season he engaged some *Khiyang/Hiyang* youths (*Maksa*) to be responsible for water. These youth went to fetch water but they could not locate any source of water. Suddenly they saw an otter (*Sachou*) on their way and when they asked it, the otter reluctantly told them, but only after being hard pressed, where they could find the water. As a result, the otter made a deal with them. Saying he would tell them only if they agreed that they would not harm or kill him and or his kind when they happened to meet again. The youths agreed to this and made the promise to the otter, who took them to source of the water. Just then, when the otter bid farewell to them and was entering his borrow, one of the youths caught hold of its tail and attempted to kill it. Luckily the otter's tail slipped out from the youth's hand and it escaped death. This angered the otter and so he blocked the flowing water by diverting it to another direction. The youths therefore, could not fetch enough water for the grand feast and returned exhausted. When the host, *Thao-pu* and the people questioned the youths about the water, the leader who belonged to *Khiyang* clan explained about the broken breach made to the otter. Learning the story the *Thao-pu* accepted the curse of the otter on his clan on behalf of the *Khiyang-pu* considering that *Khiyang* should not be the burdened because of his feast. Henceforth, the members of the *Thao* clan were forbidden to kill or eat otters (*shachou*).
5. *U-chikte*, a kind of small brown bird, is considered as the totem of *Yuhlung* clan: The bird is usually found among thorny bushes. The bird signifies calm nature and independence. According to *Chothe* during a famine the bird helped find them food which saved them from starvation, it also gave them their eggs. The little red feather below its neck is believed to be the bird's blood from an injury caused during its

journey when it was caught in the thorny bushes while helping the Yuhlung. Therefore, the members of the clan are prohibited from eating this bird and its kind.

6. *Shirsim*, a kind of wild vegetable grown in the forest is considered the totem of Parpa clan: Accordingly, they said that during a drought season the people survived by eating only this vegetable for certain days as it was found to grow in one particular area only. As a result, a *Parpa* man being the leader of the group took the responsibility to protect it from being plucked and eaten in future.
7. The swallow (*Pingprou*) is considered as the totem of Rangshai clan's: On the basis of the legend, the Rangshai consider that the bird is one of their ancestors who turned himself into a swallow in a magical fight to protect his clan's reputation. Henceforth, the members of the clan were forbidden to kill or eat swallows and were not allowed to chase away the swallows from their houses. The bird is considered their cognate.

The totems of Chothe mentioned above are seen as an emblem, a symbolic representation of an animal or plant connected to a certain clan of their community through various mythical tales. They also believe that specific clan members share certain similar characteristic and behaviour with such animals, birds and plants that they consider as totems. Accordingly some of them believe that if a member has strong faith in the totem of his clan, he can obtain inspiration, power and the strength of the Tiger or the otter alike. The Chothe believes that if they dream of their totem or come in contact with, it signifies that their totem is trying to communicate a sort of warning of some danger to the concerned person. Such similar totemic beliefs are seen among the Native Indians of Northern America like Iroquois, Cherokee, Apache and Algonquin.<sup>6</sup> According to Chothe the totemic animal is one that remains with a person for life, both in the physical and spiritual world. People may identify with different animal or spirits as guardians in their lives, which they believe is this one totem animal that acts as the main guardian spirit and acts sometimes as one's intuition.

#### **5.4 Superstitions: Signs, Omens, Dreams and Curses**

Superstitious beliefs are universal: they are found in every society whether primitive or civilized. They co-exist with religion. But the intensity of belief defers from culture to culture as some cultures are more superstitious than others. This belief is applicable even to some families or individuals irrespective of religion. The term superstition, according

to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) is derived from the Latin word *superstitio*, meaning “standing over” from being awed, unreasonable or having excessive belief in fear or magic, especially foreign or fantastic ideas. The term superstition, to medieval scholars, means belief outside or in opposition to Christianity, but today the concept is applied to without foundation or in contravention to scientific and logical knowledge.<sup>7</sup> There are innumerable superstitions of varying types and degrees based on signs, symbols, omens, numbers, letters, colours, days, months, events, directions, names, totems, sighting of birds and animals depending on the perception of the individual. It is this perception that defines the individual where he stands among the crowd or society. Anything and everything can be taken as superstitious belief by relating to his experiences but not always, as it cannot be ascertained about the happening at will. Certain hypothetical beliefs which is unexplainable or unreasonable or that opposes common belief is considered as superstition. Faith in such hypothetical beliefs plays a major role in the perception and deception of variant superstitions. Mysteriously, some similar superstitions are also found among different cultures in different places, like myths discussed by Claude Levi-Strauss.

Since superstition exists in almost every cultural life with varying intensity of beliefs and frequency of practice so, it is difficult to classify accordingly. Superstition, simple or complex, shows many similarities from one society to another. The Chothe, as explained by the people, have innumerable superstitious beliefs that may be classified as lucky or unlucky, auspicious or inauspicious, favourable or unfavourable on the basis of signs, symbols, omen, numbers, colours, days, directions and birth name of a person that greatly affects one’s personality. But there are some individuals who intentionally ignore and try to avoid or reject such beliefs without disproving them. For example, atheists and the agnostics consider any kind of superstition as co-incidental events. Such sceptical opinions are common among many Chothe elders and mature-adult groups who have experienced, heard of or seen certain incidents but are not willing to come forward as they believed in them. However, among the younger generation the attitude of scepticism in any superstition belief is found to be less in such semiotic beliefs. They show less apprehension as they reject and are not bothered by any type of signs and symbols. For example, seeing a cat crossing the road before a person is generally considered an unlucky sign or a bad omen for many of the Chothe people. But a contrasting belief also exists among the Chothe members. Another example, a particular sign or number or colour may be considered lucky for a person but may prove unlucky for another. Therefore, the belief in such signs, symbols, colours, numbers and dreams are not

universally uniform but vary from individual to individual and how one perceives, understands and interprets his perception and experiences.

Opinion on the nature of superstitious beliefs differs from individual to individual amongst the Chothe population, out of 200 respondents, 126 (i.e. 63%) persons believe in various types of superstitions while 74 (i.e. 37%) of them considered do not believe in any type of superstitions [see Table 18(iii)]. The figure indicates that despite many Chothe being converted to Christianity the majority of them are not completely free from superstitious beliefs. However, interestingly the table 18(iii) shows that the youths are less superstitious than the elders in both categories; Christian and Indigenous religion. The degree or the number of people believing in superstitions is less amongst the younger generations or more in older generations.

**Table 18 (i) Followers of indigenous faith who believe in superstitions**

Category	Youths (20- 40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percent age
	male	female	male	female	male	female		
Yes	6	4	5	4	7	2	<b>28</b>	<b>70%</b>
No	4	4	1	2	1	-	<b>12</b>	<b>30%</b>
	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 18 (ii) Followers of Christian persons who believe in superstitions**

Category	Youths (20- 40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percentage
	male	female	male	female	male	female		
Yes	25	8	34	5	22	4	<b>98</b>	<b>61.25%</b>
No	21	6	23	3	9	-	<b>62</b>	<b>38.75%</b>
	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>		<b>65</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 18 (iii) Distribution of Chothe respondents who believe in superstitions (both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

Category	Youths (20- 40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percent age
	male	female	male	female	male	female		
Yes	6+25= 31	4+8 = 12	5+34 = 39	4+5 = 9	7+22= 29	2+4 = 6	<b>126</b>	<b>63%</b>
No	4+21= 25	4+6 = 10	1+23= 24	2+3 = 5	1+9 = 10	-	<b>74</b>	<b>37%</b>
	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 18(i) also shows that majority of the Chothe followers of indigenous faith believe in a number of superstitions; out of 40 respondents 28 (i.e. 70%) expressed their beliefs in various superstitions and only 12 (i.e. 30%) did not endorse superstition.

Similarly, [Table 18(ii)] shows that though majority of the Chothe population are Christians but still many believe in superstition. Out of 160 Christian respondents as many as 98 (i.e. 61.25%) persons believe in different types of superstitions and 62 (i.e. 38.75%) persons do not believe it.

### **1. Lucky and Unlucky Signs**

The Chothe believe that if a person who is on an important journey or business mission or trip and happens to step out his house first with his left foot or he re-enters the house to get something he has forgotten, it is considered an unlucky sign. Similarly, events like a person noticing a cat (esp. black cat) crossing his path, a broom accidentally touching his feet while the floor is being swept, sweeping a room before leaving it, a woman combing her hair, walking under a pole-bar or a ladder, etc., are all looked upon as bad or unlucky signs which might result in defeat, an accidents etc. They relate the broom to a witch. On the contrary, if a person notices a girl fetching water, a calf sucking its mother's milk between the two legs, being greeted by a man, etc., it is considered as a good or lucky sign. Similarly, the western Europeans also believe that if a bride meets a lamb, a dove, a spider, a policeman, a clergyman, a doctor, a blind man or a black cat on her way to her wedding ceremony is lucky, while if the groom gives a coin to the first person he sees on his way to the church or if the bride or a child cries during the wedding service it is considered lucky. Dating back to Victorian times seeing a chimney sweep on the way from the church is believed will bring good luck.<sup>8</sup>

The Chothe elders say sexual intercourse before any game is unlucky. According to them if a sportsman, especially a footballer or a volleyball player has sexual intercourse either with his wife or with any girl the night or just before the game he is considered polluted. Therefore, he or his team (they) will probably lose the game even if he or they are positively on the winning side. Their explanation is that a woman is like an evil spirit, as she is easily influenced by the evil spirits and is capable of seducing men and bringing their downfall. They claim that since many of them have experienced such things they therefore, repeatedly warn the young village players to avoid such activities during major tournaments so that such disgraceful defeats did not happen due to silly reasons.

**Numbers and Colours:** The Chothe believe that numbers also play a very important role in their lives. Generally, they follow the counting method of a binary-pair as “Chaang – si” (matured or ripe – decay or death), or “chaang – waie” (right side – left side), where ‘*chaang*’ also means, right side or odd number, and ‘*si* or *waie*’ means, decay, even number or left side. Any odd number or numbers that fall on the right side while counting is considered good and favourable, while any even number or numbers on the left side are considered unfavourable and unlucky, which may be contrary to other societies’ belief. For many European and American countries the number Eight (8) and Friday the Thirteenth (13) are considered unlucky. The Romans believed the number 13 is a symbol of death and destruction, but for the Mayan and Aztecs of Central America and the Chinese it is a sacred and lucky number (Ash 2007:172). For the Christians triple six (666) is believed to be the “number of the beast” or Satan’s number. Tetrophobia or the fear of four is widespread in China, Japan, Korea and Hawaii and so the use of number 4 (four) is minimized or avoided as far as possible because the Chinese word for ‘4’ or ‘*sì*’, sounds nearly the same word used for death (*sǐ*).<sup>9</sup> While for the Chothe and other indigenous tribes believe the number “seven” (7) is the most important and powerful number as it relates to the seven cosmo-natural elements or the mythical number of ‘Seven Heavenly Gods’. The importance of this number seven is also connected to their seven clans and is also reflected in the seven items of sacrificial or ritualistic offerings to the seven cosmo-natural elementary gods as observed in many of their rituals and ceremonies.

Some Chothe believe that their luck depends upon colours too. Some colours protect them from injury, accidents, illness or evil (witchcraft). Accordingly they claim to wear clothes, metals and gems of different colours of on the basis of their character or personality (*rashi*) like a simple talisman. The Chothe priest and the assistant-priest wear white along with the traditional shawl and the head-gear for the benediction and valedictory ritualistic ceremonies. The colour of their ritual flag is normally white but for certain rituals related with evil purposes a kind of horizontal striped flag with white, black and red colours is used.

The Chothe believe that wearing any shining metallic objects protects a person from any harm, misfortune and also from evil (witchcraft). So many of them both men and women, are seen wearing ear-rings and necklaces made of gold and silver, bracelets made of brass and copper. They also wear amulets prepared by a priest around their arm or waist with a belief it deflects or averts evil spirits. Their common belief is that if one’s necklace, ear-ring, finger-ring or bracelet, made of either gold, silver or brass, becomes

dull it indicates ill health. Precious gem-stones like diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphire are also considered as talismans. They believe that one should wear such gem-stones according to one's character or personality (*rashi*), if not the person might suffer from certain illnesses due to incompatibility.

## **2. Auspicious and Inauspicious (Days and Directions)**

The Chothe believe in astronomy. They consider that certain days of the week, months of the year, numbers and geographical positions are very important as they are related with auspicious and inauspicious elements. On this basis, the birthday of an individual is one important criterion to determine the right day for rituals or ceremonies like the merit feast, marriage, starting day of any business enterprises or for important journey, etc. Similarly, the western people also believe that marriage in January is roar and rime, September is golden glow, smooth and serene life will go, and December is cheer, love shines brighter from year to year. The general auspicious days for the weddings are: Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday's the best of all, Thursday brings crosses, and Friday losses, but Saturday - no luck at all.<sup>10</sup> Likewise the Chothe consider the 'odd number' (*chaang*) as auspicious, favourable, mature or ripe, while the 'even number' (*si*) as inauspicious for decay or death. Accordingly Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious, while the other days are believed to be inauspicious, so also the months and directions. Depending on the nature of the rite, certain rituals which involve magic or black magic are performed only on 'even' days like Tuesday or Thursday but especially on Saturday as they believe the days relates with the evil.

Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious for the Chothe to make journeys to the north. Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday to the south while Sunday, Monday and Wednesday to the east, and Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are considered auspicious to go west. They say in olden days they consulted divination and performed sacrificial offerings to find out their auspicious and favourable day, month and direction before they waged and fought any war and battle.

## **3. Favourable and Unfavourable Signs**

Like any auspicious and inauspicious day, month and direction there are also certain signs that are considered favourable and unfavourable by Chothe. For example:

**Village or House Site:** The Chothe believe that January to March is considered as the most suitable session for establishing a village or constructing a house. After surveying a suitable site for the village or house they first perform an egg-divination (*artui jan*) on the spot on any auspicious day like Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday to find out if the signs or omens are favourable or not for settlement. This superstitious belief is also seen in divination as T.C Das says, the Chothe perform the egg divination at the new settlement (Das 1945: 41). Perhaps, if the divination is favourable then, they perform another rite called *lamthing lethoi*, meaning ‘area purification rite’, on any auspicious day. This *lamthing lethoi* is a rite to cast away the evil spirits from the chosen spot. Similarly, the procedure is the same even for locating the site for construction of house. The rationale behind considering the months January-April as favourable for the establishment of the village and house construction is because the season is plentiful as it falls after the harvest season and moreover, the season is dry and warm. The Meitei also follow suit.

**Ancestral Names:** The Chothe strongly believe that some ancestor’s names are endowed with certain charisma that may or may not be favourable in re-naming or giving to their grandchildren. For example, Y. Tarik says that, Marcus Marim (18 yrs) son of Manhoi Marim (56 yrs) of Khongkhang village was named as “Langshu” a name of his deceased great grandfather. Tarik says Lanshu (Marcus) during his childhood suffered frequent illnesses for about four/five years, his sickness was not diagnosed despite getting full medical attention. So, the village elders began to doubt about the child’s name which belong to his great grandfather a famous priest (magician or medicine man). Though they are Christians, they were later convinced of the traditional belief that the boy illness could be because he was unable to carry the charisma of his great grandfather’s name. Therefore, one of the elders performed a simple child-naming ceremony again and renamed him “Marcus” (a Christian name) by putting the *amtoi think* (a kind of wild turmeric stalk) on his neck again, thereby requesting the great grandfather’s spirit to leave the boy without harming him since he has been renamed as Marcus. Thereafter, he says, the boy Marcus recovered from his illness slowly and grew up to be a healthy 18 years old. Similarly, the Chothe believe that if a child is possessed by an evil spirit or if his soul is disturbed it can be cast away by simple individual rituals like; *Iring thapa*, *U-sil lethoi* and *thawai kokpa*, depending on the nature of illness.

**Twins:** The Chothe are sceptical about twins. When a woman gives birth to twins of boys or girls it is considered good and favourable. But if they are cross-twins, a boy and a girl, it is considered unfavourable for the family. They believed that in cases of cross-twins one of the children normally dies either at the time of birth or when young, and the surviving child often leads a sickly miserable life as though something is missing or incomplete. They believe twins souls are attached together like the faces of a coin, whatever happens to one has a direct effect on the other in taste, choice, experience and sickness.

### **Some Common Superstitions of Chothe**

1. The Chothe believe that turmeric, garlic, *Kuchu-leiham* (a kind of wild herb plant) and a person's urine can repel evil spirits or ghosts. They keep these below their mattresses or hang these in front of their doors when apprehensive and dreams are bad. Sometimes they apply it on their forehead or carry some with them whenever they travel to strange areas or thick forests to dispel evil spirits. Sometimes dried *Kutchu-leiham* is burnt as incense and the ash is applied on the forehead especially while travelling at night, with a belief that evil spirits cannot bear the smell.
2. Many Chothe believe that if they dream of a big fish or that their right palm is itching, they will get money. But if one's foot is scratchy they expect an unscheduled journey.
3. If a person sneezes during lunch or dinner it is believed that people are gossiping or back-biting him/her. If the number of sneezes is odd it is believed to be positive and if it is an even number they believe it is a negative remark. The Chothe believe that if such a belief is shared with others at the moment, then the intensity of the bad remark is assumed to be lessened. Similarly, the Chothe believe that if one's muscles on the left arm involuntarily tremble or move, it indicates that there could probably be a quarrel or a fight. If it is on the right arm it indicates a disagreement on certain issues. Similarly, accidental spilling of salt is believed to cause a fight or argument during the day. To undo the harm they toss some salt over the left shoulder.
4. If a rooster crows at an unusual time especially, in the evening or in the middle of the night and if another rooster responds from a different direction then it is considered the sign of a youth planning to steal a girl and they anticipate news of elopement.
5. The Chothe believe that if a bee stings a person, the person will not suffer from any illnesses for that particular year. So they avoid killing honey bees.

6. Chongding of Ajouhu believes that if he sees a winter bird, *Ngabek* flying to and fro above a house, it is a sign to him that an animal or bird has been trapped in his net. He says he is optimistic of a good dinner when he sees such a sign.
7. If a person suffers from epilepsy or stammering or some kind of delirium or hallucination he is considered under the possession of an evil spirit or the spell of a witch. So they seek divination and the ritual is performed accordingly. The Chothe practice of baffling or dumb-fooling a person when one suffers from hiccups. They baffle the person with unusual or shocking stories so that the person gets a shock and changes his breathing rhythm. This is commonly practiced by the elder on the youth/children.
8. Some believe that if they find money on the way and happen to pick it up, it brings them bad luck and losses double the sum of the money found, as a result they did not pick up money that has been dropped by anyone but others believe that if they replace it with a stone no harm takes place.
9. According to Mrs. Y. Urumleima (Margaret), as told to her by her grandparents, if one sees a snake carrying certain kind of plant or grass in its mouth one should manage to identify it because such a plant or grass is believed to be capable of curing its poison and can even resurrect a dying man.
10. The Chothe believe that if a dog comes charging to bite one should sit down immediately and throw or pretend to throw either a stone or a stick instead of running. The belief is related to their folktale, '*The Dog and the Eclipse*'.

#### **5.4.i Omens**

Signs and symbols are important elements in belief systems. When certain ominous signs and symbols appear at a place before any important event, they are regarded as bad omens. Arthur Stanley Pease in *The Omen of Sneezing* says that sneezing, unlike others that are more persistent and widely diffused ominous significance, throws some light upon the attitude of the Greeks and Romans rather than their interesting customs. According to him the belief that sneezing possesses an ominous significance appeared very early in many texts like in the *Odyssey* of the Greeks and Romans. He also said that the belief and disbelief in the omen of sneezing is remarked by great philosophers like Plutarch, Aristotle, Socrates and Cicero, etc. in various writings (1911: 429-432). The Chothe also consider that if the number of sneezes is odd it is good but if it is even, it is a bad sign. Similarly, Campbell Bonner (1906) also, in *The Omen of Herodotus* describes that “a dream of losing a tooth forebodes death. If

the tooth falls out without pain, it signifies the death of a friend or a distant relative, if it gives pain, a near kinsman will die” (1906: 236). There are innumerable signs and symbols of omens and some may be distinctively similar in many ways but the nature of interpretation varies from individual to individual and from society to society. The Chothe often consult the sorcerer (priest or priestess) and perform divination before any major festival or war campaign or family and individual rituals to see for any ominous sign with a fowl or a pig or a dog as described in following Chapter: *Religious Practices* (rites and rituals section). From the description provided below it is hoped the readers will be able to better comprehend and understand the nature and types of ominous signs seriously considered by the Chothe.

**The Ominous Sign of *Maharani Sana Leirum*:** Khongkhang is entirely a Christian village but still many believe in superstitions. One common superstitious belief is the ominous sign of “Maharani Sana Leirum” meaning, the queen’s gold ear-ring.<sup>11</sup>

According to Khongkhang people, one of the kings of Manipur had gone to Kabaw valley in Myanmar (Burma) for some official purpose but since he did not return at the expected time the worried queen came down looking for her husband. She visited the Khongkhang Chothe located on the Indo-Myanmar (Burma) road near Tengnoupal after learning that they were her distant relatives. Since, she was given a warm welcome and hospitality she felt so indebted that she took out her gold ear-ring from her own ears and gave it to the Chief (*Hulak*) as a token of her love, appreciation and gratitude with an assurance that the ear-ring is the memento of their bond of friendship (see Pic.17). On this basis they claim that whenever some unfortunate events happened in the village they found something unusual on checking the ear-ring. For example, according to Kh. Khedon (F/o Khetrichou), one of their newly appointed chiefs did not live long because an unfortunate accident occurred to him on his coronation day; one of the ear-rings slipped off from his ear while ceremonially wearing it to symbolise his chieftainship. He also says that the gold ear-ring sometimes changed its colour from bright to dull yellow, and whenever it changed its colour the village experienced chaos and disturbance.

The village council members would check the queen’s gold ear-ring from time to time, once or twice annually for any ominous sign i.e. change in colour or a mark. This checking was done especially when they felt that their peaceful village was being disturbed or was in a situation of chaos. They say the inspection of the gold ear-ring is carried out only on a Sunday which is considered as the most auspicious or holy day of the week. Another story according to them is that some hundred years ago, the left ear-

ring developed a crack and this was considered as the warning of a quarrel amongst the villagers and disintegration of village into two groups (now re-united). When the second crack was noticed adjacent to the first crack, a major village crisis occurred, and when a section of the cracked portion of the left gold ear-ring split the village suffered from the Kuki-Naga Crisis (1989-1997) resulting in the relocation of the village. Because of such incidents many of the villagers believe that it is the queen's assurance that such ominous signs are indicated through her gold ear-ring which warns the villagers about any danger and calamities.

The people say that the village was earlier known as "Mouhulon" but was re-named as "Khongkhang" derived from "Khongkap" (footsteps, in Meitei) as suggested by her after her visit to the village because the steps prepared for her were like a ladder. The queen's gold ear-ring is successively taken care by the village chief, now under the custody of Kh. Manichandra (56) the chief of the village.

**The Omen of a Barking Deer:** The Chothe believe that if a deer barks toward the village it is an ominous sign indicating some well-known persons like a village chief, a village elder or a leader would probably die, if not a serious village dispute or misfortune would befall on the villagers. While on the other hand, if a deer barks toward another village they considered they will receive the news of death from the direction of that village. Similarly, the Mao and the Lamkang communities of Manipur too believe that in olden days if a deer barks in and around the village, the enemies attacks the village or the village faces some serious crisis. According some agnostics, such events could happen because some hunters might have killed either its mother or partner, or the deer lost its way in the dense forest filled with ferocious wild animals.

**The Omen of a Falling Banner:** According to Maipak, *The Emmanuel Catholic Church of Lamlanghupi* celebrates its Silver Jubilee (25 years) on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2007. However, on 21<sup>st</sup> Jan. 2007 some of Chothe youths, despite the ominous sign shown to them just before leaving the village ignored it and met with a bus accident. Most of the youths were volunteers from Tampakhu village (Chandel district) who stayed back after the celebration. According to him a local bus was hired on 21<sup>st</sup> jointly by the *Catholic Youth Organisation* and the *Catholic Church Committee of Lamlanghupi* to drop them till their village. That very afternoon the village youths and their friends from the other village happily boarded the bus. But just as the bus began moving out of the village road the "jubilee's banner" that was hung at the main village gate across the road suddenly fell

down to the ground, and the bus just ran over it. Many village elders who came out to bid them farewell saw this ominous sign. Seeing the sign they all felt something strongly within them that if the youths were not careful anything could happen to them. So, some women folk seem to have even shouted to the youths to cancel their journey and return. Since the youths were all in high spirits they pay no heed; who responded nothing would happen to them. Unfortunately, within an hour the village leaders were informed by some friends from the town that their bus had met with an accident and the injured have been taken to the *Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS)* hospital. He later heard that just before the bus met with the accident the youths were joking and dancing inside the bus and some were intoxicated. However, most of them were injured but none of them died in the mysterious accident.

**News of Death:** The Chothe have their own perception and views on different types of omen for death. In early days sighting a crow and vulture was considered a bad omen for death. According to Marim Chongding of Ajouhu, if he hears the *Baibek* bird (Koel family) howl or cry at any time of the day it brings him news of death from his kin or friends from afar. Similarly, if a honey bee comes hovering and mumbles especially around the ear of a person he believes the bee is conveying him some desperate messages from some distant relatives. Likewise many Chothe believe that when such things happen they often get bad or sad news like death, serious illness or an accident concerning friends or distant relatives within few days. They believe that such birds and bees act as messengers sent by benevolent gods/spirits on behalf of the concerned person or family members because of the helpless situation in the hour of need.

**The Tragic Landslide at *Ahu Tuitrit*:** The Ajouhu of Central-cluster group believes that the tragic landslide that occurred at *Ahu Tuitrit* few hundred years ago that led to depopulation is said to be the punishment received from their Guardian god *Pu Lungchungpa*.<sup>12</sup> They say the punishment was for the arrogant attitude and the selfishness of their chief at the time.<sup>13</sup> According to them, the village *Ahu Tuitrit* was divided into two viz. the rich and the poor by their chief who was cruel, selfish and arrogant. So, they celebrate their annual festivals at different places. But during one of their annual festivals of *Achui rin (Jarr rin)* there was heavy rainfall, in which they claimed that the entire area where the rich group celebrated their festival was suddenly swept away in the landslide killing them all, while the few poor groups who celebrated on the ridge survived. They say that their God had shown many signs and warnings to

their village chief but he did not pay them any heed. The present Central-cluster groups claim they are the descendants of the poor people who survived the tragedy.

**The Sign of the Makan Roof:** According to some of the Chothe elders of the Central cluster group, there was another mysterious event which took place in the early days. Accordingly they said that the roofs of all the Makan houses were blown away in one stormy night whereas the houses belonging to other clan members were not affected at all. They believed that it was a kind of ominous sign for the members of the Makan clan. After the incident they shifted the village to a nearby place, *Ahu Lunghor*.

**Ominous Signs of Wild Birds and Animals:** The Chothe believe that if any wild animal like a deer runs through the village or any strange wild bird enters a house it is considered as an ominous sign. When such an animal enters the village or a house its life is not spared because it might bring misfortune in the village and even death to the family. They regard such animals to be sent by the evil spirits as messengers to inspect whether the humans still inhabit the village or the house. They believed that if they let it go free or escape the evil spirits considers the village or the house uninhabited, and when they intrude the village or the house the villager or the family suffers from chaos and disturbances. Such ominous signs are seriously taken by the Chothe.

According to H. Thambaljao and Y. Tomalsing, “The first incident probably took place some three centuries ago when their forefathers settled near *Laimatol* hill range on the top of the western mountain. A deer ran through the middle of the village in the afternoon bewildered but later escaped to the other side after a chase. The deer looked frightened but they saw no hunter after it. However, they claimed that soon after the incident the village was attacked by the neighbouring Rongmei tribe”.

The second incident seems to occur in the present settlement (Lamlanghupi) many years ago when most men were away in the fields. A young deer ran through the village in the evening and escaped as the young youth who were untrained in hunting simply chased it away with sticks. Later, when the elders learnt about the escape they sensed some misfortune would soon befall them but they ignored it as mere coincidence. Within a few months the village had a general meeting in which a silly quarrel broke out between two young leaders because of an ideological conflict. They say this silly quarrel flared up into two rival lineage groups and slowly the tussled became a clan conflict where both sides were unwilling to compromise. Subsequently, the village was divided

into two rival parties irrespective of clan and lineage, and they began to celebrate the festivals separately, though they are now reunited.

According to H. Dimho (36/M) of Lamlanghupi, one rainy night a very strange wild bird flew inside his house in 2006. He was surprised to see the unusual strange bird and as he was about to chase it away, his eldest son five years old went and informed his grandfather. Soon he was ordered to capture the bird and call the village elders to discuss the reason of the bird's visit and also confirm the bird's identity. Dimho, who initially did not believe the various sorts of superstitions and taboos, and thinking that the bird accidentally happened to fly inside his house attracted by the light in his house and because of the rainy weather. Hearing various ominous stories he became sceptical again because he was in bad terms with his wife during at the time. As decided by the village elders, the bird was captured, killed and cooked. Then, the priest performed a simple rite *chathak-pepa* (feeding the gods) before lunch was served by offering a little piece of the bird's meat, rice and wine (*zu*) to the gods, and also seeking protection from whatever misfortune that would befall them and Dimho's family. He and his family members were forbidden from eating the bird's meat.

These Chothe elders, when asked about the logic behind why Dimho was forbidden from eating the bird's meat, said that whatever misfortunes would befall on him and his family members will be received by them, even death, with a belief that they are old and have lived long enough, but Dimho is still young, healthy and has children and he should still continue to live his life happily. In short the elders are taking the place of Dimho's fate for the matter. Such incidents confirmed their past ominous belief that the entry of wild animal in the village or wild bird inside the house brings them misfortune and disaster if they let it loose or allow it to escape. Therefore, the Chothe kill such wild animals.<sup>14</sup>

**The Ghost and the Dog:** The Chothe believe that dogs have the potential to see and sense the movement of the ghosts or spirits of the dead. So they consider howling and delving the soil by a dog at night an ominous sign. According to Mrs. Y. Atonsicha, if they notice a dog howling up in the air at night it means it can see some kind of ghost or a spirit roaming around the area, and delves the ground hunting for it as if it had disappeared at the spot. When such thing happens to a family's dog they consider that the ghost or evil spirit is trying to intimidate the dog with signs of misfortune, and delving the ground is taken as a symbol of digging a graveyard. Some families mix little of the delved soil in the dog's food so that the ghost will not be able convince the dog by

eating its own faeces. If the dog persists with the howling despite scaring off the ghost with some noise or fire or fire crackers some families consult sorcerer for divination and perform a ritual if necessary. But if the dog becomes worse, they kill it by letting its blood ooze in substitution for human life, like the *Anam kokna lethoi* (ritual to free from the suppression).

#### **4.5.ii Dreams**

Dreams are conceived as a sequence of images, sounds and feelings experienced while sleeping, strongly associated with Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep.<sup>15</sup> The contents and physiological purposes of dreams are not fully understood, though they have been a topic of speculation and interest throughout the world. Many people have sought meaning in dreams or divination through their dreams as a point of reference. This has been described physiologically as a response to neural processes during sleep, psychologically as reflections of the subconscious, and spiritually or religiously as messages from God predicting the future. Generally, dreams are also considered as prophetic or omens of particular significance. Many cultures practice dream incubation, with the intention of cultivating dreams that were prophetic or contained messages from the divine. For instance, the ancient Greeks constructed temples they called *Asclepieions*, where the sick were sent to be cured. It is believed that cure would be affected through divine grace by incubating dreams within the confinement of the temple. In ancient Egypt, priests also acted as dream interpreters. In the Holy Bible there are also incidents recorded where Joseph and Daniel acted as interpreters of dreams to the Egyptian kings as revealed to them by their God.<sup>16</sup>

The scientific study of dream is known as “Oneirology”. Science claims that a human spends a total of about six years dreaming during an average lifespan, which is about two hours each night. It is unknown where in the brain dreams originate. It has been hypothesized that dreams are the result of *dimethyltryptamine* (DMT) in the brain.<sup>17</sup>

It is said dream interpretation began as part of psychoanalysis at the end of the 19th century: the perceived, manifest content of a dream is analyzed to reveal its latent meaning to the psyche of the dreamer. Sigmund Freud (1900) in *The Interpretation of Dreams* made the first attempt of explaining the causes of dreams. But later Freud and Carl Jung identified dreams as an interaction between the unconscious and the conscious.<sup>18</sup> In 1976, J. Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley suggested a new theory that changed dream research, challenging the previously held Freudian view of dreams as unconscious wishes to be interpreted. The activation synthesis theory maintains that the

sensory experiences are fabricated by the cortex as a means of interpreting chaotic signals from the Pons. They propose that in REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the ascending cholinergic PGO (*ponto-geniculo-occipital*) waves stimulate higher midbrain and forebrain cortical structures, producing rapid eye movement.<sup>19</sup> The activated forebrain then synthesizes the dream out of this internally generated information. They assume that the same structures that induce REM sleep also generate sensory information.

Therefore, like many primitive societies of the world the Chothe also accept that dreams are messages from their divine God, ancestors, deceased relatives and friends. Some consider them a medium of conveying the problematic situation, a sign or warning about any misfortune that would soon befall either himself or someone related, while others view them as mere sub-consciousness from past experiences and deep thoughts. Depending on the nature of the dreams, they may be interpreted according to the essence of the dream and the rational perception on the basis of his belief and experiences. In this way, same dreams are sometime interpreted differently depending on one's perception. The root cause of dreams is still in speculation and it remains an unsolved mystery even today. Since there are innumerable dreams and their meanings vary from individual to individual often interpreted by their priests or village elders. For example, seeing house construction, flowing clean water, climbing over a hill in a dream are all considered a good sign while the opposite is bad or unlucky. Similarly, if one dreams of catching big silvery fish he will get money. Some of the respondent's dreams are:

M. Chongdin of Ajouhu village says that he still believes in divination and dreams even though he is a Christian now. He claims that, "Just before my sick brother died, I dreamt of my brother being handcuffed by some soldiers and taken away somewhere else. In the morning as I got up suspicious, just then a relative came and informed me that my brother had expired. So, I was asked to kindly visit the deceased's house at the earliest for the necessary ceremonies". Similarly, he also believes that if a wild cat captures and eats a fowl in his dream one of his relatives usually dies.

According to Kh. Khedon (85/M) of Khongkhang, "If I think about my jhum field and sleeps the night and dreams of a banana tree with three co-joined fruits, I would fetch a good harvest that particular year. But if I dream of making a rope, it indicates I have to go and clear the creepers in my jhum field. However, if I dream of a war it means that wild animals like monkeys and wild-boars are destroying my paddy or vegetables. Perhaps, if I dream that my jhum is being harvested by other people it is a sign of a bad harvest".

Kh. Hamunchou (68/M) of Chumbang said, “Each time I dreamt of one of my molar teeth falling, an elderly person happens to die”. According to him, if he has such a dream he is sure that on that day he will be informed about the death of his aged relatives either from afar or nearby. Another belief is that if he dreams of a big river or huge amount of clean water it indicates a lucky sign, or if any enterprise is undertaken on the day it prove successful. His dreams are common to many Chothe as he also believes that dreaming of clean water means auspicious sign and on the contrary dirty or murky water is inauspicious.

It is very obvious that most of the elders, even though they are Christian, still believe in ominous signs, while the younger generation, who are young with little experienced, are less bothered about such signs, omens and dreams.

#### **5.4.iii Curses**

Many Chothe elders still believe in a curse or generation curses. Curses like suicide, incest, marriage breaches, immature death, and other related problems are believed to come back or the curse returns again to the concerned family line at least seven times or seven generations until a proper forgiveness ritual is performed. Curses seem to occur even today among many of them in different forms since majority of them are Christians now. Such incidents today are considered as co-incidental events and the Chothe show no sign of interest in such matters now as they are more concerned with their present socio-economic condition rather than past events or incidents. The Chothe believe that the cause of their de-population now is due to a generation curse given to their forefathers in the past by neighbouring tribes and their Supreme God because of their notorious and reckless actions in misusing magical spells excessively on others in battles and wars.

For example many Chothe elders in line with their folktales believe that the first major plague that occurred in their country in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is considered the curse of an old widow who married a Moirang man. The story according to them is that, she came to visit her parent’s village in the Chothe kingdom but on her return journey to Moirang requested the youths who took her across the Loktak Lake in the boat to drop her till her house, but in spite of her repeated earnest requests the youths refused her plea considering that they were also late and as they would have to row the boat back to their village again. So, it seems the youths abandoned her at the bank of the Lake leaving her alone and find her own way home. They believe that the old widow regarded this very act seriously as disrespectful and humiliating to her and seemed to have cursed those

youths to lead a short life and die in the wilderness for their arrogance and selfishness. According to their folktale they believe that her curse came true as soon as she died when a sudden plague came and took thousands of Chothe lives in a short time. The subsequent plaques that occurred in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are also accepted by them as curses because of the devastation of natural calamities as they happened mostly to the Chothe.

## 5.5 Taboos

According to etymology, the word “Taboo” traces back to the Tongan *tapu* or the Fijian word *Tabu* meaning “under prohibition”, “not allowed” or “forbidden”. The word *taboo* drawn from *tapu* is said to have date back to 1777 A.D. as mentioned first by Captain James Cook, an English explorer on his visits to a friendly African Islands (Tonga).<sup>20</sup> A.R. Radcliffe-Brown gives us a better picture of the term which was first scientifically explained in an article, *Taboo* by James Frazer in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accordingly A.R. Radcliffe-Brown states that the English word “taboo” is derived from the Polynesian word “tabu” which simply means “to forbid or forbidden” and can be applied to any sort of prohibition. A rule of etiquette, an order issued by a chief, an injunction to children not to meddle with the possessions of their elders may all be expressed by the use of the word “tabu” (1972:73). Such a description is seen to be similar to many of the primitive societies of the world.

In Chothe, the term “taboo” may be understood as “Asei-asi” meaning “forbidden from doing evil/death things. It also means forbidden from doing - left side or even number”. Since, left side or even (numbers) are considered bad from the perspective of favourable and unfavourable sides, numbers or directions. It signifies prohibition of doing any bad or evil things for fear of misfortune like death or decay. So, the term *asei-asi* is refer to any unusual action or behaviour that prohibits or forbids or restricts certain actions that could proved death or left or even or wrong side of life. For example, touching a corpse, harming or stealing certain sacred deity’s object, kicking an elder, etc. For Chothe, according to H. Thambaljao disrespect to elders like kicking or insulting especially to a maternal uncle is considered a serious socio-religious taboo, and a curse by him is said to a have direct effect and is manifested upon his grandchildren with physical deformation. If a child is born with some deformity, is considered a curse from the forefathers or grandparents for certain unpleasant reasons. Therefore, folk-courtesy is highly valued and practiced among the Chothe. Taboo can be classified as religious taboo and social taboo with respect to the nature of one’s action. For example, a person,

not a priest performing a ritual or deconsecrating the deity's object is considered as religious taboo with a belief that certain misfortune, bad luck, illness or even death could befall them, while certain actions that negate or demoralise the social norms, is considered as social taboo. According to them social taboo specifically refers to the do's and don'ts according to acceptability and unacceptability of their societal norms, like incest or breach of lineage marriage.

Sigmund Freud (1950), describes in his essay, *Totem and Taboo* a link between forbidden behaviours and the sanctification of objects to certain kinship groups. He also states the only two universal taboos viz.; incest and patricide, which form the eventual basis of modern society.<sup>21</sup> This is no doubt incest, patricide and homicide, etc. are universal taboos. Alfred L. Kroeber said that Freud's thesis proposes that certain psychic processes tend to be always operative and finds expression in wide-spread human institutions. Among these processes would be the incest drive and incest repression, filial ambivalence and the like (1972: 25).

Religious taboos are rules that strictly prohibit anyone from acting against their religious doctrine or performing any kind of ritual at their sacred-grove other than the assigned village priest or assistant or the approved sorcerers, without prior permission. Urinating and defecating near sacred places is religious taboo. Touching a corpse and spelling a deceased's name are considered taboo. It is forbidden to eat or drink or bring in anything inside the house without washing or bathing or smoking the fire when one touches a corpse. It is religious taboo for Chothe to cut or burn a banyan tree for fear of misfortune. It is a religious taboo for the villagers to venture out of the village on the *Lamleh thoipa* (*panthong iratpa*) a *genna* or village ritual; it is also taboo for the members of the family to move outside the house during the family ritual like *Thawai-kokpa*. However, there are seven main socio-religious taboos which the Chothe people observe on the specific *Lamleh thoipa* ritual day. They are:

1. *Lajek* – prohibition of weaving or starting a loom for a new cloth,
2. *Shangjek* - prohibition of rice plantation,
3. *Neemjek* – prohibition of Neem (a kind of yeast plant) plantation,
4. *Abaijek* – prohibition of yam plantation,
5. *Ithingjek* – prohibition of ginger plantation,
6. *Ishanjek* – prohibition of turmeric plantation and,
7. *Annajek* – prohibition of any vegetables.

It signifies that the members of the village should not engage in any social activity on this specific day for fear of serious misfortune, though these taboos have

become lenient due to change in time. Apart from this discussion there are innumerable socio-religious taboos and superstitious beliefs practiced by the Chothe which are partly described in the 'rite-de-passage' in the following chapter.

**The Miscarriage of a Woman:** The Chothe strongly forbid a woman from eating bee larvae or crabs and half hatched eggs during her pregnancy because they believe that she would suffer from miscarriage. This belief applies even to pregnant bitches and pigs too. They claim this taboo cannot be ignored as seen from their experiences.

If a man or woman dies an unnatural death like committing suicide by hanging (*lui-jand*) or dies in wilderness is synonymously known as "lamthi" meaning, died outside or in wildernesses. The Chothe prohibits bringing of such unnatural dead bodies neither inside the village nor his house and also forbid the burial in their common cemetery. They are buried separately outside the village boundary because they believe that if buried close by or in the same village cemetery, the souls from such an unnatural deaths continue to haunt the village, and the same thing occurs again in the family line, generation after generation like a chain-reaction. Therefore, no matter whether the person has a good or bad record in his lifetime he is buried separately outside the village cemetery. Extra rituals like; purification of the house, purification of the village area and a special rite to confirm his death are performed accordingly by the village priest, so that such an incident will not occur on his family/lineage and in the village again.

According to Y. Chongkan of Khongkhang, his village authority prohibits any person keeping his newly constructed house vacant or unoccupied for many days or months after completion for fear of misfortune. Therefore, one is asked to inaugurate the new completed house at the earliest within two months or at least make fire everyday inside until one occupies it. Their belief is that the evil spirits or ghosts that roam around the village might occupy and later claim and take control of the house and his family, and the conflict might result in someone's death.

## **5.6 Ghosts and the Spirits**

The Chothe believe in the existence of benevolent and malevolent ghosts or spirits. The ghosts or spirits are considered as the dead men's souls who are unable to reach the land of god (Heaven) or the land of the dead (Hell) and are believed to be stuck temporarily in the land of the Middle-world (*Leihu lamjai lam*). They classify the spirits as benevolent and malevolent spirits. Those that are good, approachable and helpful connected with socio-economic life are generally considered as benevolent spirits, while

those that are mischievous, harmful, cruel, destructive and evil in nature are considered as malevolent spirits. The Chothe believe that the soul of a man transforms into a ghost or a spirits only when one dies. Many consider some of the benevolent ghosts as their ancestors who still live in the middle-world and are not immortalised as gods yet, but protected by the Heavenly God. The Chothe consider that some of their ancestor's spirits lived in the middle-world as spirits or ghosts for certain periods up to two/three generations before they are completely immortalised as gods. But many say such benevolent ancestor's spirits do not stay for long in the middle-world after the final rituals and ceremonies are performed for them, otherwise they prolong their stay unsatisfied and even cause trouble to the concerned family and they can be reached by specialised priests consulting their regrets or grievances. This indigenous perception is similar with the Christian belief. Since, the Roman Catholic observe a special prayer day for all departed souls as, "All souls day" on 2<sup>nd</sup> November every year. Elizabeth Colson also describes that the Tonga people term their ancestor spirits as *Mizimu* who act as the agents of sorcerers between ghosts and mankind, dependable on living, not independent like malevolent ghosts who cause evil. They are mostly kinship members and help only the kin groups and even choose their own descendants to give their names to (1972: 484-85).

In Chothe, the dual concept of soul (*thawai*) and spirit or ghost (*bhoot*) is that the 'soul' inhabits the living body, while the 'spirit' exists outside the individual's body, usually after death. The concept is that, the soul has a home (body) but the spirit is homeless like an orphan, therefore, it wanders from place to place and sometimes even tries to communicate with people or they haunt the people. The perimeter between the two is such that whenever a man dies his or her soul either goes straight to Heaven or Hell according to one's life performances on earth. But the soul that cannot enter either is stuck in the middle-world and becomes a ghost known as *bhoot* or spirit of the dead (*athi thawai*). Often such ghosts or spirits that exist are equated with unnatural death (*Lamthi*) one that dies in the wilderness or outside the village. According to T.C. Das the most prolific source from which evil spirits have been and are still being derived, is unnatural death (1945: 201). Certain such spirits are captured and used as sorcerers by the professional priests and priestesses who consult them during divination to reveal or prophesy the secret activities of others.

The Chothe believe the ghosts or spirits that one often sights, meets or hears about at a specific place are usually connected with some kind of mysterious unnatural or premature death like a tragic accident, fire, drowning, and parturition or killed by wild

animals. H. Thambaljao, Y. Maipak, Miss. H. Hoirei and many others claim to have sighted or met different types of spirits or ghosts. They consider the wandering spirits who harmless as benevolent, while the spirits or ghosts that are mischievous are treated as malevolent like *theinompa*, *lamhel*, *Suttrai*, *Cheijunpa* and many unknown ghosts. Generally these malevolent ghosts are believed to have existed long before, under similar fate, and the cause of their death cannot be established. The Chothe have a way of identifying the mischievous spirits as male or female by the nature and type of their actions and targets. According to them, female spirits/ghosts often target children, young boys and handsome men, and the male ghost targets women and young girls. Their habitat area is often identified as a haunted area because people sighting such ghosts or spirits at odd hours, especially on cloudy nights around marshy areas or places where vehicles frequently break down, accident prone areas or empty houses. These malevolent ghosts may cause illness and even death if one rebuke or threaten them. John Middleton similarly points out that the Lugbara, an African tribe constructed shrines for their ancestors and any disrespect shown to them could collectively send sickness to the living, and are said to do so if offended by lack of respect and consideration by their descendants (1972: 489). However, Melford E. Spiro speaking from the sociological perspective says that the *Ifaluk* of the Central Carolines (Micronesia) who fear and have anxiety of their malevolent ghosts (*alus*) for bringing ill-luck or sickness, which makes them dysfunctional in their society has a latent function, manifested in the form of social order from being aggressive and misbehaving within their society (1972:479-82).

Out of 200 respondents both followers of the indigenous faith and Christian as many as 114 (i.e. 57%) of them claimed to believe in the existence of ghosts or spirits and 86 (i.e. 43%) indicated that they did not believe in such things (see Table 17). Here too, number of respondents in proportion to the age-groups who say “No” are more with the youths than with the other two age-groups of mature adults and village elders who say “Yes”.

**Table 19 Chothe respondents who believe in the existence of ghost and spirits**

Category	Youths (20-40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percentage
	M	F	M	F	M	F		
<b>Yes</b>	21	12	36	9	30	6	<b>114</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>No</b>	35	10	27	5	9	-	<b>86</b>	<b>43%</b>
	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

H. Thambaljao says that, “In early days our village area was filled with bushes and shrubs. One evening in 1938 when I was a young boy I saw shrubs fighting like bulls in the pasture behind our village while looking for my cows and buffaloes. I was so petrified and amazed to see those shrubs fighting, where I can even hear the sound of the bull’s horns clashing. Out of curiosity I went closer to have a look, and they began to move further and later faded and disappeared. But when I reached the spot I saw the shrubs plants in their places”. In addition he also says he often experienced a baby’s cries in marshy or bushy areas around the village and sand thrown by the spirits from the road side, sighting of fire-balls near the river side and mountains. Some of the common malevolent spirits or ghosts known by Chothe are:

***Theinompa (The Ghost that Hurls Granules):*** According to Chothe this mischievous spirit teases people by throwing granules or sand at passersby from some bushy place and the victims are especially young people who are ignorant and fickle minded. They believe if such a ghost/spirit persists with this, one can cast or chase it away from the area if one can collect his granules in a piece of cloth and fry them in a pot. The important rule is that one should go straight home, not talk to any passerby even if he knows them until he fries the granules and finishes his deal with the ghost. If carried out accordingly they believe the ghost will follow and beg for the granules or pebbles even by knocking on the door until they are returned. If such a situation takes place one is asked to compromise and threaten the ghost/spirits not to harm or do any mischievous things to him or his family members in the near future and also to relocate itself or face dire consequences. Then, only after the ghost agrees to the deal one can throw away the granules outside the house. But, it is also warned that if one does not return the spirit’s granules the spirit will come haunting and frequently disturb the family. They also say that such ghosts do not enter the house or mosquito nets for fear of being trapped. The story reflects that if one is fearless one can overcome such ghosts or spirits.

***Lamhel:*** This forest or jungle spirits guard particular forest area and it is believed that a simple appeasement rite has to be performed before any person uses the land for jhum farming, otherwise it is said the field will not bear fruit. To find out whether the area is favourable or not a divination is consulted for signs. It is also believed that if a person dares him while travelling in the deep forest he will mislead the person and the person will get lost by the hallucinating magical power. The wife of this spirit is called Sarui, commonly known as Sarui-lamhel (See also, Das 1945: 192).

**Lamtaipa:** Another notorious forest spirit that wanders aimlessly in the deep forest near the gorges or the river side is *Lamtaipa*. In early days the Chothe performed this annual ritual *Lamtaipa* to this spirit (gods) in the month of Inga (June-July) as described by T.C. Das in connection with a legendary story of two missing persons, *Angte and Ansu*, who went to the forest and never returned home (1945:193). This annual ritual is also known as *tuihoipa (tuikuk-thingkuk)*, where only the village council members went down to the main village river or stream and sacrificed a pig. After offertory they prepare and eat the meat and then returned to the village.

**Suttrai:** The spirit of a woman or a child who dies during parturition is called *suttrai*, meaning 'crazy vagina'. But this often refers to a loose charactered woman or a prostitute and it is believed that the aborted child or infant died especially due to the lady's promiscuous behaviour. They are buried outside the village common cemetery since their deaths are considered unnatural; the existence of such spirits can be identified at specific village areas by a baby's cry, especially in the evening or at dusk. When one hears such a baby's cry one can hear only the echo of the cry and nothing else. Perhaps, if one gets closer to the place where the baby's cry comes from, the cry automatically echoes from another place or direction, confusing people. The Chothe believe if the spirit/ghost is a woman who longs for her child then, she normally make an appearance dressed in white, especially on cloudy nights.

**Cheijunpa:** It refers to a kind of spirit that throws a stick from a bushy place up in the air where one can only hear the noise like of a bamboo stick being thrown making a sound but one can never see it with the naked eye. They say it occurs at any time of the day or night, and if the stick strikes a person, the spot becomes black and terribly painful.

**Tingtricknu:** It is identified as an elf or witch that lives around thick bushy or stream areas and catches a person that comes near her territory by hallucinating. They are known for their mischievous tricks of kidnapping and hiding people and making the person look stupid and ridiculous. Numerous Chothe folktales also describe that the jungle elf or witches feeds the captured and seduced one with various types of worms and insects hallucinated by the witch's magic appear as delicious meat items.

**Helloi:** The seven sister witches or elves are called as *helloi*. The youngest sister of the seven elves is considered to be the prettiest and most beautiful. They mainly inhabit places like a stream sides, bushes, dense forests, huge trees and marshy areas. It is said they roam during the day time. Perhaps, if they happen to see any man wandering alone around their territory they often dupe him with their illusionary magical power, trap him and feed the victim worms and insects which are enjoyed by the victim who imagines them to be delicacies like meat and fish. But such victims are said to appear as if they are suffering from some mental or psychological disorder. So, sometimes the Chothe are afraid to marry girls who have seven sisters.

**Lam-meithanpi:** In early days when the population was low and the jungle was dense, it was believed that many fireballs appeared at night at strange places around the river-side or mountain cleavages. These 'fireball spirits' were known as *Lam-meithanpi*. Though science claims these to be methane gases but many who have seen them closely still disregard the hypotheses.

**The Banyan Tree of Khongkhang:** During my field trips to Khongkhang village I inquired from Y. Neisim (29/M) why most of the villagers are scared to go near their banyan tree grown at their playground at night? This question was raised as one of my friends warned me not to go to that place as it was haunted. After much persuasion, Neisim reluctantly said that according to his elders, the place seems to be the spot where human sacrifices were carried out in early days as they found many human heads around the tree when the playground was levelled with a bull-dozer. The elders thought the heads belonged to the Japanese soldiers who marched from Myanmar (Burma) during the Second World-War. He further said that many strange things used to happen around the area, and even Rev. Namhatlung of the Liangmei tribe who is considered a visionary told them that the banyan tree was owned by a male evil spirit. It is believed that the spirit often comes out at night, and dupes and mesmerize boys when they see any girl alone (irrespective of biological relation) who comes out to fetch water or for dating or for other purposes. The boy or a man being possessed by the evil spirit easily seduces the girl often leading to forced sex or rape. In such kind of incidents the boy and the girl are forced to marry. But in consanguineal/cognate cases, the boy is punished with a fine of a pig or a cow for the crime committed, thereby resulting in serious family conflicts for the breach of marriage rules or illegitimate marriage, not believing the spirit is the sole cause for such incidents.

Besides these common malevolent spirits or ghosts mentioned above there are several nameless spirits which the villagers' identify according to their mischievous nature and particular appearances. The new spirits spotted around the village or at some specific places are usually identified with that of a person who recently died of unnatural causes. Rituals are performed accordingly if need be or if identified by the relatives so that the deceased's soul rests in peace.

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### *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> E-Pao.Net [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangla\\_Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangla_Palace). Accessed on: 17/6/2009

<sup>2</sup> *Swearing at the deity's site*: Many Chothe irrespective of whether Christian or non-Christian still firmly believes that if any guilty person made a false promise both the accused and the accuser at their deities' site or sacred-grove in the their Supreme Guardian God's name *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa*, then the guilty will not survive long after the swearing. My informants Pr. Roushi and Y. Lungle said that many neighbouring Meitei of Waikhong after swearing at their sacred-grove of old Ajouhu (Purum Khullen) settlement, the guilty suffers from severe illnesses, some are cripple, others even paralysed and others died within few months.

<sup>3</sup> See, *Lamleh lethoi*, the village gate ritual and the *lou-houpa lethoi* in the benedictory invocation ceremony, in the following chapter.

<sup>4</sup> *Totem Animals*: (<http://www.crystalinks.com/totemanimals.html> ) Dated: 19/8/08

<sup>5</sup> *Animal Totem Power*: Discover Your Animal Totem Symbol Introduction written by StarStuffs © [http://www.starstuffs.com/animal\\_totems](http://www.starstuffs.com/animal_totems) Dated: 19/9/08.

<sup>6</sup> *Legends of America*: A Travel Site for the Nostalgic & Historic Minded (American legends: Native American Totems & Their Meanings), Copyright © 2003-2008, [www.Legends of America.com](http://www.Legends of America.com). Dated:19/8/08

<sup>7</sup> *Superstition*: (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superstition>. Dated: 10-11-2008).

<sup>8</sup> Good luck - bad luck, Superstitions and sayings of unknown origin (April 1861). Customs, Lore and Legend of Other Clare Days: Superstitious Beliefs and Charms ([http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/beliefs\\_charms.htm](http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/beliefs_charms.htm)). Dated: 10-11-2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Superstition*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superstition>. This page was last modified on 5 November 2008, at 14:03. Dated: 10-11-2008).

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<sup>10</sup> Good luck - bad luck, Superstitions and sayings of unknown origin (April 1861). Customs, Lore and Legend of Other Clare Days: Superstitious Beliefs and Charms ([http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/beliefs\\_charms.htm](http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/beliefs_charms.htm)) Dated: 10-11-2008.

<sup>11</sup> The identity of the queen or the owner of this gold ear-ring cannot be ascertained till date base on the history of Manipur some of them are of the view that it could be either the wife of King Chingthang Khompa or Chandrakriti of Manipur as they frequently visit the Kabaw valley of Myanmar in early days.

<sup>12</sup> *Ahu Tuitrit*: village settlement no. 53 mentioned in *Chothe Golden Jubilee Souvenir* 2002.

<sup>13</sup> They claimed that their ancestors were great warriors in olden days and are very cruel, ruthless and merciless towards their enemies during their raids and plunders. They also claimed to have baffled their enemies and escaped many times with their powerful magic by letting their drum and gong beat itself whenever their enemies made surprised attack to their villages when they settle in the south-western regions. Some considered because of their cruelty and arrogance attitudes their population was reduce to minority as punished by their god.

<sup>14</sup> However, this particular Chothe belief is contradictory to the Mao's belief. According to P. Lokho Savio of Kaibi village and Heshu Aji, the Mao forbids killing such bird or animal that entered the house on the basis of their myth and on humanity ground. According to them, the Mao considers such bird or animal as their relatives seeking help and protection from human friends as they have escaped from their enemies or evil spirits. Accordingly both claimed such wild bird or animal appeared sickly or frightened. Unlike the Chothe, the Mao's released such bird or animal to a safe place after treating them well or healing the wounds if any.

<sup>15</sup> *Dream*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream>)  
Date: 10-11-2008.

<sup>16</sup> *Dream interpretation*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream\\_interpretation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream_interpretation)) Date: 10-11-2008.

<sup>17</sup> *Dream*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream>)  
Date: 10-11-2008.

<sup>18</sup> *Dream interpretation*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream\\_interpretation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream_interpretation)) Date: 10-11-2008.

<sup>19</sup> *Dream*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream>)  
Date: 10-11-2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Taboo*: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboo>).  
Dated: 24/4/2009.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CHOTHE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

All religious beliefs are constructed on the foundation of myths, legends and experiences in which the symbolic elements are represented and manifested in the practice of socio-religious observances, rites and rituals, ceremonies, doctrines, *genna*, taboos, norms, mores and even folkways that are significantly called as religious practices. In short, religious practice means certain actions or behaviour or character of a person or group that conforms in accordance to one's religious principles, other than socio-cultural activities. For example, E. Durkheim says rites and ritual's that are "religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; rites are a manner of acting which takes rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups", who re-emphasises that "rites are the rules of conduct which prescribes how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (1915: 10, 41). But when one talks of ritual sacrifice, Raymond Firth says "sacrifice is ultimately a personal act, a giving of the self or a part of the self represented or symbolised by various types of material objects that have social significance or value or the implication will be that the self is trivial or worthless" (1972: 332). Man being a religious and cultural individual begins his life journey right after he is born as a member of the society till his last breath, which is plainly understood as, "rites-de-passage" where his sojourn in this world is filled with various rites and ceremonies irrespective of which religion or culture he belongs to. Generally, almost every society has similar pattern of rites of passage but at micro level the practicality and technicality in its operation varies from one society to another. The rites, rituals, offerings and sacrifices on the other hand are seen as formal practice of appeasing gods and goddess with offerings and sacrifices by human beings who negotiates or bargains with the gods for an exchange to free the troubled soul from bondages.

#### **6.1 Rites-de-passage (Birth, Initiation Rite, Marriage and Death Ceremonies)**

The Chothe, even today on the basis of their myth and legend still practice many of their indigenous customs and traditions unlike some of their kindred communities of Kuki-Chin-Mizo or the Naga-Kuki speaking groups in particular, and any indigenous

communities of the world like the American-Indians in general whose socio-religious cultures are disappearing every day. No doubt, the Chothe religious elements of beliefs and practices are also disappearing in a similar trend like many indigenous communities of the world because of the evangelisation process and proselytisation to Christianity, besides other forces of change that delve into the society. Many underdeveloped and developing communities from North-eastern region of India, the Native America Indians and the Negro Africans are some of the worst affected communities of the world that cannot completely resist the phenomenal forces of Christianity, modernisation, globalisation and become the victim de-generating their indigenous age-old culture to paralysis. Therefore, the people of this region are passing through transitional period where the forces of change are threatening the very survival of their indigenous culture. The advancement of science and technological has brought about developmental opportunities and magnetising the people to a new cultural lifestyle which majority aspire for it, on the other hand, it is the cost and the difficulties in maintaining their distinctive age-old traditions, culture, values and identity that they have been practicing for many generations. So, some traditionalists view that the propaganda propagated by the new modern cultural groups for the advancement of the civilization is rather destroying their age-old religion, traditions and cultural values to an irreparable state and so they stress on the importance of preserving such cultural values. This chapter focuses on the *Religious practices* starting with the *rites of passages*, reveals differences between indigenous and modern practices, and how, like many indigenous tribes of the world, the Chothe have compromised their indigenous attitudes, customs and traditions to suit the modern lifestyle because change is an inherently inevitable process that has crept into their society. The first part of the study describes the socio-religious practices systematically in accordance to their beliefs, and the second part is the discourse on the subject provided by Chothe village elders, senior citizens and youth.

### **6.1.i Birth: Child Delivery Method**

According to the Chothe, a woman is traditionally forbidden from killing any kind of creature, eating certain kinds of food like bee larvae, crabs and immature eggs. She is refrained from doing any kind of heavy work during the later stage of her pregnancy for fear of miscarriage. At the time of her delivery, she is assisted by midwives, her aunts and also the husband if demanded. The woman usually takes her preferred position in the middle of the house, either by bending on her knees like a

quadruped or lying backward with knees raised on the mat and covered with some cloth. But now many prefer to give birth on the bed or in the hospital in similar positions.

If a woman faces any problem during child delivery it is believed to be caused by a malevolent or evil spirit by holding back the baby. So, the priest (*theimpu*) or priestess (*theimpi*) or any elder who knows the simple incantation or prayer performs the appeasement rite “Noukham butha/chathak” (lit. food for the gods that block the placenta) to the Sun and Moon gods at the earliest. If not, they believe the mother or the child would die. According to them the child would be released by the evil spirit and the woman would give birth only after offering some sweets or eatables to the gods. It is observed that the Meitei also perform this appeasement rite (*Noukham butha*) in many of the state’s hospitals at a secluded place just before a woman gives birth so that no complication arises. Similarly, Gilhodes says the Kachin of Upper Burma also invokes the domestic *Nats* (gods) and orders a *dumsa* (priest) to sacrifice whatever is desirable during child delivery (1922: 176). The simple incantation of the placenta appeasement rite addressed to the Sun and Moon gods is given below as provided by Chongdin Marim of Ayouhu which is similar to T.C. Das description (1945: 228). Below is the free translation of the simple incantation:

“*Ninu suk-heckta shuk-o, Thapa suk-heckta suk-o,  
Sunu lamham no-o, shapa lamham no-o,  
Toukniya wonchoi mashanu api mulluno-o...*”

(Come out like the Sun rises,  
Come out like the Moon rises,  
Women do not stop dancing; men do not stop dancing,  
Oh, grandmother, one who first touched a woman’s stomach once upon a  
time, hide not the baby anymore...).

***Noupham Phumpa Rite:*** In olden days once a baby was born the umbilical cord called *Lai* was immediately cut by a sharp bamboo piece and tied with a thread. Soon the mid-wife would hold the baby by the legs, upside down, and hit it on the back so that the baby takes a deep breath and cries aloud. The Chothe believe that the louder the baby cries the wider lung expands and the healthier the baby grows. However, many Chothe now use a sterilized knife or blade to cut the umbilical cord. According to *noupham phumpa* tradition the placenta is put in a small earthen pot (one litre a size) and is buried inside the house at the side of the main entrance normally by the father of the child. Even

today this is practiced irrespective of religion. The placenta of baby boy is buried in the right, south side and if it is a girl on the left north side, the direction taken from inside the house. The Chothe believe that if the pit is shallow the person will have a shallow mind so the pit is as deep as a man's elbow (*khut-tang*). This simple traditional ceremony of burying the placenta (*noupham phumpa*) is the first and most important socio-religious ceremony of a child. It is learnt that many indigenous communities of North-east India too practice the same custom. Even if a child is born in a hospital the placenta is brought and buried in the same customary manner. But because of the modern concrete floors and Christianity some of them bury it outside the house at a secluded corner. According to them, the logic behind this socio-religious custom is that even when the child grows up and happens to lose his way or strays in the deep forest he will definitely return home, since they have buried his/her placenta which has strong attachment with him considering as part of his soul. The Meitei also bury the placenta outside the house, on the north, left side if it is a boy, and to the south or right side if a girl.

Traditionally, the newly born baby and the mother are forbidden to go outside the house until the house purification ceremony is done because they believe that the woman is ritually unclean and the child without a name might be harmed by witches and evil spirits.

### **6.1.ii The Child's Naming Ceremony**

The child naming ceremony is observed on the third day of birth, and is one of the most indispensable customs of the Chothe as it is the first initiation ceremony of the child into the society by giving him a name or an identity as a member of the group. There are three basic rites involved; the first being "ming bohpa" meaning, 'naming of the child' performed outside the house. The second part is known as "tong-theina" meaning 'to develop speaking' which is held inside the house, and the third or last one is known as "inn-thingpa" literally, 'purification of the house' conducted both inside and outside the house. Traditionally, this *inn-thingpa* ceremony is done on the ninth day if the child is a girl, and if it is a boy on the tenth day. This day should not be confused with the naming ceremony that is held on the third day. John Shakespeare has briefly written on the Chothe naming ceremony in the early twentieth century and this system has not changed much. He writes that, "Among the Chawte, the *theimpu* attends on the day of the birth and sacrifices a fowl and sips *zu*. He then, mutters incantations over a piece of turmeric which is then thrown out of the house. On the third day a fowl is killed,

and as the name selected is pronounced three grains of rice are dropped into a cup of water, and if they sink the name is approved, but if they float another one must be selected and tested in the same manner” (Shakespeare1912: 161).

**Selection of the Child’s Name:** The Chothe are very careful in choosing a child’s name for fear of that the child will not live a long life. They believe that if they give an incompatible or unsuitable name like an ancestor’s or of a recently deceased grandparent’s name to a child, the child will not survive long, even if one lives it is expected he will lead an unhealthy and unhappy life. In such cases the child is renamed again. For such reasons, at least three names are selected especially by the surviving grandparents or related elders, first from the names of three or four generations old deceased grandparents whom they knew had lived a long prosperous life and new meaningful names were also carefully chosen and given to the children. The importance of this child naming ceremony is seen in the seriousness and the obligation, and the essential items required for the ceremony. The items are like; a miniature of bamboo basket (*piepie*), goat’s stool (*akae aek*), rat’s stool (*aju aek*), banyan leaves (*bungpi-bu*), a kind of wild turmeric (*idao*), nine pieces of very good red grains (*chisai shan aku*), white stream of thread (*la-lui angou*), winnow (*barei*), if it is a boy a traditional shawl (*awa-ampi pun*), a symbolic small bow and arrows (*phei*) and a spear (*shei*). For a girl a traditional girl’s sarong (*nik*) and a certain kind of beads of a rare fruit seed worn as necklace (*theiru*), a tub with little water, a fowl and wine (*zu*).

Besides, the essential items required for the ceremony, the presence of two elderly persons i.e. *Mapu-mapi* (lit. grandparents) is indispensable who symbolically represent as the “god’s parents” on such special child naming ceremony. *Mapu* is represented by the maternal grandfather or uncle (child mother’s grandfather or father or eldest mother’s brother/maternal uncle) and *Mapi* is represented by the paternal grandmother or aunty (child father’s grandmother or father’s mother or preferably eldest sister/aunty). It is important for the child’s parents to invite such persons and receive blessings from them as god’s parents on behalf of the Almighty Gods. It is also great privilege for two distinguished persons to be invited, to rejoice the birth of a grandchild; the maternal grandfather brings a bottle of *zu* and a rooster if he is a boy and a hen if it is a girl. This tradition is an obligatory in Chothe custom which is related to their *genealogical myth* that has logical implication with the death ceremony. But in certain

cases, if the paternal grandmother cannot avail herself she recommends or suggests an aged paternal grandmother or aunt, it also applies to the maternal grandfather/uncle.

If the third day is inauspicious for the naming ceremony it is normally conducted on the fifth day of the appointed auspicious morning as mentioned by Shakespeare (1912: 161). After the child is given bath, the 'paternal aunt' sits on the south of the northern side of the veranda facing north, holding the child in her lap, directing the child's face towards east. While the *theimpu* sits on the north, opposite to the child and winnow with all the items placed in the middle, adjacent to it is the water tub. Before the priest begins the main ceremony all the waste materials outside the house premises are thrown away by muttering some words called "lou-houpa" meaning, 'throwing wasted medicines'. A similar rite of benediction is carried out on the invocation day of the main festival. As soon as he returns, he makes *idou* necklace and puts it on the child's neck and begins conjuring spirits as he offers *zutin* (fermented rice beer). Then, out of nine red rice grains, he takes three of and places them carefully on his right palm in a triangular shape, and then he invokes "Maraampa" (the lot's charm for the first selected name of the child) after which he instantly drops down the grains into the water-tub. The last part of *Maraampa* incantation goes like, "*maraaam, maraaam ma-oh, thinkpu thinkpi tumma tuisharui-o...*" meaning, *maraaam maraaam ma-oh*, grandfather and grandmother of all ancestors let's go down. The priest repeats this twice with the other two selected names in the same manner. The red rice grains that formed perfect triangle inside the water-tub are selected and chosen as the most suitable and favourable name for the child. Thirdly, the priest mutters the charm for each rite of "tha-tepa" (counting of the months), followed by "kum tepa" (counting of the years), then he finally performs "pun-junpa" (throwing /casting the cloth) where he slightly throw or drops down a shawl on the boy (see Pic.19). But if it is a girl a sarong or longyi is used. Thus, he blesses the child and chooses the child's name.

The significance of the *idou* (wild turmeric) worn around the baby's neck by the priest is to protect the child from the malevolent or evil spirits. The miniature bow and arrows (*phei*) and spear (*shei*) symbolise the weapons of a male child who will grow up to be a great warrior. They also believe in the potential to protect against the evil eye or other black magic. Therefore, if it is a boy, the *phei* is hung outside the house beneath the roof on the north or left side of the house after the rite, and if it is a girl on the south or right side. The *piepie* is a kind of small carrying basket type specially made from a particular herb plant that symbolises a stretcher or coffin. According to them even if he

dies his dead body and soul will remain safe in the basket from being eaten by wild animals or being scattered and will be treated as unnatural death.

The second part of the ritual ceremony is carried out inside the house called “*tong-theina*” meaning, ‘to develop speaking’. In this ceremony; a little chutney (*mashipoi*) with a *cheiche* (V - shaped bamboo strip) is placed on the banana leaf, fermented rice beer (*zutin*), little cooked rice, the chicken’s liver, head, wings and thighs are all set on the winnow. The parent’s chicken and the maternal grandfather’s chicken are cut and prepared separately according to *saram-ngaram* (traditional method of equal distribution).<sup>1</sup> When the curries are cooked the parents’ chicken selected menu are placed above the maternal grandfather’s chicken items in a “*tai-che*” (a small storage basket). After the paternal aunt sits near *phamleh* with the baby and the priest sits on the opposite side, then the priest begins the ceremonial rite with *tongkaipa*, the invocation and offering of wine to their gods and also to their ancestors seeking blessing upon the child. He then, first take the parent’s chicken liver with little rice and mutters by touching the child’s chin with it as if feeding and throwing away. He does this again with the maternal grandfather’s chicken liver and thereby, blesses and wishes the child to grow up healthy and also develop speaking by re-assuring with the chosen name by simultaneously pouring a little *zuting* three times above the bulging tomb where the placenta (*noupham*) was buried, to their gods for each of them (father, mother and child) and saying, “this is the shared meat of the father, the mother and the child...” (*henana mapa tum, manu tum and ashanou tum...*). Later the placenta tomb floor is mopped and levelled. The priest concludes the second ceremonial rite with *tongkaipa* prayer followed by the *zurum*.

However, when this *tong-theina* ceremony is over the family offers *zu* to the priest and “*tokana*” (fee for the service rendered) and an informal discussion follows. The *tokana* or money is offered on a piece of banana leaf by any family member on behalf of the child, then the priest rubs the person’s head and blesses the child after which the priest collects the money and tears off the banana leaf into pieces and throws it outside as it is a taboo to leave it inside the house. The maternal uncle and the paternal aunt too receive this *tokana* and follow suit. Depending upon the family’s desire and economic status they might provide common lunch or invite only close relatives like modern birthday celebration. However, another cultural religious significance is that as a courtesy the paternal grandmother should be the first person to leave the house, who is escorted by two youths up to her house, and when the two youths return, they escort the maternal uncle and finally the village priest. Each of them is sent along with a package

containing little *zuting*, cotton and uncooked rice called “maypoi” meaning, ‘blindness remover’ (to protect from blindness), which is carried in a big carrying basket (*lan*). The paternal aunt on reaching her house, from the veranda, rubs her eyes with the cotton and conjures “Oh, great grandfather... let me not be blinded and be victim of falling teeth...” (*Oh, pu thou-o... mit-jing, ha-jing pino-o de...*). Then she throws the *meruk* backwards (a small measurement basket) that contains the things after which she gives her blessing and best wishes to the two youths for a long and prosperous life for their kindness to drop her, and also conveys her blessing again for the child and to the family. Inside her house she performs the last *tongkaipa* with the *zutin* provided by the child’s parents. Similarly, the maternal uncle and the village priest follow suit. Thus, the formal child naming ceremony is complete.

***Inn-thingpa* Rite:** The child naming ceremony is followed by “*Inn-thingpa*” meaning, ‘cleansing or purification of the house’ on the ninth day if it is a girl and on the tenth day if it is a boy. The ceremony begins early in the morning before the sun rises. The ancient term for *inn-thingpa* is known as *machampa* (to neutralise) the house. Though the terms are different they carry the same meaning of ritual cleansing and nullifying from any external effects. Two chickens are required for *inn-thingpa* or *machampa*, one provided by the child’s parents is strangled and used in divination of *Ai-ke jan anpa* (divination of chicken’s leg overlapping) and the fowl is prepared inside the house. The other fowl provided by the maternal uncle along with a bottle of *zu* (wine), is killed and prepared outside the house as an offering to the gods according to *saram-ngaram* method by the *theimrui* (followers of the priest). It is strictly forbidden to bring the maternal grandfather’s chicken or the curry inside the house. When both the chicken curries are cooked the *saram-ngaram* menu of the child’s parents is taken to the priest who offers the *tongkaipa* prayer inside the house after which he applies little ash of *kuchu-leiham* (dried herb leaves, the scent that is believed to dispel the evil spirit) on the child and mother’s forehead. Then he sprinkles some water (like holy water) with *tairen* leaves above them and also all around the house, casting away the evil spirits inside the house. After this main part of the formal ceremony the rest of the procedure is the same with the child’s naming ceremony. But at the end of the ceremony, instead of the maternal aunt the priest is first escorted to his house after offering them the *tokana*. The rationality of the ceremony is to ritually purify the child, the mother and the house from the blood stain, considered religiously polluted. Therefore, the term *machampa* (neutralisation) is

derived from this particular ritualistic act of purification or cleansing of the house. However, there is another similar purification rite known as “Tuithoipa” (water purification ritual) which is more serious, complicated and is performed to purify a woman whose child dies during or soon after birth. According to Chothe elders, this *tuithoipa* rite is performed in any unnatural death considering as a bad sign possessed by the evil spirits or is under some kind of spell.

However, looking at this from the Christian perspective the nature and objective of this Chothe *inn-thingpa* or *machampa* the purification rite performed after birth appears similar to the Catholic “House blessing” ceremony and also how the Israelites practice such ritual as described in the book of Leviticus, chapter: 12 verses 1-8. Accordingly it states that, ‘the Lord gave Moses the regulations for the people of Israel where a woman after giving birth to a son is ritually unclean for seven days and if it is a girl for fourteenth days as she was during her monthly menstrual periods and is prohibited from touching anything that is holy or entering the sacred tent until she completes the purification rite. So, on the purification day whether for a son or daughter she has to offer one-year old lamb for a burnt-offering and a pigeon or a dove for a sin-offering. Further it mentions that if the Israelite woman cannot afford a lamb, she shall bring two doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt-offering and the other for a sin-offering.

The sociological significance of inviting two most important elderly persons i.e. paternal grandmother or aunty and maternal grandfather or uncle on the child’s naming ceremony and on *inn-thingpa* day is that both symbolically represent the ‘godparents’ on behalf of the ‘Heavenly and Earthly gods and the Sun and the Moon gods’ being their children as described in the *Chothe genealogical myth*. Second, the logical implication of this custom is that it maintains strong bond of marital and kinship ties between the lineages groups of the two clans. Thirdly, it is a privilege and an obligation for both the grandparents to attend the ceremony and bless their grandchildren on behalf of the Heavenly gods. Fourth and a very important custom is that if the grandchild is a son the grandparents are more profound because according to their custom he has been ascribed and assigned to be a mentor designated as the “sword bearer” (lit. *Champupa*) who would be responsible in finding the best burial spot when they die, as it is forbidden for his or her other kin members to do this particular prescribed task. On the other hand, if the child (either a boy or girl) dies prematurely or unexpectedly at an early age then, it is the same prescribed maternal grandfather or any of the consanguine mother’s brothers to behest the assigned *Champupa* task in locating the best burial spot and also performing

other necessary customs. Therefore, out of one's gladness and happiness whenever a child is born the maternal grandfather provides a bottle of *zu* and a fowl (a rooster if it is a boy and a hen if it is a girl). So, the obligation to participate and bless the grandchildren for long life by the grandparents in the child naming ceremony becomes mandatory in fulfilling their *rite de passages* that ends with death ceremony. They consider that if such a task is not followed accordingly the deceased's soul would be troubled in his/her death journey or might get stuck in the Middle-world.

### **6.1.iii Initiation of the Child into Adulthood**

The first initiation ceremony of the child into the society is the naming ceremony performed on the third day after the birth as described. But once the child enters the teens or the adolescent age of 14-15 years (not fixed), he or she has to undergo the initiation ceremony (*leibak manpa*) to become a full fledged member of the youth congregation in the society. The membership fee for a boy is a rooster and a bottle of wine, and for a girl it is just a bottle of wine and a bunch of tobacco leaves. This initiation ceremony is carried out in the morning on the third day of any festivals either on *Inn-nampeï rin* or *Achui rin*. The parents or any guardian of the child informs the *Pakhanglakpa* who recommends and informs the matter to the village council and on their consent the village priest performs the initiation ceremony, either inside or outside the festive house. So, the youth on the appointed day of the morning sits in the south facing the priest who sits opposite in the northern side. The village priest then pours the concerned person's wine on the ground by muttering the incantation to their gods and ancestors, after which the boy is asked to drink some of turmeric juice that would cleanse his stomach, liver and intestines. Then, the priest strangles his rooster for a divination, and later inspects the chicken's leg for the positive or negative signs of his future perspective after which the priest asks him to drink the glass of his wine placed before him in one gulp to signify that he is no longer a child but an adult. Finally, the priest offers a thanks giving prayer with the wine again on the ground followed by the *zurum*. Thus, the boy is now socially and ritually initialised as a full-fledged member of into the youth congregation of *Nungak-Luthei bunkung* as "leibak" (soldier whose fee has been taken or eaten).

When the ceremony is over the youth's face is seen to be happy, confused and flushed. His friends welcome him into their club who begin to playfully tease and joke. The chicken is prepared according to their specific prescribed menu of *saram-ngaram* and is taken by the village elders. According to his leadership performance and nature of

the vacant post in the *Nungak-Luthei bunkung* or the youth political unit he occupies the post. Perhaps, if he is the eldest son of a family or lineage he is given the first preference and privilege to occupy the vacant position in all the political hierarchical units provided he pays all the necessary customary fees. The initiation customary fee for a girl is a bottle of wine and a bunch of tobacco leaves which they have to bring in a measuring basket from her house to the festive place. The ceremony is rather simple, the priest, after conducting the ceremony for the boys similarly offers prayers with her wine, followed by *zurum* after which her tobacco leaves is distributed among all the members of the village council.

## 6.2 Marriage

Once a Chothe youth attains a marriageable age the paternal grandparents begin looking for a suitable mate for their grandchild. According to Chothe elders, traditionally there are three types of marriage viz.; (1) Arranged marriage, (2) Love marriage (eloped) and, (3) Forced marriage. When a boy and a girl reach a marriageable age, it is always their paternal grandparents or uncles and aunts who look for a bride or bridegroom for their grandchildren. It is they who often encourage and suggest their grandchildren to decide the girl or the boy of their choice and preferences for marriage. On the basis of their marriage rule, the first preferred girl is often the mother brother's daughter (MBD), second is girls from the prescript clans.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, if both the boy and the girl like each other and agree, a day is fixed for the engagement where the paternal grandfather/uncle along with any of the brother/son-in-law (*Maksa*) would go to the girl's house to meet her parents with a fowl and four bottles of wine (*jukhams* the dried bottle gourd for storing water and wine) to propose and settle the issue. If both parties agree a day is fixed and marriage ceremony is hosted, but no specific ritual is performed. Perhaps, if the groom is rich he pays the bride price and marriage is held at the earliest.<sup>3</sup> But if the boy is poor, only after serving three years of marriage labour service he has to bring the girl to his house and marriage is solemnised on any auspicious day.

Since society has become more secular and democratic love marriage is also seen to be very common among them now. From the perspective of their folksongs and folktales it is evident that love marriage prevailed in olden days though not commonly practiced. However, forced marriage is seldom practiced and when such incident occur a heavy fine and penalty is imposed on the boy's family and the lineage gets a bad reputation. Like many societies of the world once a boy or a girl is married, he or she is

excluded from the youth unit and joins the men's organisation after paying their registration fee i.e. a bottle of wine to the council of elders on any of village council's meeting or festive occasions. However, there is no consideration for any bachelor or spinster to be in the men's or women's organisation or on grounds of age until and unless he or she gets married.

### **6.3 Death and Burial Ceremonies**

The Chothe pay more serious attention to the death ceremonies than birth ceremonies, several stringent rites and rituals are performed with other cultural milieu. They bury the dead on the same day before sunset. The importance and seriousness of Chothe death ceremony is reflected from the degree of social norms and religious taboos observed. Once the villagers hear a typical gong sound it signifies that a villager had expired. So, they postpone all their business schedules and attend the death ceremony as an obligation. Any social or religious activity on such inauspicious day is considered as taboo and violation might result in series of deaths. As a result they stop all social and religious activities like going to the field or weaving cloth etc.

When a Chothe man or woman dies they beat the gong at least ten-twenty times at an interval of five-ten minutes each to signify someone has died. As relatives mourn over the deceased, the corpse is initially given a bath inside the house held by a relative on his lap, after which they dress in him or her in his best attire, comb the hair, put on the headgears and the corpse is laid either on the mat or bed covered with some clothes on the north side of the middle room of the house with the head positioned towards the west, opposite from the normal sleeping position (see Pic.46). They decorate and cover the corpse with traditional shawls, scarves and also put all his or her valuable belongings like shirts, pants, ornaments like cornelian beads, necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, shells, a gong, a plate, a jar and a mug beside it. The man's spear and sword (knife) or if it is a woman, her carrying basket and a hoe are placed near the head. Then corpse is decorated with flowers, and coins are placed upon his eyes as a replica of his shining eyes so that, the dead people did not look at them or sees the real world through this dead man's eyes. They also put coins on his forehead and between the lips too. Cotton and garlic are stuck into his ears so that the deceased and other dead people will not hear anything what the living converse.

Chothe believe that if sun light or rain directly fall upon the corpse then his/her soul might escape from his dead body it may not be able to return to it and will become a

ghost and will hunt people with his spirit. This belief is seriously taken by the people so a tent like structure with white cloth is made inside the house high above the corpse so that the deceased's soul may not escape from the house. This custom of shading the corpse with clothes from direct sun light and rain is strictly observed till the corpse is finally buried.<sup>4</sup> However, while the family members are busy decorating and arranging the corpse a chicken is killed as early as possible and prepared according to the *saram-ngaram* for the "athi-thoina" rite, literally means 'to invoke the dead spirit'. Besides, all other normal food items were also prepared and arranged on the banana leaves placing near his head side. Friends and relatives who come to bid farewell, mostly brought gifts that are given directly to the deceased or indirectly to the concern family members. For example, gift are categorised as shawls for man and sarongs for women to show their love and gratitude.

At the deceased resident while the family members await for their friends and relatives to pay their last homage, the rest of the manual works are distributed among the villagers. A bamboo stretcher for carrying the corpse to the cemetery is prepared by the elderly or middle-aged group, while some three-four persons inscribe the memorial stone. An animal like cow or buffalo is killed with a belief to accompany him/her in the death journey. According to them, another reason is that, if the deceased happens to come across a big river he/she can hold on to the tail of the animal and cross the river. The youth and other mature elders prepares and cooks the beef, while the womenfolk take care of the rice, chicken or fish curry for the non-beef eaters apart other local dishes like *chutney*, boiled or fried items. The young girls pluck flowers and decorate the corpse and the stretcher, who also showers flowers on the corpse during the procession to the cemetery.

Simultaneously many activities take place when a Chothe man dies. The relatives and friends from far and wide gather and mourn beside the corpse. Some Chothe elders sing their traditional funeral songs one after another along with the beating of the gong without other music instruments like; drums or *mithun* horns as it is an occasion of agony and no celebration. When a messenger from the cemetery (grave diggers) informs the concerned family about the completion of the grave, all the respected village elders and concerned relatives gather inside and outside the house for the last rites and all sits in accordance with their own positions and status on the southern side of the house, so also, all the members of family assemble inside the house for the "athi tokana" meaning, 'death's token or gift'. As soon as the priest performed the *tongkaipa* offertory prayer all

the male children (sons and grandsons) of the deceased queue to pay their respect and gratitude to all the important elders and visitors by offering them a gift *tokana* (i.e. one rupee coin each placed on a piece of banana leaf) and prostrating themselves one by one. The sociological significance of this token *athi tokana* is to symbolically acknowledge the family's gratitude to the important visitors for their concern and solidarity, and also to remember the dead and his family even in their prayers thereafter. The last ceremony is called "athi tongthin" meaning, 'inform the dead' performed by the village priest (see Pic.50). He inspects all the required essential personal assets of the deceased like his clothing, plate, mug, comb, cowries, shells, necklace, bracelets, beads, ear-rings, spear, knife, gong and any other material objects. He then instructs the dead, the spear and the knife are meant to protect himself against his enemies, the eatables, the food and the wine are meant for him to have when he is hungry and thirsty, the cloth meant for him and his deceased relatives suppose to be given as token when he meets them on his death journey. The priest also reminds the dead the gifts from the well wishers too one by one. After which the death body is wrapped from right to left first with three-four new traditional shawls one after another and is tied with strings torn clothes tightly before the body is taken to the bamboo stretcher outside that is positioned north-south kept on the northern side of the front courtyard.<sup>5</sup>

Here, another significant taboo observed is that whenever they move the dead body, the corpse's legs always directed forward. According to them, their religious-philosophy is that when born the head comes forth first but since he is death it should be in the reverse form because the person is returning to where he belongs. Accordingly it means, 'one should return in the same manner as one comes forth or is born into the world'. As a result the corpse's legs are always directed forward as if they are going to send it back in way how one comes forth. So when the corpse is push into the stretcher his leg is inserted first (north side) and then the corpse is tied with the bamboo chords (see Pic.48). Then, the selected four youth carry the corpse after rotating clockwise and proceeds to the cemetery in which the corpse's legs are always directed in the front. There is often confusion that occurs while rotating the corpse, inserting and taking out the corpse from the stretcher, and also while putting it inside the coffin at the burial spot because the stretcher carriers are ignorant about their socio-religious taboo and norms, that the custom and tradition for the deceased should be always opposite from the living position. Therefore, the corpse's head is position towards the west and the legs towards east when the corpse is placed inside the coffin before sliding inside the burial tomb or

tunnel as if the deceased is re-entering inside his mother's womb, which is opposite in the direction and form where he was born.

When all are busy at the graveyard, some elders still continue to warn about the taboo or restriction in shading the corpse, to be careful from dropping the clothes and letting the dead man's soul escape into the person responsible for shading. They are asked to hold carefully until the coffin is nailed and pushed inside the grave-hole (tunnel). Once they slide the coffin inside the grave-hole they immediately block it with bamboos and later all the deceased's belongings and waste materials are also thrown inside the grave (but things considered extremely bad and dirty are burnt at one corner). When this part is over the *champupa* and the kin's member first throws down a handful of mud into the tomb symbolically to signify the burial and the rest join helping them fill the grave. The memorial stone is placed facing west little on the western side of the tomb towards the head side. To protect the tomb from the wild animals and thieves a number of pointed bamboo sticks are inserted all over the tomb.

Another taboo is that it is forbidden for anybody who goes to cemetery to return home before the burial is complete for fear that the evil spirits might follow them. While the people are busy fixing the bamboo sticks the priest and the *champupa* perform their valedictory prayer at the previous ritual spot on the east side of the grave again by offering wine, food and fruits on the ground and another food package hung on the small bamboo pole. The offering on the ground is meant for the Heavenly gods and other evil spirits and the food package is meant for the deceased. After the rite the priest and the *champupa* await the people at the cemetery boundary, as the family members first proceed, the priest brushes everyone sideways from head to shoulders backwards with *kuchu leiham* (the green branches of herbs plant) warding off ghosts. The priest and assistant-priest shouts about the taboo, forbidding them not to look or turn back until they reach their homes. This prohibition of looking back signifies the act separation and disconnecting whatever is the relationship with the dead, indicating the existence of different worlds between the living and dead. They claim the herb *kuchu leiham* is a kind of dispeller of evil elements with a belief that the smell is very unpleasant and unbearable for evil spirits or ghosts, who therefore avoids following people with such smells. On reaching the village all the people who return from cemetery wash their face, hands and legs in the stream including all the instruments while some sprinkle little water above them. Then when they reach the deceased's house or their house they receive fire or smoked themselves with the burn *kuchu leiham* kept at each house gate

and again sprinkle some water above them with the *taren* leaves specially kept in a bucket for the purpose. Only then, they are considered somehow ritually clean and safe, but many take a bath and change their clothing. This ends the burial ceremony of the Chothe for the day. There are also similar ceremonies practiced by some of the American Indian tribes like; the Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache. As Morris E. Opler describes these American Indian tribes, “brush off their own bodies with green grass” just before the members return to the village from the burial in order to wade off any ghost. Other similar practices are like; bathing, burning clothes and smoking their bodies with “ghost medicine” (1972: 469). But if the family is rich even dinner may be served but it is a tradition for relatives and friends to visit the family late evening and whole the night for five days to comfort the family, even the Christian families do observe this traditional practices.

The death and burial ceremony of the Chothe is somewhat similar with Lotha of Nagaland. According to J.P. Mills in *The Lhotha Naga* (1922), the corpse is wrapped in two or three good cloths and carried out of the house by the *mungpen*, the specific stretcher bearers and the tomb is covered with stones and thorns to prevent from pigs and dogs scratching up the earth and a low fence is built around it, in the case of a woman’s grave only the basket is hung at the head, containing five instead of six pieces of meat while in the case of a man’s grave a basket containing a gourd of *madhu* liquor, a little boiled rice and six pieces of meat is hung on the post at the head besides his wooden dao-holder, and bear’s hair wig, cloth, cowrie lengta, ivory armlets, etc. are hung on the cross-bar, and his spears are stuck upright on the grave (re-reprint 2003:158). This death and burial custom is also similar with the Rongmei, except that they bury the dead in their own courtyard like the Garo. The similarity of various death and burial ceremonies among various ethnic communities of north-east India besides language, suggests their similar origin and migration route that could be of thousands of years.

### **6.3.i Re-incarnation**

It is tradition for the Chothe to check for any re-birth mark or some identification mark especially, by grandmothers as soon as a baby is born. The Chothe believe that if they notice any prominent kind of black or dark or greenish big spot or like a mole around the buttock/ hip/ belly/ thigh/ arms/ on the back of a person is considered as the re-incarnation marked a sign that the person is re-born to complete his or her incomplete life time on earth. They believe in the immortality of the soul. Accordingly the Chothe

consider that a person continues to be re-born at least seven times, so apparently they look at the baby's face for any kind of similarity with any of their predecessors. This belief served as the foundation to their religious belief and practices; mythically and in relation to their ancestor worship. Accordingly *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* is considered to be the avatar or the Divine-incarnate of the Dragon-Python God (*Pu Lungchungpa*) substantiated by the small protruding tail.

### **6.3.ii The Sword Bearer (*Champupa*)**

The Chothe traditionally bury the dead before sunset. But in case, the person dies in the late afternoon then, he or she may be buried on the next day as early as possible. The most important and distinctive aspect about the Chothe when a person dies is to identify the right person to locate the burial spot for the deceased who is known as "Champupa" meaning, 'the sword bearer' who acts as the god's child or god's son or guardian angel of the deceased as it is an obligation bonded by kinship ties, as described in the child's naming ceremony. This *champupa* is a prescribed grandson; if the deceased is a man i.e. maternal grandfather or uncle it is one of the maternal grandsons. But if the deceased is a woman the *chumpupa* should be one the paternal grandsons. However, in case the grand-son or grand-daughter dies earlier, it is the maternal grandfather or uncle who acts as *chumpupa* according to the Chothe custom. Here, the confusion and problem often arises while looking for the right *champupa*, to bear the sword when the descent line is weak. Because no other close kin or relatives can substitute him as it is prescribed and bonded by kinship ties. For example, if a man who has only a daughter dies, and perhaps she marries a man of different village or community, no matter how far she lives from her parents village they have to find her son i.e. the deceased's maternal grandson to perform the prescribed obligated task of *champupa* for finding the best burial spot. So, the delay occurs when the concerned person is out of station or is not available immediately for the task. On the other hand, if the deceased man has no daughters or the daughter has no son, his cognate brother's daughter's son substitutes for the task under the circumstances of mutual understanding. On the contrary, if a grandson happens to die prematurely then it is the maternal uncle or mother's brother who takes the role of *champupa* as prescribed. However, in the case of birth ceremony any related maternal grandfather or paternal grandmother is allowed to be the godparents on behalf of the actual person under certain circumstances. But such excuses, according to Chothe elders, are not simply possible in the case of the death ceremony as one has to fulfil the last

obligation according to the prescribed rule. Therefore, some of the Chothe death ceremonies are delayed in waiting for the right person i.e. *chumpupa* to initiate the death ritualistic ceremony.

Once the right *chumpupa* is identified, he is made to wear the traditional shawl criss-crossing over his chest by tying the knots on his back like armour holding the sword/knife of the deceased. Then the priest performs the simple rite inside the house for their safe journey to the cemetery. According to Chothe custom the *chumpupa* should carry the sword (knife) on his shoulder and walk ahead of all while travelling to the cemetery followed by the village priest holding the rice beer (*zuting*) bottle and the chicken curry for the offerings at the burial spot. The two are followed by the grave diggers. The *chumpupa* is strictly forbidden to carry the sword hanging downwards. They consider it is like the act of surrendering oneself, and hence, he is asked to carry the sword lifted high or put on his shoulder to signify that he is still strong, brave and aggressive and is ready to challenge any opponents or the evil forces from harming and killing any of them further. When they reach the cemetery the *chumpupa* locates the best burial spot within their clan's or lineage area by encircling it clockwise by spilling the *zuting* (fermented rice beer) demarcating the tomb to be dug. Then, he symbolically shoves the soil first and the grave diggers begin digging. In the mean time the village priest and *chumpupa*, on the eastern side of the grave, offer an invocation prayer with the gifts to their Heavenly God and also to the gods of death who inform about the death and also seeks blessings for protection, safety, smooth and speedy in their digging work. After which the *chumpupa* and the priest return home. Certain questions might arise as to why so much importance is given to the relationship between maternal grandfather and grandson, and also paternal grandmother and grandson. Because of the emphasis some might even support the theory of matrilineal or matriarchy as the based for the origin of society, which is not sure.

### **6.3.iii The Death Commemoration Ceremony**

The death commemoration ceremony is called as “Thi-duh” meaning ‘remembrance of the dead’ which is usually held within one month of the death (Shakespeare 1912: 165). But now it is conducted within a year usually in the month of May-June like first death anniversary where close relatives and friends are invited for the ritualistic feast. The ceremony begins with the killing of a fowl/chicken, besides a cow or pigs for the feast. When the fowl's meat is cooked the village priest, the *chumpupa*

(sword bearer) and the family members first go to the cemetery and offer; the meat, rice, sweets and fruits and wine (*zuting*) on the deceased tomb for him and also other kindred deceased members of the family. According to Chothe, the feast is like a kind of farewell ceremony or a way of showing gratitude or repaying any indebtedness owed to the people; village elders, friends and the grave diggers for showing their solidarity and cooperation on behalf of the deceased by the family. It also gives an opportunity to show their respect and bid farewell for those who cannot avail themselves on the funeral day. The Khasi also similarly perform this death commemoration ceremony as they believed that the soul of the dead man can reach '*Ka Dwar U Blei*' (House of God) after performing this ritual by the kinsmen of the deceased (Nongkynrih 2002: 130).

But with regards to the Chothe Christians, they follow and practice the death ceremony in almost the same traditional way except that the rites and rituals are replaced by prayers, the wine with tea and the custom simplified to suit their convenience by discarding many cultural aspects. Some superstitious beliefs and taboo like smoking the fire, bathing (if they touch the corpse) are observed when returned from the cemetery.

### **6.3.iv Unnatural Death**

Unnatural deaths such as suicide, a woman's or child's death at the time of parturition, a man killed by wild animal or fire, etc. are buried outside the common village cemetery. Extra rituals and ceremonies are conducted for such kind of unnatural dead. One may look into the contemporary nature and attitudes of the Chothe towards such dead. For instance, during my intensive field work, Enoucha (37) a young Meitei man who married Oni Makan of Chothe (36) committed suicide on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2007. He lived in his wife's relative village Salemthar with two sons and a daughter. He was a supervisor (Mohori) of a small group in the bridge and drainage construction. According to his wife, he was mentally disturbed for the past few years with regards to his parents and his financial status. Because of such reasons, they often quarrelled and he frequently beat her, and also threatened her with committing suicide, which she thought he was saying out of anger and drunkenness. As usual he told her the same thing on that fateful night when their children were all asleep, after which he went to visit his friend's house. The next day his eldest son went for an early morning walk and suddenly he spotted his father hanging on a *khok* tree on the eastern side of the Chandel road. Immediately the villagers gathered around the spot and speculated many theories of his suicide. Later they took down the dead body and kept at a secluded place waiting for his relatives. On the

basis of the Chothe custom, the villagers did not allow his body to be taken inside the village nor did they allow them to bury it in their common cemetery. The problem became more complicated because he had not done the traditional “Sharu sipa” meaning, ‘bone washing’ or the ‘complete assimilation’ ceremony to be a valid citizen/member of Chothe. Therefore, the village council did not want to bury him even in their village area for fear of many unwanted reasons despite knowing him and his wife. One of the deceased brothers took his dead body to cremate in the Meitei tradition. One can notice here, though Salemthar is a Christian village they still believe in superstition and practice all the necessary customs and rituals for the unnatural dead. The family being very poor, his wife’s relatives sponsored all the necessary requirements like the fowl for the purification of spot/area, and a pig for the purification of the village which is mandatory for such unnatural death cases. All the necessary rituals are performed by the village priest (Roushi). Such sacrificial meat is eaten only by married man or matured adults who have children. It is taboo for his family members and children to eat such meat.

#### **6.4 The Chothe Grave Design: Symbol and Meaning**

The Chothe have a separate cemetery (*thlan*) usually located on the south or western side of the village (see also Shakespeare 1912: 165). It is taboo to have their cemetery either on the east or north side of the village. Their grave is very complicated in its design and structure compared to other ethnic communities as noticed so far in North-east India. The corpse is bathed, oiled, wrapped with clothes and put into coffin and buried like the Egyptian Pharaohs. Many individuals are involved in digging the grave, and the tools used are like spades, shovels, axe, hack, etc.

The structure of the Chothe grave is of two types. The first structure is five feet deep, four feet wide and seven feet long of [5 (4x7) ft] in its design. The second structure is like a tunnel, a hole little larger than the coffin size carved to fit the coffin with a dimension of about two and half feet each (i.e. 2 ½ x 2 ½ sqft). in breadth and high, and about 5-6 ft in length, which is dug in the lower middle part of the western grave wall with a declination of about 35° – 45° (see Pic.49) According to the Chothe elders, the declination of the tunnel structure is made in such a way that the dead man’s soul would plunge down and definitely reach the land of dead, which they believe is down in the middle or core of the earth. But the Christian grave is rather simple; instead of this tunnel or the hole like structure, they directly dig a coffin size pit just on the floor of the first structure. When all the necessary rites and customs are completed in the graveyard they

slide the coffin into the tunnel with a shout, and cover the hole with bamboo believing that his/her soul would not escape and wandered on the earth as spirits.

According to Chothe elders, the reason for the second structure of the tunnel like design is for fear of thieves and wild animals. They say that in olden days they bury the dead along with all their valuable belongings made of metallic objects like; gold, brass plates and cups, brass gong, iron knife, spear, precious beads and gem stones along with the dead. So, those people who knew about it usually re-dig the grave and steal the valuable objects. Hence, they hide the corpse on the western side of the tomb, so that no one finds the corpse, and even if they do so, they will not be able to steal or collect all the valuable things in one night. But they are not sure when such a grave design began to be used. According to me the custom appears to be quite ancient and they seem to have followed the royal burial style of their kings or chiefs by all. However, the Chothe tombs can be easily identified whether it belonged to a man or woman, by the materials left above it. As John Shakespeare also describes, the Chothe cemetery and tomb can be identified as a man's or woman's grave with the objects and material placed above it (1912:165).

Since the Chothe bury many precious belongings along with the corpse they have little or no preserved archaic materials. But there are stories that tells us how some neighbouring people found many precious things while digging for house site or constructing roads in some of their old abandoned village cemetery areas like; brass plate, cup, spear, cornelian beads, coins, bones, typical stones, etc. Again the Chothe consider as taboo to take back such things if they cannot identify their forefather's graveyard on the ground that it might bring them misfortune. Some archaic objects are sometimes found but they do not bother to take care of them, and hence they have very little historical evidences to tell about their past culture. However, in 1997-'98 a Bulldozer driver while levelling the football ground of Bishnupur Higher Secondary School, hit upon a pot full of silver coins of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century bearing King William, Queen Victoria, King George IV & V.<sup>6</sup> The pot seems to have contained more than one thousand pure silver coins. They say the diver wrapped the silver coins in his cloth and disappeared immediately knowing the value. As soon as the news spread people started searching around the area and found some coins that were scattered. A similar case seem to have occurred earlier during construction of Bishnupur Block Development Offices and quarters where some workers claimed to have found spears, brass plates, cup and red beads. Both these places are said to be abandoned villages of the Chothe.

## 6.5 Rites and Rituals of the Chothe

Emile Durkheim remarks that a rite or ritual is a recessive repetitive act, which means when a priest identifies the cause of the sickness of a person he performs the same rite or ritual for such sickness again on other sick patient with the same or similar cases which becomes repetitive in his ritual practice or action. Likewise we find many rites or ceremony have their own story or latent implications where some have roots or originate from certain myths and legends which subsequently become tradition. But it would be wrong to universally generalise that all the ritual acts are derived from a myth/legend or vice versa, since many of the rituals has no connection with a myth nor a myth implicates a ritual, some derive from certain incidental experiences or through dreams. As Clyde Kluckhohn asserts, “in sum, the facts do not permit any universal generalisations as to ritual being the cause of myth or vice versa. Their relationship is rather that of intricate mutual interdependence, differently structured in different cultures and probably at different times in the same culture” and that, “a ritual may be reinforced by a myth (or vice versa) in the donor culture, but satisfy the carriers of the recipient culture simply as a form of activity...” (1972: 97)

From the study, the Chothe rites and rituals may be classified into three categories viz. (i) personal (individual) ritual (ii) family ritual and, (iii) village ritual, (see Table 20). Most of these rites and rituals are supplicated to the three cosmo-natural elements; (1) Celestial Heavenly Gods (Sun-Moon), (2) Land-Forest God (*ching-lam leihu*), and (3) Water God (*tui leihu*).

Today the Chothe practice only few important primary rites and rituals that are regularised into their custom, but many of the secondary rites and rituals have been neglected and discarded due to the changing world. The Chothe follow the lunar or Hindu *saka* calendar and any kind of auspicious or inauspicious rite and ritual day is based on it. The ‘date’ of a month is equally important as it is counted by ‘even’ or ‘odd’ numbers and ‘days of the week’ depending on the full-moon or new-moon of the lunar calendar. The lunar day of full-moon or new-moon is the day that really matters to them as the counting began from the full-moon onwards. They believe any rituals performed during or soon after full-moon are considered fruitful and successful. Therefore, celebration of any festivals begins on or soon after full-moon on the first Monday of the particular lunar month. Likewise, any major rites and rituals that have positive implication are performed on any auspicious ‘odd’ week days like; Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday on or after the full-moon. On the contrary, rites and rituals

connected with the evil spirits or witchcraft (black magic) that have negative implications are performed on ‘even’ days like; Saturday, Thursday and Tuesday. According to them, all rites and rituals practices vary from simple to complex depending on the concept, purpose, its derivation or origin, although they are similar in many ways like ritual items, taboos, sanctions, etc. Some of the rituals practiced by Chothe since early days are given below as provided by their village elders:

**Table 20 Different types of Chothe rituals**

Name of ritual	Meaning/ purpose of the rite	Probable time	Category
<i>Leihu pottampa (Heiruk keipa)</i>	Veneration of the village deity (Pu Lungchungpa)	March-April	Village
<i>Lamleh thoipa or Panthong iratpa</i>	Rite for the gods of the village gates	Feb-March	Village
<i>Thoipithoi (Thi-duh)</i>	Rite for the ancestors	May-June	Village
<i>Tui-thoipa (Tuikuk-thingkuk)</i>	Rite for the water/river gods and goddesses	June-July	Village
<i>Shang kokpa (Sabuhung)</i>	Rite for the paddy/good harvest (agricultural rite)	Sept- Oct.	Village/ family
<i>Tuihumpa</i>	Rite for the purification of house (pre-mature baby’s dead)	Any month	Village/ Family
<i>Keirou thou</i>	Rite for the purification of the family (for ancestors)	Dec-Jan.	Family
<i>Anam-kokna lethoi</i>	Rite for bad omens	any month	Family
<i>Arrow (Airow) lethoi</i>	Rite of roasting chicken	any month	Family / personal
<i>Thawai kokpa</i>	Rite of calling back the soul	anytime	Personal/ Individual
<i>Pumningpa</i>	Rite for the exchange of soul	anytime	Personal
<i>Ui chup lethoi</i>	Rite for physical retardation or dog sacrifice	May-June (favourable)	Personal
<i>Shiam lethoi</i>	Rite for malnutrition child	anytime	Personal
<i>Sakma lethoi</i>	Cucumber or evil eye rite	anytime	Personal
<i>U-sil lethoi or Airing thapa lethoi</i>	Rite for the exchange of soul with a dog-fish/ a fowl	anytime	Personal
<i>Khomnoubi lai</i>	Rite for immature breast milk	anytime	Personal
<i>Chapan thapa</i>	Appeasement rite to cure minor illness	anytime	Personal

### 6.5.i Village Rituals

The Chothe village ritual ceremonies are observable by its elaborateness in their practice that usually began early in the morning. The village as a whole observes certain socio-religious taboos and other obligations. Sacrifices and offerings of animals are a must accompanied by several divinations conducted by the village priest (*theimpu*). Table 20 some of the village rituals are like; *Lamleh thoipa (panthong iratpa)*, *Thoipithoi*

(*Thi-duh*), *Tuithoipa* (*Tuikuk-thingkuk*) and *Shangkokpa*. But *Lamleh thoipa* (*panthong iratpa*), *bambu*, *tuithoipa* are still practiced by Lamlanghupi villagers. Some of the village rituals are described below with a holistic perspective of their beliefs and practices in terms of the nature of their worships, sacrifices, offerings and divinations:-

**(1) *Lamleh Thoipa* (Ritual at the Main Village Road/Gate)**

This *lamleh thoipa* ritual, also known as *pantong iratpa*, is considered to be one of the most important Chothe village rituals. It is annually observed by the entire village like *genna* especially, in the month of *Lamta* (Feb/March) soon after the *Innampei rin* of the following Saturday. The term *lamleh thoipa* means, ‘ritual at the main village road/gate’, which is synonymously used by Meitei as *Panthong iratpa* (rite at the village gate). All the members of the village council i.e. the three village units viz.; *Urinta*, *Tang-ngarinta* and *Nungak Luthei bungkungs* collectively organise this ritual. According to them, the ritual is mythically connected with the folktale, ‘*The Dog and the Eclipse*’ and also the superstitious belief that the dog can see the ghost or spirits of the dead man (see the story in common folktales-legends, Khiyang 1985: 17-20). Because of its significance this ritual has survived the test of time till today, despite the fact that many rituals have crippled. According to their custom it is said that before this particular ritual is conducted by two junior *Tang-ngarinta* members should go and announce about the observance i.e. taboo in the evening to all the villagers at least one day in advance. On this basis, the two *Tang-ngarinta* members thereby went with a drum asking all the villagers to remain indoors for the day until the ritual is over. It is interesting that even the Ao tribe that inhabits the extreme northern side of Nagaland also performs a similar ritual which they call, “Lizaba kulum” the worship of the Supreme God by the *Imkong Ao* which means by the whole community (Smith 2002: 82-83). From the description it appears to be similar in the objective and the principle of Chothe *Lamleh thoipa* as the entire village observed the taboo like in a *genna*.

So, on the following Saturday (i.e. 6<sup>th</sup> February 2006) soon after the *Inn-nampe* *rin* festival all the village elders gather at the village chief’s house where the village priest and assistant priest and other junior members assist in the preparation of the sacrificial ritual of *Lamleh thoipa*. The village chief (*Hulak*) who sometimes performs certain rites is strictly prohibited from performing any ritual on this day and also on *tuihumpa lethoi*. This is like an appeasement ritual with an objective to seek protection from the village gates deities of the four directions, as it is believed that these deities can

help guard and protect their village from any external or unforeseen evil forces by sacrificing a dog for the deities. Looking from the perspective of the day observed i.e. Saturday it may be considered as a ritual for the evil spirits or gods. Therefore, on this day it is forbidden or taboo for any villagers to venture outside the village or allow any outsiders to pass through the village, nor any social activity is permitted until the ritual is over. In Chothe such a day with restrictions is known as “asei asi ni” meaning, forbidden or taboo. Some of the basic items required for this *Lamleh thoipa* ritual are; (i) a dog (ii) a rooster (iii) *zutin* (fermented rice beer), (iv) two *utong* (two long bamboo cups), (v) ginger (vi) rice and all types of spices and ingredients for the dog meat and chicken (vii) two local eggs (viii) some flowers (ix) some cotton (x) banana leaves (xi) two winnows (xii) *Theipi mashipoi* (chutney of wild apple leaves), (xiii) *bakuk* (pieces of broken earthen pot), (xiv) *kuchu leiham* (a kind of wild dried leaves). The village priest and the assistant priest arrange the items accordingly in two different winnows for separate rituals. The ceremony begins with a simple rite called *chapan thapa*:

***Chapan Thapa***: The “chapan-thapa” means, ‘sending a message in advance’ is the first simple rite of *Lamleh thoipa* ritual but is also performed on major village ritualistic days. It is performed for the *Hushapa* (village constructors) i.e. the four village gods/deities of the gates or directions. For this rite, all the village council members gather in the chief’s (*Hulak*) house around 6-6:30 a.m and each take their respective seats arranged in the veranda according to the political hierarchical positions of the village council or court room style.<sup>7</sup> The two *theimpus* (priests) sit on the right side of the main entrance door facing east, the senior priest (*ulin theimpu*) sits on the left side of junior priest (*noupong theimpu*), once the chief and other members consent to begin the rite, the two priests take their respective ritualistic items and place them on the winnows, and they proceed to their respective assigned directions. The senior priest then goes to the eastern (*nashu*) deity and the junior priest went to the western (*nata*) deity where both offered the *chapan thapa* rites (see Pic.26). The items for this rite are; some rice, some flowers, cotton and one local egg each are placed on the banana leaf for each winnows or deities.

***Lamleh Thoipa***: When the two priests return to the chief’s house after performing the *chapan thapa* rites, the senior village priest offers the *tongkaipa* the invocation prayer with *zutin* (rice beer) provided by one of the *rui*, followed by *zurum* to proceed with the main *lamleh lethoi*.<sup>8</sup> The true nature of the Chothe belief and worship is very obvious

from here as the priest offers *zutin* by pouring some on the ground three times, each time conjuring. According to Y. Tomalsing, the first offertory is address to their Supreme gods (*Thangvan rengpa* and *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa*), the second offering is meant for their ancestors, and the third which he pours with his left hand is meant for the evil spirits. This particular invocation signifies that the Chothe worship and gives due reverence to their cosmic-natural Supreme gods and their ancestors, besides acknowledging the power of evil spirits, who appeased them, so that no harm comes from them.

For the main *lamleh lethoi* two similar rituals are involved. The main group after the *zurum* proceeds in line to the main village road/gate (Lamleh) toward north for the main ritual with the dog headed by the senior priest carrying the *louhoupa*, followed by *Hulak*. The second group is headed by the junior priest along with some friends with the ritual items who went to the south gate with a chicken for the sacrificial offering, who later join the main group after their sacrificial offerings are over.

The village priest (senior) with his knife prepares all his ritualistic items at the chosen spot where his followers have erected a symbolic gate. The priest arranges ritual items like the broken earthen pot pieces (*bakuk*), wild apple chutney leaves (*theipi mashipoi*), wine cups (*zu-utong*), dried herb leaves (*kuchu leiham*), turmeric (*aishan*), ginger (*aithing*), cone banana leaf and the dog. As he sits and takes his position he first cuts the turmeric into two pieces and makes some incantation and places it on the banana leaf. Then, he takes the ginger for the 'ginger divination' which he slices it into two pieces, places it on the blade of the knife, after he has finished conjuring he immediately drops it on the banana leaf and checks the position of the ginger (see Pic.34). They believe that if the two pieces of ginger fall in a good position it foretells a good omen or a good day, otherwise, it is a bad omen. After the ginger divination, the priest slits the dog's throat and lets the oozing blood fall on the banana cone leaf, he then sprinkles the blood all around the offerings (see Pic.35). Later the dog's neck is cut off; a bamboo stick is inserted to the head through the throat and is hung in the middle of the symbolic gate at the ritual spot (see Pic.37). According to them, the dog's head is hung in such a way that the mouth is wide open and projected outwards to symbolically signify the external evil spirits that try to enter or interfere or disturb the village will be bitten by the dog so others would fear and retreat seeing a ferocious dog that can even swallow them. The Chothe believe that such a symbolic representation of the dog's head somehow protects the village from external unseen evil forces.

The Chothe also believe that the deities that guard their main village gates or roads (*lamleh*) also foretell misfortune through the sacrificial offering of the dog's spleen divination. So, the spleen is carefully removed and the priest interprets the signs, after examining it thoroughly, to the village chief and other leaders present. Since, the sign varies from year to year, so also, interpretation differs. The year 2006 indicated a good omen except that the tip of the spleen was a little narrower than usual. According to Tomalsing it means that, "There could be some uncertain problem or misfortune at the end of the year. If the dog's spleen is normal and in good shape it signifies a very good sign and a peaceful year, but if it is unusual with some kind of deformity or mark then it is considered a bad omen. When such deformity is noticed the villagers are warned to be careful and vigilant with their behaviour". The deformity marks at particular length of the spleen denotes the probable month. Later, they cut the dog's legs, ears and tail, and remove its intestines and offer these along with other ritualistic items, after which, the priest takes his knife again and makes three incantations in the form of a valedictory prayer by rubbing the knife on the dog's body each time. Then, he cuts the turmeric again into two pieces and pierces it along with the *kuchu leiham* leaves in a small bamboo sticks, and as he makes the last incantation he flagged them on each side of the offerings [see Pic.100 (E)].

The junior priest (*noupong theimpu*), like the senior priest (*ulin theimpu*), similarly performs the rite at the southern gate (*thangting* or *santhong* in Meitei) with the turmeric and the *kuchu leiham* in a simplified manner. He strangles the chicken by the throat and inspects the divination of the chicken's leg overlapping style. After that, he removes the intestine and observes to confirm the sign and omen. Similarly like the senior priest after conjuring cuts off the fowl's neck, the wings and the legs, and offers them to the south village gate deity. When the junior priest completes his rite, he joins the main group and officially informs the divination and signs of the chicken's leg initially to the village chief and the senior priest.

***Pheiroi Khapa:*** It literally means, 'mat fencing for the dead offering'. It is fencing structured like a basket made for the special offering to their gods and seven clan ancestors. The ancient term is "athi-amang tampa" meaning, 'offerings for the dead', under a pipal tree on the south west of the main ritual place. This *pheiroi khapa* is an inverted basket built in dome structure having a diameter of two sq ft. made criss-crossing with *ching-ngang/lang* (the young stalk of a kind of wild shrub plant), where the

inner floor is polished with water (see Pic.33). This *pheiroi khapa* fencing basket structure is specially designed to protect the offerings; some rice, cooked dog meat and the chicken to their dead clan ancestors. The priest first divides the chicken meat into seven pieces and places on the banana leaf and conjures, after which he takes the cooked dog meat and tears it into eight pieces and similarly invokes again. According to them, the first share of meat pieces was meant for their Almighty God, while the other seven shares are offered to acknowledge the seven clan ancestors and also to seek protection from the evil forces.

When this *pheiroi khapa* rite is over the entire council members gather around an open space and sit according to their respective positions and status. Just before lunch one of the junior *rui* serves *zuting* to the senior priest with the roasted dog liver and offers the *tongkaipa* prayer, followed by *zurum* until the big rice beer pot is empty. This leisure time gives them to discussion on various village issues and subjects, besides the divination signs and omens. When the food is ready, the junior *rui* again serves the priest with more wine who then offers *tongkaipa* for the food.

Later, when all of them finish their lunch they return to the chief's (*Hulak*) house in line, now headed by the *Hulak*, *Luplak*, *Keirung* and the rest of the members follow (see Pic.38). The priest who awaits them at a distance brushes/wipes them sideways from head to shoulder with a bunch of *ching-ngang/lang* leaves, and the junior priest provides each of them with a stalk of that branch and also reminds them the taboo of looking back.<sup>9</sup> The last group washes the cooking utensils in the stream considered ritually polluted and it is forbidden to bring the utensils home without washing. On reaching the chief's house, each of them again occupies their respective seats again and the senior priest offers *tongkaipa* with *zutin* as thanksgiving for the blessed day on behalf of the chief, followed by the *zurum*. However, the overall concluding *tongkaipa* prayer is performed by the chief himself on behalf of the entire village followed by the *zurum*. As part of the custom, one of the *Tang-ngarinta* members slightly bows down and offers the *ashiem* or *tokana* some money on a piece of banana leaf to the senior priest for rendering his service, then the priest blesses the *Tang-ngarinta* person by rubbing his head (backward) three times. Then, two *Tang-ngarinta* members go around the village locality and re-announce to the people that the ritual ceremony is over, which is called as "asheipa", meaning 'village purification/taboo is over'. This pronouncement signifies lifting of prohibitions and that people are free to continue their normal work. But the rest of the council members continued discussing about the fund and in fixing the particular

lunar day and date for the forthcoming east and west village gates deities' ritual called "bambu" deities of village boundary.

(2) **Thoipithoi (Thi-duh):** According to the Chothe, *Thoipithoi or Thi-duh* is a death commemoration ceremony in which they pay tributes to their dead ancestors by honouring and giving due respect for the contribution they have made in uplifting their society in the past, so that their departed souls might rest in peace. The ritual ceremony is performed at home and at the burial spot with the sacrificial offerings by the priest, which has been described earlier in the death ceremony. Although, it was traditionally held in the month of May-June annually they have all agreed to perform it on any auspicious day of the year because of socio-economic reasons. From the Christian perspective the rite is more like the, "All souls day" observed by the Roman Catholic Church annually on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

(3) **Bambu:** The literal meaning of *bambu* is obscured but according to them it means, the station deity of the four directions that guard the four village gates which is symbolically represented by four stones, each located at the edge of the village boundary easily identified by some bushy trees. These deities are considered dangerous as ill-treating them or non-performance of appeasement rituals might result in sicknesses and even death. The gods of these four directions are known as *Bambu - nashu* (east), *nata* (west), *mai* (north) and *thangting* (south). The Mayan tribe of South-America call such gods of four directions as Bacabs; (Mulac (north), Cauac (south), Kan (east) and Ix (west) (Ash 2006:161). Like *lamleh-thoipa* this ritual is also considered risky and serious as the offerings are specially made for the four village deities or gods of the four directions who guard the village after the annual festival of *Achui rin* on any 'even' days of the week. According to T.C. Das, the spirits of the four directions of the compass are believed to cause disease and death (1945: 204). This is an appeasement rite and the day is also marked by "Asei-asi" (taboo or prohibition of one's action). It is performed only in the evening and is not as elaborate as *lamleh-thoipa*. Sometimes, offering for these deities is called as "lou-houpa" (throwing of medicine) which is performed just before the invocatory ritual in any main annual festival. Certain social activities and movement are prohibited like *genna* where but not as strict as *lamleh thoipa*.

(4) **Shang kokpa:** This ritual is conducted in the month of August-September when the

rice begins to fill its ears. *Shang kokpa*, means ‘call for the rice’. A fowl is sacrificed and the ritual is similar to *Thawai kokpa*, where the priest (*theimpu*) stands at the main door and offers a prayer by calling all types of rice (wealth) from all the direction to fill up his granary in the name of their Almighty god so that he becomes rich and prosperous. The offertory prayer is also performed for *Shang rung* i.e. the talisman rice stones with meat and wine placed round on the gong. Traditionally it was taboo for the village chief to host any kind of feast or eat certain kinds of food and drinks after this ceremony until the first harvest.

(5) ***Tui-thoipa (Tuikuk-thingkuk)***: This ritual is performed after *Achui rin* festival, i.e. in the months of September-October on first Monday on or just after full-moon depending on the Lunar calendar by offering a pig to the water gods at the river side. The purpose of this *tui-thoipa* is to purify the village by appeasing the Water God like the *lamleh thoipa* at the river side after all ritual items like some rice, flowers, *renglei* leaves and some sweets are furnished on banana leaf. The priest sacrifices a pig by slicing its throat and offers the oozed-out blood in a banana leaf cone. After the sacrificial offering the village priest offers a thanks giving prayer to the water god on behalf of the entire village with the fermented rice beer (*zutin*), (see Pic.40). All the rites and rituals are exclusively done by the village priest. The village chief (*Hulak*) is prohibited from performing any kind of rites except the opening prayer *tongkaipa* prayer at his residence for the ceremony so that no harm befalls them.

### **6.5.ii Family Rituals**

Chothe family rituals are different from the village and personal rituals in many ways for its exclusiveness, where the other kin members related by marriage like *maksa* or cousins act as helpers on such types of rituals. The rites and ceremonies are not as elaborate as the village and as simple as the personal rituals. Certain taboos and obligations are maintained by family members. Such rituals are performed either inside the house or outside the house within the family premises. Some of the family rituals are described below:-

#### **1. *Tuihum Lethoi* (The Rite of Touching Water)**

This *tuihum lethoi* or ritual requires a pig and a fowl. The pig is taken to the river or stream as the term denotes, “tui” means, ‘water’ and “hum” means, ‘dive in’ and the

ritual is performed there, while the fowl is killed inside the house. This is a serious ritual performed when a woman who has had a miscarriage or delivers a premature and the baby dies. The Chothe believe that the ill fate of the woman is because she was possessed by an evil spirit and needs ritual purification. In such a ritual purification all the family members participate, all the family belongings like clothes and utensils are taken to the stream and washed from early morning. This ritual is somewhat similar in principle to the Catholic ritual of 'house blessing' ceremony. After the village priest performs the first part of personal ritual for that particular woman, he performs another rite call as *Inn-shingpa*, meaning 'purification of the house' by sprinkling with the blessed water with three branches of *tairen* leaves all over the house.

When all the necessary work is completed, the woman and all her family members gather near the river bank in the evening, then as per the priests direction the woman takes a dip (bath) in the river water, with the helped of her friends and relatives, after which the people also wash the pig before it is sacrificed. The priest then begins his incantation facing the river. When this is completed, he crosses the symbolic gate, temporarily built with bamboo on the river bank for the ritual and waits for the woman from the other side with the courtyard broom (*Sharphetinnga*), and as soon as she crossed the symbolic gate the priest brushes her head and body backwards. Then she is first asked to cross her right leg and also warns her not to look back until she reaches her home. Similarly, the pig is also taken to the river, washed, and led through the gate like the woman. Similarly all the members who gathered there also wash their faces and feet while some just sprinkle the water above them and pass through the symbolic gate as the priest brushes them all. Then the pig is killed at the river side, after the ceremony the priest inspects the liver and the spleen for any kind of sign that was placed on the banana leaf. Accordingly the priest foretells the future course of her family nodding his head that it is good.

Then, at the woman's house the priest performs the "thawai kokpa" rite (calling the soul) at the main door who prays by swinging the rooster to and fro by grasping the leg. According to Hongpa, the priest utters to the gods that the rooster is for them in exchange of her soul which has been taken away by them and causes her body and soul to be weak. Therefore, he calls for her soul to return and live in her and within her house. After which the priest sits in the middle of the house, offers some *zu* and strangles the rooster by divination method and checks the rooster's overlapping legs. As last part of the ritualistic ceremony the priest asks the woman to look into the tub of

water for her reflection that was kept for the purpose, he then conjures in the reflection. Finally, the priest offers a thanksgiving prayer with some wine (*zu*) thrice to their Supreme God, ancestors and evil spirits by pouring wine three times on the ground followed by *zurum*. This completes the *tuitum lethoi*, which involves many rites and rituals like house purification, water purification by offering of a pig and calling of the soul. The family members are forbidden to share the pork as they are considered ritually unclean, so they eat only the chicken.

## **2. *Anam-kokna Lethoi* (The Dog Digging's Rite)**

The *Anam-kokna lethoi* ritual is performed when a dog or cat scratches or digs the floor of a house frequently or climbs and sleeps on the master's bed, etc. When such unusual things frequently happen, the Chothe believe it is an ominous sign to the family that sooner or later some misfortune, even death, could befall to any of the family members. According to their superstition, a dog digging the floor of the house signifies digging a man's graveyard. In such cases, if the dog does not stop in spite of threatening and beating, the dog is killed in exchange for human being. This ritual is called as "Anam kokna" meaning, 'purification of the smell' or 'relief from suppression'. This ritual is similar with *Thawai kokpa* but it is more a direct offering of the dog's soul in exchange of a human. The family members are forbidden to eat the dog meat. Such rituals are conducted when the family members become very apprehensive for certain reasons. Sometimes some family just kills the dog without performing any ritual.

During my field work I was lucky to personally participate in one such *Anam kokna* ritual. Pr. Pouti (36) of Lungleh village informed Pr. Roushi, a village priest, that his neighbour Makan Cherhoi (56) had told him that his dog has been frequently scratching the wall of their un-inaugurated house and the dog has been behaving unusually for the past few months. The family became apprehensive because the daughter-in-law was pregnant and moreover Makan Francis (26) the only son of Makan Cherhoi who is working in the Indian Army (Indian Reserved Battalion, IRB Manipur) was about to leave home for his duty. They feared because the situation in Manipur was very bad and the pregnant daughter-in-law complained of ill-health. Such psychological apprehension is believed to have greatly disturbed the family.

After the dog was killed it was kept in front of the door step of the scratched house. The daughter-in-law sat inside that house, Roushi with three *tai ren* leaves dipped inside his small water pot and incant exchanging the soul of human with the dog, both

facing outward (see Pic.41). When Roushi finished his incantation he gave the water pot to the girl, asked her to cross the dead dog first with her right leg, and then asked her to drink a mouthful of water and blow three times towards east. This completes the rite of *Anam kokpa*.<sup>10</sup> Francis gave Roushi a sum of one hundred rupees for the service rendered, which is something like a fee for such a ritual. The dog meat is prepared and eaten at Pouti's house because the family members are forbidden to eat it.

### 6.5.iii Personal Rituals

Chothe personal rituals range from simple to complex depending on the condition of the person or the nature of his/her illness or disease. Some are seen to be purely indigenous in their practices while few are seen to have borrowed from the Meitei. It is interesting to know that some elders who were considered professional medicine men still perform simple rites and rituals for others though they claim to be Christians because of the concern they have on the people and they trust them for their expertise. For example, Pr. Roushi (who live now at Salemthar) and Y. Leingam of Leininghu, though Christians perform simple rituals and give treatment to sick patients. But getting detailed information on the nature of their treatment becomes difficult as they are reluctant to share everything. Though Leingam was initially reluctant to share his knowledge and experiences for fear of convincing him and extracting his knowledge but after explaining the purpose of my visit clearly he began to share some of it. Some of the personal rituals practiced by the Chothe are given below:-

**(1) *Ui chup Lethoi* (Dog's Ritual):** According to Chothe elders, this *Ui chup lethoi* is a complex ritual performed for sickly children, who are unable to grow up normally as other children. The basic items for this ritual are a dog for a boy, and a bitch for a girl, whichever it is, the dog or bitch is tied in front of the house with a kind of creeper plant called "ahom rui" (*heingan mare* in Meitei). After killing the dog the priest (*theimpu*) conjures his incantation along with the child. It is said that this rite should be performed only by a Parpa priest, but when a Parpa priest is not available, any of the village priest can perform it. After the priest finishes conjuring, the canine teeth of the dog/bitch are removed, washed, and tied with a thread and is made to wear on the child's neck. These teeth signify his weapon to the trouble spirits. But the liver, lung, heart and kidney cooked are packed in a dried gourd and are given to the priest as *tokana* with some amount of money for rendering his service; the rest of the meat is consumed.

(2) *Shiam Thoi*: According to Roushi, this rite is carried out for persons who suffer from prolonged illnesses, believed to be inflicted by clans ancestor spirits. *Shiamthoi* rite begins in the afternoon in the patients house where *theimpu* and *Halthat* the assistant-priest (should be a Rangshai man) and the patient all dressed in new clothes proceeds to cemetery to perform the rite at one of the selected ancestor's tomb with all the ritual items; a rooster, a bottle of wine (*zu*), a *mithun* horn (*Siki*) and a black ginger (*Idou*). On reaching the selected burial site, the priest beats the horn and invokes the dead spirit by conjuring and singing where the assistant priest and the patient symbolically dance around the burial spot three times. After that, the priest makes divination for the sick patient by strangling the rooster by the throat and inspects the rooster's leg for any ominous sign. If the right leg overlaps the left it is considered a good sign, but if it is the other way round it indicates a bad sign. After the divination process the *theimpu* shuts the door of the dead person with the sliced black ginger and also offers the head, legs and wings of the fowl and conjure again. The priest and assistant-priest sing a song at the cemetery which goes like this, [S = stands for Singer and R = Respondent,]:

*S - "Aringtu suk zou-o chamma,*  
*R - Suk sing nge ,*  
*S - Adam tul suk zou-o chamma,*  
*R - O-ye, Adam sing nge".*

In free translation;

*(S- Come out alive now, you have been neutralised,*  
*R- I have come out,*  
*S- Come out with cure, oh you have been neutralised,*  
*R- Oye, I am cure now).*

The last incantation of closing the death's door follows as;

*"Hunihi thou-wa, kathanbom keising nge,*  
*Mee sunnu ko ruino-o, mee shipa ko ruino-o,*  
*Hunihi thou-wa aru don sun hekta sun yeo-wo".*

(From today onwards, I have closed my burial door,  
 Do not take any girls; do not take any boys,  
 From today onwards, wrap like how the bamboo shoots are being wrapped up).

This third line has a particular meaning and significance because the phrase says, “wrap like the bamboo shoots are wrapped”, which signifies how the dead body is wrapped tightly with clothes similar to the Egyptian pharaohs who embalm and wrap the dead bodies.

According to Roushi, after the priest offers a prayer with some wine in front of the tomb, everyone leaves for the patient’s house dancing and singing the previous song (repeating it again). On reaching the house they will be greeted at the house gate with fire smoke burned along with *kuchu-leiham* and before entering the house they sprinkle some water with *tai ren* leaves. Then, a chicken is prepared in the customary way, whereby the head and the liver will be eaten by the priest, the left thigh, heart, intestine by the assistant priest (Rangshaipu), and the right thigh by the patient.

**(3) *Sakma Lethoi* (Cucumber Rite):** This rite is called as ‘cucumber rite’. The Chothe believe that when a person eats cucumber (*sakma*) one tends to easily get a slight fever, stomach-ache or headache because the aroma of cucumber is considered attractive to witches. Therefore, when such feverish sickness happens they believe that it was because he/she has eaten something ignorantly in front of a stranger who possesses an evil eye or a witch. This rite is very simple, the priest or any elderly man or woman who knows the charm can do it. Say, the mother of the patient, first inquires what he/she has taken on that day or the other day and on the basis of what he has eaten, all the suspicious eatables are collected and used to rub them down from his head to legs three times and drops them inside the gourd (or any vessel) which is half filled with water. Then, she listens carefully to the sound produced. According to Mrs. Y. Atonsicha, if it produces a boiling sound then it is confirmed that it was the cause of evil eyes/spirits tormenting the person. But if it does not produce any sound or noise it is repeated with another suspicious item, however, if there is no sound at all then, it is considered that person suffers from the normal fever or stomach-ache. So, the person is treated with herbal medicines.

The people of Lamlanghupi and Khongkhang call this sickness as *Khutchai-khutnam* or *khutchai-zuneem nampa* which means, ‘the smell of a wicked witch/pointed hand’ or ‘smelly wine of a witch/that enters the house’. The objective is same but the method of doing is somewhat different in all. In Khongkhang practice, they add some rice with the suspect eatables into the gourd and heats it up with fire, if it produces a bubbling sound after repeating three times, then it is confirmed that the evil/wicked spirit is tormenting the person. So, they let him or her drink little water of the mixture and also

apply some of it on the person from head to toe and the rest is thrown far away outside the house by saying a simple incantation.

**(4) *Shamla Mingsang Lethoi (Birthday Rite)*:** This is like a birthday (feast) ritual performed for a child, who is one-five years old. The meaning of the rite derives from “sham-la” means, ‘hair grown’, and “ming-sang” means, ‘name purification’. The purpose of the rite is that since child’s hair has grown his name is thus purified, so he will grow up healthy and strong. It is usually done either on his/her first birth day or on any auspicious day on which, the *ego* invites all his sisters and cousins (sisters). This rite is performed by killing a pig whose neck is three feet or more in circumference. The fats or capsule of the neck and ribs, three inches in size are removed and cut into pieces of two/three inches, then after cooking the meat is equally distributed among the village elders according to their specific position and status.

**(5) *Thawai kokpa and Iring Thapa*:** The Chothe believe that sometimes our soul moves out of one’s body and people suffer from some kind of physical weakness, confusion, loss of memory when his/her soul does not return to the person. It is believed that even treatment with medication does not help much, until his soul is brought back ritually. So, in order to bring back the wandering soul, *thawai kokpa* or calling of soul ritual is performed. According to them, this ritual is very similar to “iring thapa” ritual meaning, ‘exchange of soul with a fowl’. This *Iring thapa* ritual is considered more serious because his or her soul is immobilised by someone using magical witchcraft or evil spirits like the love charms, suppressing his mind to someone else’s wish and will. Therefore, with a specific ritual, a fowl is released (not killed) at a place indicated by the outcome of the divination in exchange for the concerned person’s soul to be released by stating his name. This is similarly explained by T.C. Das who says, a chicken is offered to *Haihru* (god) and instead of killing it the bird is let loose at the place of worship and driven towards the forest (1945: 202-03).

But in case of *Thawai kokpa* the priest takes the fowl (chicken) and rubs the concern person sideways from head to shoulder, and moves to the main door of the house holding the fowl by the legs and swings it to and fro from inside the house addressing and requesting all the gods, one after another, whom he can name to help him bring back the concerned person’s soul for which he will offer the fowl which he is holding for the kind service. He also addresses the deities of the four directions. Once the

first part is over, the priest moves to a particular spot prepared for it in the front courtyard and seeks ginger divination, where he slice it with a knife and after a short prayer, throws down on the banana leaf. This ginger divination is similarly carried out thrice. After which the priest takes the fowl and sacrifices it by slitting its throat and offers the blood which is kept in a cone shaped banana leaf, placed above the bamboo basket structure and also sprinkles it in and around the area. The fowl is prepared outside the house in the north-west corner of the veranda. According to their belief, it is taboo to leave the curry unfinished. So the sacrificed fowl is consumed only by the priest and assistant-priest.

**(6) *U-sil lethoi* (Exchange of Soul with Dogfish):** According to the Borni Chothe of Lamlanghupi, ‘if a child or any one suffers from some kind of water borne diseases, then person’s soul is believed to have been taken by some water gods’. In such cases *U-sil lethoi*, meaning ‘exchange of soul with a dogfish’ is performed in the water. According to her such ritual is carried out only after the priest examines and finds out the symptom of the child’s sickness. The items required for this ritual are a dog-fish, one piece each of white and red rice grains and a tub half filled with water. The water tub is placed in between the priest and the patient who are sitting face to face. The priest takes the dog-fish in his hand and invokes, after which he feeds the dog-fish with the red and white rice grains and conjures again. After this, he gives the fish to the child to hold and release it slowly in the tub water. The first movement of the dogfish in the tub water is carefully observed by the priest to read the ominous signs of the child. After conjuring again the priest takes the fish and throws it outside the house into a water body. The priest returns to the place and rubs the child’s body while saying another short prayer. Different priests perform this rite differently according to their expertise and the result of the divination, but the basic principle of the ritual is the same i.e. appeasing the gods or deities in order to exchange the captive soul with something acceptable to them.

**(7) *Bumoupa and Theirang Ampa* :** According to some of the Chothe elders, these are common personal rituals performed when the children get an upset stomach or suffer from slight fever. The term *bumoupa* means, ‘loss of appetite or allergic to food’ and *theirang ampa* means, ‘gastroenteritis sickness’. They believe that if a person suffers from loss of appetite, cold-fever and breathing problems, it means the person is suffering from *bumoupa*, which means ‘to come in contact with an awful poisonous air or breath

of a python/evil deity'. The ritualistic items include; a handful of cooked rice (one *boolam*), seven small silvery fishes (*maha/ngakha*), seven pieces of charcoal (*Mei-aek*), a piece of a child's diaper and seven pieces of chilly (*mashi*) all placed on the fresh banana leaf. The priest conjures his magical charm before the concerned person with the items and throws away outside the house at some bushy corner where people do not walk.

A person suffering from gastroenteritis is considered to be tormented by an evil spirit. The items required for *theirang ampa* ritual are; liquor, a rooster for a boy, a hen for a girl, seven red flowers and fruits. The priest conjures his magic on the items placed on the banana leaf and the rooster/hen is cut by the neck and the blood is allowed to flow above the offered items. Roushi says that if the rooster's or hen's blood drips drop by drop, it indicates a good sign that god has accepted his offer and he/she will be cured soon. However, if the blood flushes/gushes out of the rooster or hen, it is not a good sign and the illness is likely to be prolonged or there is a chance of it getting worse.

**(8) Menstruation Rite:** According to Y. Leingam irregular in menstruation cycle among women is very common and it is a serious health problem that leads to many ailments. Different priests or medicine men have different methods of treatment, depending on their skill and knowledge. The items required for a woman's irregular menstruation problem ritual are; a red hen, seven types of flowers and fruits, some rice, all placed on a banana leaf, except the hen. The priest (*theimpu*) first invokes a prayer with the lady/woman at the house, and then he takes the items and the hen to a spring side. On reaching the selected spot for the rite, as he conjures the charms he sprinkles some of the rice in the spring water. After that he slits the throat of the hen and let the oozing blood flow on the offered items. Leingam says that whether the concern lady will be cured or not will be known from how the blood flows out of the hen's neck. This is another kind of ominous sign observed by the Chothe in understanding the approval of their ritual to their god. According to him if the blood gushes out it indicates of bad sign that the illness will continue but if the blood drips normally drop by drop, then it is considered as good sign and she will be cured soon. However, if the blood appears dark and drops coagulate fast in big drops or if it is black and sticky, then the lady will not survive long as the blood indicates an extreme stage. In such case another ritual may be performed again if the patient is not cured, and if willing to do so.

Consulting a priest or a local medicine man depends on one's trust, faith and the kind of relationship built with the concerned priest, if they are not satisfied one may

consult another priest or priestess, who is considered more specialized in the specific area. These priests and medicine men are like modern day doctors who treat patients through the mechanism of both metaphysical (spiritualism) and physical methods. All these rites and rituals include almost all aspects of worship from simple invocation prayers to complex symbolic sacrificial ceremonies to the gods with certain sets of rules and formulae guided by the elements of social and religious principles of taboo and norms. From the above description it is seen that such rites and rituals become necessary when certain persons develop or show similar symptoms of the sickness.

Analysing from the perspective of rites and ritual the Chothe indigenous religious beliefs and practices signify that the human beings are one type of species whose destiny, health, wealth all depends on their creator the Supreme or Almighty Heavenly God, and the lower gods or evil spirits intervene in their relationship disrupting the normal life of a person either by accident or by casual effect or acted upon by others through some mechanism for personal reasons, like in magic and witchcraft. The Chothe believe in complete submission to their Supreme God but when there is an intervention by the Lower gods and other evil spirits in their normal life one has to identify and appease them by offering sweets or by the sacrificial method according to outcome of the divination. Roushi says that, "Spirits exist in the air which we are unable to see with our naked eye but can be sense and felt only by those with experience". In this way one can feel the blessing of their gods or the presence of annoying evil spirits at certain time and place but never can be seen with the naked eyes. Their presence and affects can be sense and observed by their signs and symbols in the form of a particular stone or animal or plant or insect or even reveal in dreams. It is also seen that from the above description the Chothe rites and rituals clearly emphasizes the existence of gods in a metaphysical state which may be interpreted in spiritualism.

## **6.6 Magic**

The Chothe elders claim that they have been practicing magic since time immemorial and magic has been part and parcel of their indigenous religion. The equivalent term for magic in Chothe is "mit-trang", meaning 'fallacy in the eye', while a magical "charm" is referred to as "mahei" meaning, 'fruitful or productive', and magical "spell" as "leiwa" meaning, 'spelt word by tongue'. Therefore, it indicates Chothe practise varied forms of magic from simple to complex depending on the nature of the conditions. It is believed that magic is practiced by almost all societies, commonly

among the primitive societies, and is believed to have existed as early as the Upper-Palaeolithic in Europe (Lessa 1972: 414). Numerous scholars have conflicting views about magic and religion because of their close relationship. But James Frazer has been credited for his elaborative distinction between the two and classification of magic viz.; Homeopathic or Imitative magic (law of similarity), and Contagious magic (law of contact) which give rise to Sympathetic magic (law of sympathy). Frazer defines that “magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art” (1972: 416). To be more precise in the above definition B. Malinowski states that “Magic is an intrinsic, specific quality of a situation and of an object or phenomenon within the situation, consisting in the object being amenable to human control by means which are specifically and uniquely connected with the object and which can be handled only by appropriate people. Magic therefore, is always conceived as something which does not reside in nature, that is, outside man, but in the relations between man and nature” (1972: 68). The statements can be deduced as summarised by W.A. Lessa who says that, “magic is manipulative; it acts ritually upon impersonal powers in order to automatically make use of them. Magic is a formula or a set of formulas. It is not a force as is mana. Magic is analogous to science in its use, but its premises - its theoretical bases are supernatural and antithetical to science” (1972: 413).

Magic is said to exist in various forms like illusion and indirectly harming enemies by unseen forces. Magic is closely associated with the Chothe since early days as part of their socio-religious activities. Their folktales like *Api Shumdornu*, *Rukungpu*, *Panigraha* and *Rangshaipu* are good examples. Practicing such magic is considered evil and a great sin by the Christians, therefore the people have stopped practising such magic for fear of humiliation and earning bad reputation in society. Some of the respondents even mentioned that there are still some village elders who know certain magical charms and spells but do not use them anymore because they are Christians now and the church does not permit them to practise such evil things. These magicians as pointed out by the respondents are those elders who act as priests or medicine men before they are converted to Christianity.

Emile Durkheim explains that magic is also made up of beliefs and rites like religions, with myths and dogmas, but are more elementary because of technical and utilitarian ends and do not waste time in speculation. Magic also has its ceremonies, sacrifices, lustration, prayers, and chants and dances as well (1915: 42). But the

distinction between religion and magic lies in their objectives and functions. Religion stands for social cohesion while magic is used to achieving means to an end immediately. The two concepts may be understood as the opposite ends to an element or a thing like the two polar points. Another difference is, religion has its permanent associate members while in magic it is only the person or clientele, some anonymous and not a church as Durkheim said (ibid: 44). Often in societies where magic and witchcraft are accepted as realities, mental and physical illness is usually explained as being a consequence of witchcraft or the actions of some supernatural forces like the evil spirits or ghosts. It is said in Nigeria, folk curers are licensed by the government to use supernatural means and herbal remedies to cure people who are suffering from mental illness. Nigeria also licenses doctors trained in Western medicine, which totally rejects the idea of illness being caused by magic or other supernatural causes. However, the Western trained doctors and the folk curers in Nigeria often work cooperatively and send each other patients that they cannot cure with their own approaches.<sup>11</sup>

In Chothe, James Frazer's 'imitative magic' may be term as "Doi-ai" meaning, 'burying of a fowl'. Literally it means, 'someone has buried or placed or positioned or dropped something imitative or image like by sacrificing a fowl'. The objective of this *doi-ai* is to dupe or deceive the targeted person and also to inflict harm on him physically. When such magic is done on a person, the victim gets sick and becomes weak unable to diagnose his sickness. But Frazer's 'contagious magic' in Chothe may be equated as "pot-sem", meaning 'things prepared'. It refers to any kind of object or edible things prepared by the priest or the desired person by spelling the magical charm on it. Therefore, whosoever eats such spelled objects (*pot-sem*) or is under the spell of *doi-ai* and it is believed that his/her mind has been manipulated and deceived by the evil spirit by suppressing one's original thought and taking control of his/her mind and preventing the person from thinking rationally or correctly but acts according to doer's wishes and will. The difference between the two types of magic lies in the nature of usage, the degree and the psychological intension applied. Both these kinds of magic are considered very powerful and dangerous and evil. In such magic it is believed that the person is overpowered and controlled by the external forces or the evil spirit under the command and authority of the priest where the evil spirit is kept at his mercy on behalf of the evil doer.

The Chothe believe the *doi-ai* as a very serious and dangerous magical practice, which is perceived as deadly and destructive metaphysical game played by the priests or

medicine men or sorcerers often at the behest of someone else who has paid for it. The doer's intension is always specific to the target like in the pleasure of winning and seeing the defeat of his enemy i.e. either to avenge by killing him or inflict physical harm until he/she accepts to doer's conditions. In such cases it is believed that the victim does not survive long if they did not consult a professional priest and find remedies at the earliest. They say under the magical spell (*doi-ai*) the victim even suffers from loss of memory unable to think rationally and become adamant because the mind becomes clouded as if shadowed by the dark world being controlled by the evil spirit. They say that when a person is under such spell even the entire family members are also affected with unnecessary trouble and chaos, hatred, internal conflicts, disagreements and quarrels that are destructive in nature. The old-kuki speaking group also uses the term to mean the same practice because of the culture and linguistic affinity. Kh. Khetrichou and M. Wonchung of Khongkang said that such destructive magical charms and spells, though very common in olden days, are not practiced anymore now as they have converted to Christianity. They said such *doi-ai* magic was practiced against their rival kings and chiefs especially during inter-tribal feuds, wars and battles with the neighbouring tribes, so also on love partners. The consequence of this magic might be hatred, accidents, strokes, confusion and misunderstanding with fallacious ideas and thoughts to destroy unity or bring downfall in their socio-political endeavours or break up their love relationships.

For example, if a person, out of extreme anger or fear, wants a deadly revenge on his enemy, a priest is paid to perform magic to harm his enemy. The priest secretly prepares a doll like image of the targeted person with wax or clay and inflicts a stick or dries it on the oven or above hearth or buries it underground after spelling the charm in it. Henceforth, it is believed that the targeted person will begin to suffer slowly in the way the objective was determined by the doer. This method in Chothe is called as *doi-ai* or the imitative magic. The Chothe believe that when such a thing is done to a person no pharmaceutical medicines can cure the sickness, except by consulting another professional priest or local medicine man or sorcerer to help him cast out the evil magical spell at the earliest. They believe that if prolonged it becomes immune to the remedy and is hard to cure, and ultimately results in death when life becomes unbearable. Because they believed his/her soul is been captured in the doll or image. Y. Lungle and M. John of Salemthar also claim that they know many tribal and non-tribal people of Manipur who have suffered for many years under magical spells and charms from many

un-diagnosable diseases, mental or psychological illness, physical weakness and loss of memory, etc., and are unable to recover despite receiving various medical treatments even outside the state. But when such persons are being treated by a right professional medicine man or priest many seem to get cured mysteriously and in no time. Magic and witchcraft for self satisfaction is commonly practiced among the Chothe society.

However, *pot-sem* magic is carried out especially when a person wants to take full advantage of another by deceiving or fallacy to defeat a rival out of hate or to seduce a girl. As Malinowski says that, all such magical rituals are dominated by the emotions of hate, fear, anger, or erotic passion, or by the desire to obtain a definite practical end (1972: 68). According to Chothe elders, there are various types of *pot-sem* or love charms prepared by the local priests and priestesses; such magical love charms or split charms are often spelled on any eatables like sweets, fruits, flowers, pan (*kwai*-beetle nuts), beverage, wine, stone, fish or meat and given to eat to the desire girl/boy while in some cases the spell is carried out in ritual form as *doi-ai*. According to them, when such magical charms are cast on a person, they believe that the person's mind is poisoned, causing him to fail in seeing to see the truth and from thinking rationally or correctly where he begins to lead a confused life with an adamant attitudes and erratic behaviour that often results in "doing things considered right for him/her, but which are perceived to be incorrect or wrong for other in-effected people". The victim develops such thoughts mysteriously and is expected to do things accordingly to the doer's wish as he has been influenced and control by evil spirit under the direction of the doer's spell. Pr. Roushi said, since, such victim's mind is already being poison or brain washed by the magical spell he often behaves erratically, adamant and stubborn though his mind is filled with imaginations and hopes. It is believed that even if one explains his/her erratic attitude and behaviour he/she will not listen, rather will refuse to accept facts. So, they believe that until the evil spirit is cast away or the object is removed from him/her by a professional priest, the person's behaviour will not change. Such erratic behaviour are believed to be because of the intervention and influence of an evil spirit overpowering his soul. Such contagious magic (*pot-sem*) is believed to work temporarily, in most cases, for about a few days to months or even years, but not permanent. But if the doer is interested in continuing, like in seducing a girl he repeats the same charm or spell on the person from time to time. In such cases, they believe that if one do not check or consult profession priests or local medicine man at the earliest, the victim sometimes becomes mad or suffers from mental or psychic problems permanently.

Most Chothe prefer to use the lenient term *pot-sem* rather than *doi-ai*, as the term *doi-ai* is a very strong negative word. *Pot-sem* is understood as a ‘fallacy of the mind’, while *doi-ai* is considered an act of ‘physically inflicting harm on a person’ by the external evil forces on behalf of the doer’s wish and desire. But the connotation *pot-sem* is sometimes use as “mee-khut sem” meaning ‘prepared by someone else hand’, which is understood to mean the casual effect in the handiwork of magical witchcraft. For example, if certain magical charms are spelled on some eatables or hides of cow or buffalo the targeted person usually suffers from some kind of stomach ache, unhealthiness or mental or psychological problems. Therefore, if one becomes suspicious he might consult divination and perform the necessary rituals. But the Chothe believe that only an expert priest, who has superior magical power and knew the exact magical formula can cast away the evil spell or neutralise the magical charm of the person otherwise, it is believed it does not have much effect if the ritual is performed by another priest who did not know the precise magical formula.

Another example is, if a man loves and desires a girl/woman very much and wishes to possess her, he buys love charms secretly from a local medicine man (priest or priestess) and spells the charm on any eatable. On the basis of the instruction and method provided by the priest, the person gives the love charm to the girl he desires. After which it is believed that the charm will start working and the victim, without any reason, would start thinking of him/her deeply every day. Thus love develops against the natural law under the influences of an evil spirit. Such love charms are said to be used by both men and women, and are very common among the Meitei and Meitei-Muslim (Pangal). There are also destructive spells which destroy a happy married couple’s life and break relationships between lovers by casting the ‘splitting spell’ (*hikkai leiwa/mahei*). There are also even seductive charms that make one unconscious immediately and are used in kidnapping or raping girls. Cigarettes are considered as anti magic because magic loses its power and value in fire.

On the other hand, the Meitei, in order to defend themselves from the evil spirits or to prevent retaliation from their counterparts of evil magical charms wears brass objects (*Chandra* in Meitei) on their arm or waist that contains sacred magical charms as talisman in the form of written words or magical charms spelled in dried bark of a particular plant (white *Kurak*) or specific objects. But tribals wear a tooth, especially the canine tooth of a lion, tiger, bear or a dog as a talisman on their neck with a belief that it

helps dispel or protect from an evil-eye or evil magical spells, as one sees in the *U-chup lethoi* where a child is made to wear the tooth of a dog.

Table 21 shows that out of 200 respondents, 113 (i.e. 56.5%) persons believe in magic and 87 (i.e. 43.5%) people do not. The figure shows that the mature adults and village elders believe magic more than the youth. This is seen because the younger generation is mostly brought up in the Christian environment and beliefs.

The objective of using magic on innocent person is motivated and derived at winning or taking full advantage of the other person for certain personal reasons like seducing a girl. While in some case such magic is carried out when a person is determined to take revenge for hurting his/her emotional or sentiments by a rebuke, hatred, defeat or embarrassment. However when the victim knows that he/she is under such magical spell for his sickness he/she might also intend to do the same. Thus, out of fear or hatred such magic becomes vital for vengeance which slowly develops into a deadly metaphysical or mental game acted on by a priest. The Chothe believe that once started, such magic or witchery it is not easy to stop as both the parties engage in exchange their hatred until one surrenders or is defeated. So, when the enmity between the two persons become too strong, not only contagious magic or witchery (*pot-sem*) but even imitative magic (*doi-ai*) is also used with an aim to end the cause and effect which results in blood pressure stroke, an un-curable sickness, mental illness and paralysis. It is believed that such evil spirits misguide the action of others under the wish of the doer for selfish personal reasons against the law of nature. However, in magic or witchery quarrels, the Chothe believe that it is always the evil doer who will finally succumb, even to death, whereas the victim despite his severe wounds and suffering at the end is likely to survive as the victor, provided he takes precautionary action and defends himself. It is like the old saying, ‘Ultimately the good triumph over the evil’.

**Table 21 Chothe respondents who believe in magic (both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

Category	Youths (20-40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percentage
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>		
Yes	24	10	36	9	28	6	<b>113</b>	<b>56.5%</b>
No	32	12	27	5	11	-	<b>87</b>	<b>43.5%</b>
	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Some Chothe elders claimed that most of their magic and witchcraft formulae have been lost to the Meitei since their interaction. During my visit inside the Kangla Fort, a Manipuri priestess (*Maibee* Radhamani), when asked to her why *maibeas* usually wear a tribal scarf/dress during their divination? She says that, “Since the tribal gods or spirits are very powerful they have to wear the tribal dress to protect themselves against the other lesser gods from diluting their mind, and the first lady (*Leima Panthoibi*) of the land belongs to a tribal community coming from the east (*Nongpok*)”. Likewise in important rituals and coronation ceremonies of Meitei, a tribal man in traditional attire is required to be present. Such practices may be explained in many ways. One such explanation could probably suggest that the tribals are the original inhabitants of the land from the socio-religious historical perspective since the tribal forefathers’ spirits still control the land. Therefore, the Manipuri *maiba* and *maibee* have acquired the culture and knowledge of tribal magical formulae act as imposters to identify themselves as tribals by putting on tribal scarf/dress in order to safeguard themselves from repercussion. This explanation may not completely suffice the whole reason of the practice.

#### **6.6.i Some Famous Chothe Magicians**

The Chothe magical story is incomplete without the famous magicians i.e. Parpa Panigraha and Yuhlung Mushanpa. They say Panigraha was a notorious and very skilful magician and no one dared challenge him considering him as one of the greatest magicians among his contemporaries. Because of his powerful magic even the king of Manipur once sought his love charms for seducing beautiful girls. Some of his famous magical folktales are:

- (1) The *Inn-chung ar-row*: The story is of a competition against his rival medicine man, where he showed his magical talent by roasting and cooking a chicken on the roof of a house without letting even a single thatch of the roof burn in the day time.
- (2) It is also said that once a ferocious bear was trapped in Panigraha’s net, he went near it to release but the bear scratched him on his face. This angered him and so he cast his magical charm on the bear to obey him and later killed it with his knife in one stroke. They also say that in early days he used to tame wild animals like elephants and tigers.

(3) Another popular story is of an incident, which says that he rescued his friend encircled by the forest wild-fire while clearing his jhum field by redirecting the wind and fire to the other side with his magic.

Yuhlung Mushanpa is also considered another great magician of Chothe of the latter period. He too was known for his notoriety and braveness. He was also the village chief and was known sometimes as Mushan Hulakpa (chief). It is said that he cured and healed many sick patients with his *doi-ai* and *pot-sempa* magics which the Maring and Meitei medicine men could do. He is also said to be a womaniser because of his powerful love charms. Other famous Chothe magicians with almost equal feats are; Makante, Damsingpa and Shalchou (at Konjol settlement).

### **6.7 Witchcraft**

The notion of witchcraft exists even among the Chothe like the other tribal communities of Manipur. But because of its negative connotation and attitudes towards the subject matter, and the fear of committing identity mistakes or falsification, such stories are always whispered in secrecy and not talked about openly. According to W.A. Lessa and E.Z.Vogt, witchcraft is the exercise of evil through an imminent power. Witchcraft, unlike sorcery, is derived from within, and cannot be learned. A witch's power to do evil may lie dormant and if not used but increases if practiced often, but it is nearly always inherited (1972: 414). Witches are of different types. There are two types that are commonly found among the Chothe and relative tribal groups. These witches derive their names from their peculiar nature and behaviour. The first type is called as "khutchai" literally 'index finger' or "khut-shei" means 'long hands' and sometimes as "khutchei jum" meaning 'pointed index finger'. It refers to witches who have long pointed fingers or hands. The second type is known as "lei-shei" meaning 'long tongue'. But they are commonly known as "khutchai mit or khutshei mit" meaning 'the eyes of long hands'. This *lei-shei*, refers to a typical witch, that sticks out her red tongue beyond its length in her sleep and it is believed that the spirit ventures outside the body during such times. Generally all kinds of witches are understood as possessing 'evil-eyes' (*leihu mit*) and some as vampire or blood sucker (*athi-chup ngei*) depending on the nature of their evil power acquired. The Chothe believe that such witches are more prevalent among women than men in the region, and are generally considered to inherit their powers from birth, though some are believed to have acquired it from certain incidents.

W.A. Lessa also similarly remarked that the witches are mostly women even among the Nupe of West Africa (1972: 414).

The Chothe believe that these witches possess evil spirits or have the power of the evil-eye, normally inherited from their parents or kin members after they pass away or transmit it into unborn child when inside her mother's womb. In such case the evil spirit is believed to assume and take control of a kin member's body as though he is still alive because his previous family members did not perform his death ceremony properly. It is believed even if the other person dies the evil spirits enter or take control of the nearest kin member when find any opportunity to do so. However, it is also said that if the person who possess a strong will and does not wish to pass the spirit to his or her nearest kin members when he or she dies the spirit becomes a 'ghost' that ventures in to the village and torments people. But most often it is said that if a baby is born on the day when a particular witch dies it is believed the witch's soul enters the baby's body and stays, in case she did not have any kin members to pass it on to. Although, in earlier days it was considered a very serious offence by society but now people seem to be lenient and less bothered about witches, which is attributable to education and influence of Christianity.

According to the Chothe most of these witches often focus their evil eyes upon cute babies, young children and especially pretty innocent women. The witch also attacks those who speak ill of them. The Chothe women are very careful when they come in contact with such kind of witches because they believe that if they do not treat or please them well they avenge the person at night leaving dark black bite marks, which means that if a person, believed to be a witch, happens to stare deeply at a man or a woman while he or she enjoys delicacies and does not share with the person (witch). Then it is believed that he/she will probably suffer from some kind of stomach ache or some physical ailment or misfortune. Similarly, if a person shows a disgruntled attitude or grudges to a witch or hurts her sentiments or physically assaults, the concern person is likely to suffer from some kind of misfortune either physically or mentally according to her displeasures.

For example, if a witch or the evil eye (*khutchei jum*) happens to meet a young pretty lady while shopping and she envies her looks or the pretty lady does not treat or respond to her well, then the witch will stare or touch or point her finger at the clothes or jewellery or any eatables of the young lady, so that the lady suffers from some kind of stomach ache or sickness after she reaches her house. A bite mark or dark

bluish/greenish spot on the body which is very painful is believed to be a sign of a witch's displeasure. Perhaps, if the witch is very angry and serious about an insult or the embarrassment from that pretty lady or anyone else then the witch might take the extreme step in the form of magical witchcraft of contagious or imitative magic (i.e. *pot-sem* or *doi-ai*). Because of such reasons the Chothe refer to witches as evil-eyes or pointed index finger or long hands, which is more of a code of language only understood by them, although these witches are generally equated as vampires or blood suckers (*athi chup ngei*). So, the Chothe believe that the dark blue-black or dark greenish mark seen on the next day on any part of the body especially, on the neck, arm, thigh, belly and back with some pain in the area without any accident is considered to be the sucking marked of the witch during one's sleep. John M. Roberts in his article, '*Witchcraft Event Staging in Rural Tlaxcala: A Study in Inferred Deception*' has clearly describes the nature of one of the four types of witches as 'bloodsucking witches' among the Tlaxcala (Mexico) community, the principal common physical indicators of an infant's having been sucked by a witch, the position and location of the infant's body has black and blue marks on the chest, neck, and back (indicating asphyxiation); and occasionally scratches on the infant's face' (2000: 145, 147).

Some of the Chothe women like H. Puinuleima, Th. Leima, Y. Borni, H. Hoinu and H. Horei during interview shared their experiences on how the witch comes and sucks or bites them and their children during their sleep leaving a dark greenish mark on their bodies and children. For example, Mrs. H. Hoinu (43) from Lamlanghupi luckily showed me a dark greenish spot on her left thigh telling me that it was the sucking mark of a witch. She said the witch is an old Meitei woman from the neighbouring village who often came and sold fish and vegetables in the village. Hoinu believes that the witch was angry at her the previous day as she did not purchased the fish she brought and bought it from one of her rivals. She admits of talking in bad tone to the old woman that her fish was too expensive compared to other lady. So, Hoinu believes that she might hurt the old woman's sentiments and as a result it is she who took revenge on her. Some of them also admit that such marks are not only very painful sometimes but lead to dizziness and suffocation. Therefore, the Chothe often avoid people who are confirmed as witches.

According to Chothe, the witch often perform their witchcraft in secret, mostly in the evening when it is quiet often in her garden on the pretext of plucking some vegetables or at her hearth before she sleeps by murmuring the spell. Such typical behaviour is said to have being noticed accidentally by the neighbours when they happen

to suddenly dropped by or visit her house. Therefore, in such cases, if a person is suspicious of suffering from some ailment or sickness he is expected to consult a priest or medicine man to diagnose the symptom of the illness by divination, and accordingly a simple personal ritual may be performed if necessary. Evans Pritchard also describes that even the Zande attribute all misfortunes to witchcraft unless there is strong evidence, and subsequent oracular confirmation, that sorcery or one of those evil agents (2000: 202). Such consultation with a priest is considered very important because as Evans Pritchard describes that although the Zande accept a mystical explanation for the causes of misfortune, sickness, and death, they do not allow this explanation if it conflicts with social exigencies expressed in law and morals (ibid: 214).

Therefore, for simple ailments, a priest or an expert performs a simple rite with the suspicious object which the witch is believed to have envied or thought about it. In order to get rid of the pain and cure, the priest conjures the dispelling charm with a piece of charcoal, some cooked rice and red flower that are all placed on the banana leaf along with a small amount of the suspicious edible items, and wipes it on the greenish dark mark, spitting on it three times and offered it by throwing it outside the house. When such simple appeasement rite is performed the Chothe believe the pain and the dark mark heals faster. Perhaps, if the bite is deep and the person continues to suffer seriously a sorcerer may be consulted for divination and probably a complex ritual is performed by a priest.

According to Pr. Roushi, M. Wonchung, Pr. Wailum and Pr. Herachou they can feel and detect the presence of a witch in a group of people and recognize them from their typical character and nature through their experience and contact. If one identifies the presence of a witch in a group or in any social gathering one is asked to follow certain basic rules, that is, he or she should not be bothered nor pay any serious attention to raise suspicion like staring or showing any displeasing attitude at her/him which might disclose him/her identity in public. One is expected to remain passive; otherwise he is expected to prepare for the consequences later. They say sometimes their nature is characterised by restlessness, anxiety and impatience or an uncomfortable attitude while standing or sitting directly in front of a priest or a person with a stronger personality. In a group they prefer a secluded place and always stay behind people. In certain cases if one can identify a witch, one is asked to secretly pluck her/his hair and hide it under one's pillow to avoid from harming oneself. In olden days the Chothe especially women used

to wear, the stalk of “wairei” (a kind of wild flower, the Meitei called it *Nousek lei*) as necklace, to protect themselves from witches.

**Witch Curse** The Chothe believe that if a person suffers from any kind of epilepsy or stammering or some kind of delirium or hallucination problems he is considered under the spell or curse of a witch. Such persons with epilepsy and hallucination problems are treated with several rites and rituals. But if a Chothe person suffers from stammering they beat him with a broom (*phiyung*) suddenly on his back to startle with a shock and pain. If this is repeated three-four times the witch’s spirit will leave the person due to unbearable broom’s beating. According to Th. Ngamleng his two friends; H. Cheidon and P. Bimol and his younger brother Th. Luwangngam acquired the habit of stammering one after another by imitating Pg. Manisana, were cured by hitting with home brooms.

### **6.8 Talisman, Charms and the Fetish**

A Talisman, a charm and a fetish are objects like stones or plants or animal parts that have certain supernatural powers which they believe bring them fortune or good luck and waive any misfortune. A talisman in Chothe is called *jai* or *yai* meaning, ‘charms’. They consider that white and green talisman stones are very good, red talisman stones very powerful, while some black stones are good and also dangerous, which are found in different shapes and sizes. If a person finds such talismanic stones one is considered very lucky. The Chothe name their talismans according to the nature and type of the stones. Some common talismans and the fetishes of Chothe are:

***Shang-lung (Paddy’s Stone)*:** According to Mk. Neilut the village Old-Wangparal once had a powerful talisman called *shang-lung* or paddy-stone owned by a Makan family. According to him the stone was discovered by their family predecessors in the forest many years back and was handed down from generation to generation through their most trusted and loving child. It is believed that this Makan family, though not very rich was always self sufficient compared to other family because of the magical power of their talisman the paddy-stone (*shang-lung*). The stone is often kept inside the rice-barn or inside the rice pot by conjuring the charm for plenty which they believe will fill the rice-barn or the rice pot with its power and last longer. It is said not long ago one such kind of paddy-stone was in the hands of an old widow from Old-Wangparal village who lived a

contented life. But one day her relatives and neighbours noticed something unusual in her behaviour – she stopped talking to them and was often found quietly sitting alone. After few months when some of her close relatives consulted a sorcerer (*maiba*) it was told to them that her talisman the paddy-stone was broken and so the stone's spirit was tormenting her, and that she would recover only after repenting her mistakes and offering a ritual to the deity. After the ritual was carried out she became normal and when her relatives asked how it happened. She told them that the stone slipped from her hand and it broke into pieces after that she threw it away that was how it happened to her.

According to some Chothe elders like H. Thambaljao and Y. Tomalsing and Th. Jatrasingh those families who possess such talisman stones are usually rich and self-sufficient by God's blessing and also by the magnetic power of it that accumulates wealth. These families perform rituals for the talisman stone in the *Shanghong* festival and also on the harvest day by offering a fowl, food and drinks. This ritual is similar in nature with *thawai kokpa*. They believe that if they neglect to pay respect with ritual, the family's wealth will decline. Such talismanic stones are found in different shapes and sizes but are normally black or white in colour (see Pic.16).

***Asha-lung (Animal's Stone):*** According to Kh. Khetrichou and M. Wonchung of Khongkhang, there was a Parpa family in their village who had seven sons. One day all the sons or brothers went hunting and killed a tiger. Amazingly, they found three black-reddish stones inside the stomach of the tiger, two stones were the size of an apple and the third one little smaller than the other two. Such a stone in Chothe is called as “*asha-lung*”, meaning ‘animal's stone’. According to them, after eating the meat they brought the three tiger-stones to the village and buried them in their house. Soon the family and clan begin to experience trouble. Within five years time their clan become almost completely extinct in the village as they died one after another due to certain mysterious illnesses. This made them apprehensive and when the survivors of the family members consulted a divination, it was prophesised that they have not made any kinds of offering for the talisman stones (*asha-lung*). On the basis of the divination, a fowl was sacrificed every year and the talisman stones were washed with the fowl's blood. But every third year a pig was sacrifice instead of a fowl. Although this ritual appeared simple in nature it is considered a serious ritual because of the sacrificial offering involved. They believe if the ritual is not carried out before their plantation the spirit of the talisman stones often kill domestic animals of the village like dogs, cows, buffaloes, etc. They sometime

believed even human beings are not spared from such misfortune. But if the family performs the ritual the village will live in peace and harmony, and will even be protected from misfortune. They claim that, later when the villagers began to convert to Christianity such rituals were prohibited, the family is believed to have given it to a Maring priest.

According to the Khongkhang Chothe elders, during one of the sacrificial offerings the talisman stones revealed secrets to the priest during divination (*jai anpa* or *Sha-junpa*) that it was the stones that brought devastation and misfortune to the Sakang tribe who lived near Tegnoupal as they were plotting war against them for territorial expansion. According to their folktale, this incident seems to have occurred in the early part of twentieth century during the inter-tribal wars. It seems the stones indicated that the reason of killing all the seven Parpa brothers and their kinsmen, including the village chief and other village council members, was their disrespect. The two Chothe elders said that the family threw away the talisman stones in the forest but they were brought back again as the family were greatly disturbed in their social life. But finally they were given it to a Maring medicine man from the neighbouring village. This story of the talisman stones explains that if treated well by the concerned person they bring good luck and even protect them but if neglected or shown disrespect they bring misfortune.

**Thunderbolt Stone:** According to Y. Tomalsing, the Chothe believes that the thunderbolt stone or *a-van* or *leihu alung* (heavenly or god-stone) has certain magical powers since early days. Therefore, they treasure these stones as very important medicinal assets because they have power of healing. They believe that if a person suffering from certain minor ailments like, stomach aches, headaches, fever and air-borne diseases, drinks the prepared mixture/liquid and also applies the liquid on the body it cures him immediately. The liquid is prepared by smearing some water on a hard stone, the water is collected with cotton in a container on which the priest also spells his healing magical charms.

**The Python's Eye:** The Chothe believe the right eye of a python is a very powerful talisman, if a person can get one before the python dies it is said to bring them good luck, and the owner becomes then, rich and prosperous very soon because of its strong magical power. They say that it is especially used by tricksters and professional card players because it has the power of revealing or visualizing the opponent's cards. Co-joined king-chilly (*U-marok*) is also considered as a talisman that brings luck for card players.

## 6.9 Divination (*Jai anpa*)

Divination is an art, practiced for foreseeing the future events or discovering hidden knowledge of the past and future by invoking supernatural powers. It is also practiced in almost all primitive societies of the world, and so, is considered as universal culture. The Chothe, since early days are believed to have been practicing divination as part and parcel of their indigenous religion. They believe that it helps man to know his or their future and keep his destiny in control especially from any kind of misfortune by knowing the unknown caused or course of nature. They believed that by consulting their god or spirits they can read the mind of others or know the cause of the trouble what is unknown to them by such divination methods. Such practices are supported by their genealogical myth, oral history and also by the ancient manuscripts of *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* (MNL) and *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* (CTP). Their rituals and ceremonies are mostly accompanied with different types of divinations known by different names. Therefore, divination in Chothe is referred as *jai anpa* meaning, 'looking at the talisman or crystal ball' or *saan-pa* meaning, 'search by combing' with coins or sticks, or *jan anpa* means, 'looking at the hanging' of the fowl's leg. Such divinations are carried often out by their village priest but sometimes by the local medicine man who acts as seer or sorcerer. The Kachin call such priests *Myithoi* where, 'myi' means 'eyes', and 'thoi' as 'illuminated' (1992: 114). However, in Meitei such fortune tellers or sorcerers or oracles are generally identified with as *Maiba* (priest) and *Maibee* (priestess) who are mostly professional priests and priestesses in the art of magical witchcraft. Such fortune tellers among the Christian may be referred to as the "Visionaries". The term visionary, though, carries different perception, in principle; it falls under the same category of seers or fortune tellers or one who is able to see the past and also predicts the future.

However, whenever the Chothe face certain personal, family or village problems like wars and battles, health, marriage, business, the cause of family conflicts, tragedy or any misfortunes, etc. they seek divination from the village priest (*theimpu*) or the medicine man who act as seers or sorcerer and consult their Principal Guardian God *Pu Lungchungpa* or *Pakhangpa* to prophesise and reveal their future. The outcome of the divination in relation to the positive and negative remark usually follows certain rituals. Therefore for the Chothe, divination is to know the unknown through the priest, where the priest, by offering small gift request their gods or spirits to tell him/them about the

causal effects of the concerned person or the secret deeds or past records of an anonymous person, or tell him the hidden schedules of God (Nature) of the concern person or others, so they may rectify or compromise or be prepared in advance for the caused or future course of their life. Thus, on the basis of the result of the divination, a simple or a complex rite or ritual, if necessary is performed accordingly, either to rectify or compromise or to neutralise the causal effects, to cure the sick or divert misfortune. The Chothe believe that the prophesy and prediction of their Supreme guardian God *Pu Lungchungpa (Pakhangpa)* in forecasting their future is so accurate that they consult him only in serious matters, especially when it concerns the village as a whole or when a family or person is in severe crisis of misfortune. Sunday is considered as the best and most auspicious day for consulting divination to their God *Pu Lungchungpa*. But sometimes if it is demanded by the situation it is also done on any other auspicious days like Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The offering items for a simple divination or rite are normally two candle sticks, incense sticks, betel nuts and its leaves (*kwa*), some fruits and sweets.

The frequency of the Chothe seeking divination from their God has tremendously declined now. For family or personal divination it is normally the woman of the family who accompanies the village priest to their sacred-grove along with the offerings like; fruits and sweets for the purpose where the problems consulted are usually related to health, family conflict, marriage, business prospects, cause of misfortune etc. But nowadays many Chothe women secretly go to renowned professional Meitei priests or priestesses known as *maiba* or *maibee* to seek divination and also to perform certain family and personal rituals because most of the Chothe have been converted to Christianity. Secondly, it is because the consultation fee for divination by Meitei priest and priestess is lower (a minimum of Rs. 10/- per divination) and less complicated as they conduct it at their own residence. Thirdly, most of the expert Chothe village priests and professional medicine men have expired and the surviving village priests are not very proficient with their ritual formulae and the people do not have full faith in them. Fourthly, it is also said that the early village priests or medicine men rarely divulge all their magical ritual formula to the young priests for fear of the mis-utilisation and repercussion. Fifth, to maintained personal confidentiality in order to avoid negative implication since seeking divination and performing secret rituals are looked upon with suspicion by some people. Therefore, nowadays, the village priests only seek divination of village and family when it seriously concerns them.

Some of the Chothe divinations which are connected with rituals are exclusively done by the Chothe village priest like in case of the benediction and valedictory rituals of the *Innampei* and *Achui rin* festivals and also the ritual of *Leihu heiruk keipa* (the thanks giving ritual) at their sacred-grove or deities site. The professional local medicine men though considered experts in the art of magic and witchcraft are prohibited from performing such village divination or rituals, although they perform personal and family divinations and rituals for the sick patients outside their sacred-groves. They say that most of the priests or sorcerers or *maibee* communicate their God or spirits in their spirit's language when seeking divination, intelligible to only those who are specialised.<sup>12</sup> The Chothe, in olden days, considered the village priests as having equal knowledge and power of magic and witchcraft like any fortune tellers; although fortune tellers are generally considered only those who could prophesy the past and future events.

Divination is another powerful medium of sorcery which the Chothe priests and medicine men have been practicing since early days. They consult their God or deities by performing various divinations to know their future course and other future aspects. Table 22 shows that out of 200 respondents, 103 (i.e. 51.5%) persons believe in the predictions of divination while 95 (i.e. 47.5%) persons do not believe it.

Many of the Chothe who believe in divination are satisfied and contented after consulting a priest or priestess or sorcerer and perform the required rites through divination. They claim to be happy, light hearted and mentally free from doubts and confusion after rituals are performed. A ritual if necessary is carried out to appease spirit by offering sacrifices. The Chothe rituals are also an act of appeasing evil spirits to get relief from various sufferings believed to be inflicted by evil spirits. Especially the older generation still has good faith in such methods of treating an illness, though the younger generations has less faith in it.

**Table 22 Chothe respondents who believe in divination (both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

Category	Youths (20-40) years		Mature adults (40-60) years		Vill. elders above 60 years		Total	Percentage
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>		
Yes	22	8	34	8	27	4	<b>103</b>	<b>51.5%</b>
No	34	14	29	4	12	2	<b>95</b>	<b>47.5%</b>
	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 6.9.i Types of Divinations

The Chothe adopt various forms and methods of divination to know their future like any ancient people of the world. According to W.A. Lessa and Vogt there are generally two types of divination; inspirational and non-inspirational. Inspirational are more of the direct consultation with the supernatural powers like the Shamanism crystal gazing and shell hearing, while the non-inspirational are fortuitous like meanings in omens, signs, astrology chiromancy ordeal (1972: 414). In practice Shamans usually go into a trance to find out the answers from their spirit helpers. The ancient Romans divine the outcome of battles or business deals by conducting an autopsy of a chicken and examining the condition of the liver (ibid). Today many Americans have even set up their own business institution of sorcery or fortune telling in foretelling the future course of one's fate or for their clients by examining things such as; tea leaves at the bottom of a cup, palmistry, numerology, tarot card readings, crystal-ball gazing, shell hearing.

However, let us look at some of the common indigenous divinations practice by Chothe since early days viz.; (1) Chicken's Leg Divination (*Aike Jan*), (2) Egg Divination (*Artui Jan*), (3) Small Coins Divination (*Sae-Kup Konjai*), (4) Bamboo Strap Divination (*Ta-Shan*), (5) Ginger Divination (*Aithing Jan*), (6) Dog Or Pig's Spleen Divination (*Arshrah Jan*), (7) Dog Or Pig's Liver Divination (*Ui Or Ok Athin Jan*), (8) Chicken Intestine Divination (*Ai-Ari Jan*).

**Chicken's Leg Divination (*Aike jan*):** On the basis of their mythology this seems to be the earliest simple type of divination practiced. The village priest, after conjuring the charm strangles the fowl by the throat after which the dead fowl's leg is inspected. They believe that if the right leg overlaps the left it is a good sign and the God approves it but if it is the other way round, the left leg overlapping the right it indicates a bad sign. This simple divination is commonly performed on the child's naming and youth initiation ceremony and also in *thawai kokpa* and *shang kokpa* rituals.

**Egg Divination (*Artui jan* and *Muithoi*):** There are two types of egg divinations viz. *artui jan* and *muithoi*. The *artui jan* (egg divination) is performed to seek the good or bad ominous signs at the time while looking for a suitable site for a new village or house. This practice is evidently mentioned in the legend of *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* where young Pakhangpa was asked to perform *artui jan* by his maternal grandfather Surou at a place where he decided to establish a new settlement. Y. Hongpa said

traditionally the egg is buried in the ground one foot deep, wrapped in the banana leaf along with *Ngakha* (the small silvery fish), some rice and flour for a night. When inspected on the next day if they find the egg and the fish without any paltriness and ants gathered around, it indicates a good ominous sign, suitable for settlement.

The second type of egg divination is called *muithoi* meaning, 'waking up the hair'. This divination is considered serious and is performed especially when a family experiences abrupt misfortune and wants to confirm the apprehension that they are under a magical spell like imitative magic (*doi-ai*) cast upon them by some envious people either to harm the family's prosperity or reputation. Y. Leingam (83) said that *Muithoipa* is hardly practiced because of its sensitiveness (see Pic.43). Further he said in olden days *muithoi*, this egg divination is usually performed only by the village chief (*Khiyangpu* or *Hiyangpu*). But according to him, it seems they also perform sometimes to look for a suitable village or house site. Only those who are really skilful in the art of magic can perform it. In this *muithou* divination, the egg should be a red hen's egg taken directly from the hatchery and must be held only in the right hand, with some rice, white and red flowers, three branches of *reng-lei* (herb, *langtharei* in Meitei) and a peacock's feathers. Some perform it at their deities' site, some outside the main house door of the concerned family. The purity of the egg is considered utmost important for this divination to be flawless.

The procedure that is followed is, the priest places the egg on his right palm horizontally and invokes "Sun rise, Moon rise, you see and knew everything. My rooster wake up, and tell me whether my village/house site is fit for living or not, or is it blocked or unblocked by the evil spirits from the darkness..." (*Ni-nu suk, Tha-pa suk, nangchu leesha-ye, dangsha-ye. Ka-arr thou-o, Hu phung-mo, phung-nomo...*). The incantation is according to the objective, either to seek for a house site or to confirm for the *doi-ai* magical spell cast upon them. If the egg which is placed horizontally on his right palm moves up vertically after conjuring his magical charm it is believed to be a good sign or no *doi-ai* spelled was cast upon them. But if the egg does not move up and remains in the same position, then it is confirmed as a bad omen for the house site or that the family is under a certain magical spell. Based on the result of divination, the proposed village or house site may be abandoned or chosen, or the family may perform a ritual to cast away the evil spell. The egg used in divination is not meant to be eaten and so it is thrown far away. Gilhodes also wrote about the egg divination practiced by the Kachin though it appears little different in nature of practices (1992:120).

**Coin Divination (*Sae-kup* or *Konjai*):** According to Chothe elders, the *sae-kup konjai* or coin/metal divination requires nine small pieces of metal or coins, the village priest on any auspicious day, usually Sunday or Monday, offers some sweets at the deities' site or sacred-grove and performs the divination. He first takes three coins or metal pieces, placed triangularly on his right palm after conjuring his magical charm immediately tosses them on the ground (see Pic.4). According to them the three coins/metals represent the three gods; *Pakhangpa*, *Leima* and *Potlungpa*. This is repeated three times and if all the coins/metal pieces form a good triangular shaped it is considered a very good ominous approval sign. But if it does not form a good triangular shape it is considered a bad sign. Such a divination is also performed during the child naming ceremony, on the benediction and valedictory rituals day of the *Innampei* and *Achui rin* festivals and also in the thanksgiving ritual *Leihu heiruk keipa*.

**Spleen Divination (*Athin jan*):** This divination is performed especially during sacrificial offerings like *keirou thou*, a purification of the family. A pig is killed by piercing a sharp bamboo stick through its heart from the left side and the pig's spleen is examined carefully. Similarly, the sacrificial dog's spleen is examined on *Lamleh thoipa* or *Panthong iratpa* ritual and also the sacrificial fowl's spleen and intestine on *Shanghong kokna lethoi*, where the priest interprets the signs accordingly (see Pic.36).

**Bamboo Strap Divination (*Ta-shanpa*):** The term *ta-saanpa* means, 'search by combing with the bamboo strap'. It is the most common term in the Chothe dialect for any divination. It appears to be the most ancient method of divination before metals or coins were used.

**Mang Tampa:** According to Chothe *mang tampa* means, 'prophesies in dreams'. This divination is usually carried out when a person dies naturally but suddenly. This divination ceremony is very elaborate and is carried out in the veranda of the house in the evening. In such a divination the dead man's spirit is summoned by the priest or sorcerer on behalf of the family requesting him to tell his last statement of will and wish or express anything which he failed to inform his family members and friends before he died.

### **6.9.ii Christian Visionary and Healers**

Christian missionaries, like Reverends and Pastors are gaining much popularity throughout the world as, visionary and healers. The impact of this strong revivalist movement is also experienced by the people of north-eastern region of India in a different way. For example, of late these Christian Reverends and Pastors of North-east India, like the rest of the Christian evangelists of the world, are gaining a reputation for their visionary or healing power popularly known as they are assumed to receive divine grace and can heal and cure the sick and even have the power to cast away demons by the power of their prayers. Similarly, there are also many Christian laymen healers who are not Reverends or Pastors are assumed to receive divine grace in their dreams and can see the past and future of other people. Mrs. Y. Nalani of Salemthar says that a lady visionary who belonged to the Lamkang tribe from Heibunglok village near Salemthar village in Chandel district can predicts and heals the sick patients through prayers. She belonged to the American Baptist Church. According to Mrs. Nalani, since many find her divination prayers simple and accurate many neighbouring people, irrespective of community, sex or religion (even the Meitei or Hindu) often visits her almost every morning to consult her for various problems relating to health issues, loss of property, marriages, business prospects, family crisis, etc. She says this Lamkang lady sits and prays in the name of Lord Jesus Christ by pronouncing the concerned person's name and all join in mass prayers after which she explains her vision narrating them like an oracle or a sorcerer, and on the basis of the divination the instructions are carried out. In case of the concern person or the sick patient cannot personally attend the prayer ceremony, the consultant is expected to bring one of his personal assets like a shirt as a symbolic representation. It is said she refuses to accept money for her divination and healing accepting instead as God's blessing and grace to help the people. But it seems people often give her something in kind like a kilogram of sugar or biscuits for rendering her service and time.

When a limping Chothe old man from Lunghu a neighbouring village disappeared from his home for three days after a quarrel with one of his sons, one of the daughters-in-laws Mrs. Ringdam consulted the Lamkang lady (visionary) because in spite of thorough searching in the area by the entire village and the neighbouring youths they could not find him. According to Ringdam, the lady told her that the Limping man was still alive and would return soon. As predicted by her it seems on the third day, surprisingly, a distant relative from Ajouhu brought him to his family. This is one

example among many Christian visionaries and healers in the region. The Salemthar women also informed me about another old Maring woman considered as visionary from Pallel Lamkhai, Chandel who is running a small independent Christian dispensary and treating sick patients with herbal medicines through divination and prayers. Some of her herbal medicines are seen sold at the Pallel Lamkhai. It seems when she initially received the blessing and grace many sick patients are said to have been healed and cured of various sickness and problems.

Similarly, few years ago in 2005-06 there was a young man from Khoirentak a Kom village near Moirang who was acclaimed as healer and became popular in one night. It is believed that he cured and healed patients especially, with paralysis, kidney and eyesight problems, gastroenteritis, etc. by offering prayers and providing them holy water to drink which was blessed by him and contained a herbal mixture. It is said hundreds and thousands of people, irrespective of religion, caste, sex and community thronged his house during those days for few months. Unlike the other visionaries or healers, my informant who also visited him says, since he accepted money instead of refusing or accepting only a little, his healing powers seemed to have declined. Another very popular healer of recent time who was even in the news is known as Chawilien Hmar from Saikot, Churachandpur District who claimed he received his divine powers in his dream. He was popularly known for curing cancer, diabetes, malaria and gastroenteritis with a herbal plant called *Kam-Sabut*. But the new scientific name of the plant registered by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Shillong is *Croton Caudatus Gieseler* under the family of *Euphorbia cecae* and the code number is Acc. No. 96367 (The Sangai Express June 10<sup>th</sup> 2008). Miss H. Hoirei who visited him with her aunts and friends told me that his village was thronged by thousands of people irrespective of tribe, caste or religion from different walks of life from early in the morning. Some even waited in a long queue to receive his blessing and the herbal mixture prepared by him and his family members. Now, it is learnt that his power has also declined like other healers in a short time inexplicably. They believed that it could be because he also accepted a lot of money like the Kom healer, offered to him by the rich, business men and politicians in kindness out of their generosity from healing or curing them from certain sicknesses.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Saram-ngaram*: It refers to the customary method of equal sharing and distribution of meat among the members of the village council on the basis of their political positions and status when a fowl or a pig is killed as a fine or penalty fee. The meat prepared is distributed accordingly; where the head of the fowl goes to the chief, neck to assist-chief, right-wing to *Keirung*, left-wing to *Keirung-noupong*, right-thigh to *Zupai*, left-thigh to *Zupai-noupong*, and the liver and heart goes to the priest (*themipu*) while the rest of the meat is eaten by all members.

<sup>2</sup> See, Yuhlung, Cheithou Charles, 'Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage among the Chothe of Manipur' in *Sociological Bulletin*. Jan-April vol. 56.(1) 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Chothe considered taboo if the corpse received direct sunlight or rain with a belief that the deceased soul might escape and become a ghost or a spirit in case the soul cannot return to his body. Therefore, the corpse is given proper shading and covering with clothes from inside the house till it is buried. Slight mistakes in properly shading the corpse with clothes at the time of taking the corpse outside the house, while putting it into the stretcher, during procession to the cemetery and placing it inside the coffin is often been scolded by the village elders for being careless with the religious norms. G. Gilhodes in his description, *The Kachins: Religion and customs*, also describes such taboos and many other religious beliefs and cultural practices that are seen similar with the Chothe (1922: 231-251).

<sup>5</sup> The Chothe forbids any man wearing his/her shawl on the right side considering only the dead wears it towards right side which is opposite to the normal living person who wears towards the left side using his right hand.

<sup>6</sup> They say that one rupee silver coins of King William and Queen Victoria found were sold initially for rupees one thousand/five hundred, but later reduced to rupees five hundred/two hundred if bargain.

<sup>7</sup> The ancient seating arrangement or the symbolic model of the Chothe village council's court is believed to have been built or centred round the banyan/pipal tree or sacred-grove in ancient days (see Pic.60 & 61).

<sup>8</sup> *Tongkaipa and Zurum*: see notes in Chapter – 2 or glossary.

<sup>9</sup> *Ching-ngang /chinglang*: The stalk of a thatch plant.

<sup>10</sup> *Anam kokpa*: Such *anam kokpa* ritual is similarly performed when a dog frequently howl's at night or digs the ground/floor because the Chothe believe it is howling at a ghost or a spirits, and digging the ground signifies the digging of one's graveyard. Some families who are apprehensive of such superstitious

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belief did not perform the ritual but they would kill the dog. This indicates the impact of such superstition beliefs among the people because of their long practices.

<sup>11</sup> *Magic and Religion*: [http://anthro.palomar.edu/religion/glossary.Htm#modal\\_behaviour](http://anthro.palomar.edu/religion/glossary.Htm#modal_behaviour).

<sup>12</sup> *Spirit language*: Most of the Chothe believes in the predictions of their future courses by consulted various priests and priestess or sorcerers or oracles, though they knew it negates or proves wrong sometime. Perhaps, in certain cases if the prediction is inaccurate or delayed or does not occurred exactly at the time or place expected, the inaccuracy is accepted for their inability to comprehend properly the meaning of the spirit's language pronounced by the priest or sorcerer during divination. It is said the priest or sorcerer speaks to the dead (spirit) in their ancient or old language in phrase and verses that was spoken by their ancestors or forefathers in early days which they called it as the spirit's language, comprehensible to only few people. The reason is because they believe that their ancestor's spirits still exists as the agent or inter-mediator between gods and mankind.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **FESTIVALS AND FOLK CULTURE OF THE CHOTHE**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

Festivals and ceremonies of major religious significance are found in all cultural groups of the world. A cultural group, whether primitive or civilised, celebrates at least one festival like Christmas, Durga-Puja, Diwali or Pongal annually in commemoration of their gods, or in relation to a historic event. Such festivals also involve numerous ceremonies, simple and complex. They also perform different types of ceremonies running from birthday or child-naming ceremony, wedding, funeral, merit feast, Oscar Awards or Grammy Awards winning ceremonies, private parties and other celebrations. The festival of one's society is considered as an external expression of social behaviour. But the meanings of the festivals and ceremonies are varied according to one's own socio-religious and cultural groups. There are certainly some differences observed between the primitive festive celebration and the modern celebrations. It is seen that most of the primitive celebrate festival and feast as an honour and thanks giving to their protector and Creator God. For example they have a good harvest, prosperity, good weather, jubilation after victory in wars and battles, propitiation and protection from misfortunes or disasters by exalting their Supreme God and by making sacrificial offerings. So in principle all festivals, feasts, ceremonies and parties are to be celebrated and socialized among the groups in communion with God. In some cases it is to appease their gods. For example, the Hopi tribe who dance ceremoniously in circles so that the rain god pleases them and sends rain. But most of the modern festive like Oscar Awards or Grammy Awards winning festive ceremonies, despite their grand celebration have less religious connotation as the objective and purpose is different, though termed as festive ceremonies. For indigenous or primitive societies even the social ceremonies have religious significance unlike the modern social festive ceremonies or parties. Many scholars like Jacob Grimm, Max Muller, Andrew Lang, Wilhelm Mannherdt, and James Frazer have attempted to link the primitive festival and ceremonies which are related to myths and magical rituals with the modern festivals (Datta 1994: 151). Though the nature of the celebration may be similar in many ways the difference between the two types of societies i.e. ancient and modern is that, the ancient or primitive people emphasises their primary

importance first to spiritualism by honouring and exalting their Supreme Guardian God for blessings bestowed upon them and also in appraising their ancestors for the contributions made to their society, in which the celebration or socialisation becomes secondary. While on the other hand, most modern festival or celebrations (not necessarily all) rather gives prior importance to socialisation instead of spiritualism or appraising their God unlike the primitive societies.

Since the Chothe are in a transitional period like many societies, they have given up many of their traditional festive celebrations because of the socio-economic and political factors affected by various dynamic forces of change and influence. The two major festivals of Chothe still celebrated are now more of observances, a symbolic celebration to commemorate the occasions as many of their customs are seen to have been simplified and modified to suit the present socio-economic conditions. In this holistic study of the Chothe indigenous religion, the comprehensive documentation work of the two main festivals given below highlights many significant intricate socio-cultural elements like rites and rituals, and various ceremonies and their socio-economic and political life style. The *Innampei rin* and *Achui rin* festivals survive the test of time despite external forces. As one reads the procedures of these festivals one will be able to see how intricate the Chothe socio-cultural system is and was. It gives a clear picture who the Chothe are, and how rigid and complicated the Chothe society was in the past compared to now. It also shows that almost all their socio-cultural activities are guided by various religious norms and principles as prayers and offerings play a pivotal part in all their daily activities.

### **7.1.i Festivals of the Chothe**

In olden days the Chothe celebrated various types of traditional festivals and ceremonies according to the season, like other ancient societies of the world, but today only two main festivals and few ceremonies are observed commemorating the occasions. The reason behind forsaking many of their festivals and ceremonies is because of various socio-economic and political factors. The gaiety and enthusiasm of the feast has lost its taste rather the youth are fond of the western or modern style of celebration which is less spiritual.

According to Y. Tomalsing the reasons why the Lamlanghupi people could not celebrate their annual festivals at their present *laman* or sacred grove is because it is too far

from their present settlement, secondly, the complication and danger involved in shifting their sacred grove which involves a number of religious formalities and procedures. The third explanation is the safety and security of women, children and unwanted social elements in the village, since the festivals are normally celebrated in the evening and at night, and fourthly, the inconvenience in the movement i.e. transport and communication from one area to another, either by day or night. Therefore, because of such inconveniences the festivals are celebrated in each Council of Elders or *Urinta's* member's house in rotation in accordance to their socio-political hierarchical position and status. The *Urinta* member who hosts the festival is designated as “Lomtun” (the family who host the festival). However, all important and necessary rites and rituals are still performed at the actual sacred grove or deities' site at Khuman an abandoned settlement, now inhabited by the Meitei.

**Table 23 Traditional festivals of Chothe**

Sl. No	Indigenous festival	Month / Number of days celebrated	Meaning of the festival/Purpose
1.	<i>Urinthin Rin / Lin</i>	March-April (1 days)	A New Year festival
2.	<i>Shanghong Rin*</i>	Sept-Oct. (1 day)	Festival in honour of the harvest goddess
3.	<i>Yairitha Rin</i>	Nov-Jan (1 day)	Festival invoking dead spirits
4.	<i>Innampei Rin *</i>	Feb-March (7 days)	Festival of crops/ hunting/elders
5.	<i>Taiton lawh Rin</i>	May- June (2 days)	A harbinger of a particular festival (Zuhong festival)
6.	<i>Najui lawh Rin</i>	March-April (2 days)	Festival meant for womenfolk or married daughters
7.	<i>Achui or Chultuk Rin*</i>	Sept. (7 days)	Festival of yeast/ bread (youths)
8.	<i>Okloh Rin</i>	Nov-Dec. (1 day)	Festival reserved by a few individuals or households
9.	<i>Hungdoi Rin</i>	Oct-Nov. (2 days)	Festival in commemoration of the dead
10.	<i>Siroh Rin</i>	Dec- Jan (1 day)	Minor festival in the construction of a dwelling place

*Note \* asterisk indicates the current festivals*

### 7.1. ii The *Innampei Rin /Lin* (2006)

The Chothe considered *Innampei rin* or *Zar rin* the post-harvest festival as the first festival of the year. The celebration begins only on Monday, and only on or after the full-moon months February-March (*Phiren-lamta*) of the lunar calendar. The significance of this festival is that it is celebrated in accolade of the unmarried girls by their parents to acknowledge their adulthood or maturity for marriage. Thereby, the festive occasion gives

the privilege to the boys to choose and proposed to them during this festival hosted by the girl's parents. It is celebrated for seven days and is divided into three parts viz.; (1) *Zutui shutpa* (filtering/extraction of the wine - Monday and Tuesday), (2) the *Innampei rin* (house feast - Wednesday and Thursday), and (3) *Bampui jairik hongpa* (youth coming to whole the nights - Friday and Sunday). Each member of the village council (*Hu-bungkung*) i.e. the three *bungkungs* or houses or units play a very important function with their assigned roles and responsibilities during this festival. This *Innampei* festival is recorded in February 2006; the *lomtun* (host of the festival) of *Urinta bungkung* (council of elders) was held at Y. Tomalsing's house and the *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* (mature adults) held at (late) Th. Nabadip's resident, and the *Nungak-luthei bungkung* (youths) at Th. Jatrasing's house.<sup>1</sup>

### **Day 1 (Monday) - Preparation for the *Innampei rin* Festival**

Every *pipa*, the lineage or clan head of the village prepares the fermented husk rice beer (*sawai-zu*) one month in advance for the festive occasion. The wife's of the *Tang-ngarinta* members either on Sunday evening or Monday morning goes for special shopping 'to purchase fruits and sweets' called (*Leihu lamok-theira leithingpa* or *Heiruk keipa*) for the offerings to their gods *Pu Lungchungpa* (*Pakhangpa*), *Pi Leima* and *Potlungpa*. The fruits and sweets offered comprise of tobacco leaves (*Thakna*), banana (*amot*) with *chang* or Odd pairs, sugar-cane (*mangshu*), cucumber (*sakma*), citrus fruit, pine-apple, apple, incense, candles, etc. Everybody in the village is in great spirits for the festival especially, the children.

**The Benediction Ceremony of the Festival:** By 3-4 pm in the evening in the house of *Tang-ngarinta* or *leihu ruishang/loishang*, the village priest (*theimpu*) also known as *leihu jokpa* (deity's keeper) and the assistant-priest (*leipu*) in their full traditional attire prepares the offering items meant for the benediction ritual (*rin thouna leihu mokthingpa*). The village priest sits on the south side of the house (*ruishang*) facing north and performs a simple offertory prayer *tongkaipa* by spilling the *zuting* (fermented rice beer) three times, twice by his right hand and once by his left hand, seeking blessings and protection for their safe journey to the sacred-grove or deities' site and also for their safe return. According to them the first spilling of *zuting* is meant for their Supreme God *Pu Lungchungpa* or

*Pakhangpa*, the second spilling for their ancestors and the third with the left hand is meant for the evil spirits. After this simple rite the two priests, accompanied by friends, proceed to their sacred-grove with the ritualistic items to pay their homage and tributes, and also to seek blessings and protection for their safety during the festival days. The first day is called *Tongkaipa lungni* meaning, ‘the day of spelling/stretching words’, or *leihu heiruk keipa lungni* (the day of shopping for gods/deities).

At the sacred-grove or deities’ site (*Leihu apha*) the village priest, in this case (late) Thao Nabadip, shows his due reverence by touching the floor of the deities’ temple with his right hand and applies on his forehead as a marked of respect and adherence. This reverence is similarly done by his assistant-priest and the followers. The village priest sprinkles some water, sweeps and cleans the deities’ floor with the *tai*ren leaves and mops the outer floor with water after opening the deities’ temple’s door. He also pours some water above the stone placed outside i.e. the deities’ bodyguard or door keeper *Pu Potlungpa*. The village priest helped by the assistant-priest prepared the offering items accordingly on the banana leaves for the three gods/deities; *Pu Lungchungpa* (*Pakhangpa*), *Pi Leima* (*Pakhangpa*’s wife, the queen/mother of earth), and *Pu Potlungpa* (the bodyguard). Besides the offering items purchased from the market, the other essential offering items consist of a bowl of rice, eggs, *renglei/ langtharei* (a kind of herbal leaves), and nine small metal/lead pieces for divination. After he finishes the arrangement he lights the three candles and incense sticks and bows down before their Supreme guardian gods *Lungchungpa*. Then, he invokes the prayer, introducing the purpose of their visit who thereby seeking protection from any misfortune that could befall during their festive days, after which he bows again followed by the other individuals present. Since, the Chothe believes that their gods can foretell their future, the village priest performs the coin or lead divination (*Konjai junpa*). He places three pieces of the coin/lead metal in triangle shape on his right palm and immediately after he finishes conjuring he suddenly drops down on the floor. He repeats this twice again with the remaining six coin/lead metal pieces signifying the three gods/deities. Accordingly on the basis of the three divination’s result the priest interprets the signs and its meaning to the people. Perhaps, if an error occurs while dropping the coin/lead, it is repeated but not always. Later the priest bows down again after he finishes conjuring his closing benedictory prayer; he then collects some of the sweets offered and distributes these

amongst them, while some are carried to home to signify the completion of the offerings to their gods. Before they all leave the sacred-grove the priest collects some wet-mud from the temple or base of the bodyguard's stone (*Potlungpa*), which the priest first applies on his forehead, and then applies on other members present too, and he closes the temple's door. Then the priest evokes the last bidding incantation after which he sprinkles some water again around the temple with the *tairen* leaves and they all leave the sacred-grove after bowing slightly. When the village priest group returns to the priest's house or *ruishang* he performs the prayer *tongkaipa* with *zuting* provided by a *Zujong* for their safe journey and returns, followed by the *zurum* the tradition of serving wine to all the members present on the basis of seniority or political hierarchy.

***Lou-houpa Rite (Saroi Khangpa):*** After the main benediction ceremony another very important ritual is the appeasement rite called *lou-houpa* or *leihu chathak* (throwing the waste or feeding the gods) to the deities of the four directions that guard the village gates. This ritual is performed by *Leipu* the assistant-priest (Mareem Marachou) and not by the village head priest. It is said that in early days when their population was large it was done by four persons who went in each of the directions and offered the rites. The Meitei call this ritual as *saroi khangpa*. The objective or purpose of this ritual is appeasing the deities of the four directions for protection so that they do not allow any evil spirit or human to trespass their village and create problems during the festive days. These four directions deities are known as viz.; *Nashu (Huru) Bambu* (the east deity), *Nata Bambu* (the west deity), *Sakting* or *Lamleh* or *Lam-mai* (north deity), and *Thangting* or *Hute Bambu* (south deity) respectively. The essential items required for this ritual are; *theipi-bu mashipoi* (chutney made with a kind of wild-apple leaves), *zuting* (fermented rice beer), *achoi* (yeast), *bakuk* (four broken pieces of earthen pot) and some flowers. After each item is equally arranged separately on the four banana leaves, the chutney being placed on the *bakuk*, the assistant-priest (*Leipu*) puts all these items on the winnow and goes to the east deity (*Nashu bambu*) to make the first offering, then to the north, west and south respectively at each deity's spots and conjures for protection.

While the *Tang-ngarinta* members wait for assistant-priest *Leipu* to return two junior members arranged the *may-tum* (meat chutney) at the priest's house or *ruishang*. The *may-*

*tum* is arranged in such a way by putting the meat chutney on a piece of banana leaf with a *cheiche* (the V-shaped bamboo stick) uniformly in front of their respective positional seats for the next ceremony of *thoukeipa*. According to them, the religious significance of *cheiche* is to indicate that the meat chutney being served is clean and pure, but in case if found missing or it is not in the proper place it is considered as polluted. Therefore, the meat chutney is replaced with a new one. They are very careful with the position of placing the *cheiche*. It is a norm to place the *cheiche* behind the *may-tum* where its mouth is open toward the *may-tum*. When the assistant-priest *Leipu* returns the *Pakhanglakpa* (not the village priest) makes the *Tongkaipa* prayer. For this prayer he offers some of his *may-tum* and breaks his *cheiche* after which he conjures by pouring the *zuting* three times, i.e. twice with his right hand and the third by his left hand, thereafter followed by *zurum* and everyone tastes their own *may-tum* (meat chutney).

***Tang-ngarinta Thoukeipa (The Official Report):*** Another important ceremony as a part of the benediction ritualistic day after the *louhoupa* or *leihu chathak* is called *Thoukeipa* meaning, the official report, making to the higher authorities. It is ancient tradition where the junior members of the group officially or formally address and report the state of condition or welfare of the situation to the higher authorities like the Chief (*Hulak*) or *Luplakpa*, *Keirungpa* and *Pakhanglakpa* when they are present in a session or ceremony. Such formality of officially reporting the matter is also carried out in most of the big ceremonies and feasts. The nature of report differs according to the types of ceremonies. The report here is that their assigned duties and responsibilities have been checked, inspected and been arranged accordingly and all the things like wine, security, etc. are set ready for the festival to begin, and that they are waiting for their approval or permission or command. This official report or *Thoukeipa* is carried out by two *Lomjuis* of *Tang-ngarinta* members who sit with their toes facing their leaders *Pakhanglakpa*, *Zupaipa* and *Zuhaipa* in the south, where their closed fists lifting upwards is placed between their thighs. The senior *lomjui* sits in the north-west side while the junior member in the north-east. But the village priest sat in the west opposite to them. The two *lomjuis* both pressed their fists on the ground and together utter these words; “Oh, elder *Pakhangpa*, *Zupaipa* and *Zuhaipa*, we the three *Lomjuis*, the three *Zuthans* and the two *Zujongs* are fully satisfied with your drinks and

hospitality, we also have completed all our official duties and request your kind permission to leave for today”.

*(Urin Pakangpa, Zupaipa, Zuhai som luk, Lom-jui inthum, Zuthan inthum, Zujong pasheini amma meshawe. Narupa zurum lomma meshawe).*

After saying these words the two *lomjuis* once again press their closed fists on the ground and turn around towards the east and press their fists on the ground without any words after which they turn clock-wise to their original position and repeats pressing their fists on the ground. Both press their fists on the ground a total of three times. Then, the *Pakhanglakpa* responds that, “If they are satisfied and have completed their duties they are free and may stand up now”. This ceremony of officially reporting their duties and services ends the socio-religious session for the night among the *Tang-ngarinta* members at their *ruishang*. This *thoukeipa* ceremony is an ancient custom of reporting the subject matter to the higher authorities or a formal courtesy. While another ceremony at this hour is simultaneously going on among the council of elders (*Urinta bungkung*) at their *lomtun*'s host of the festival.

**The *Urinta Think-bompa Ceremony:*** The *Urinta* members similarly make their arrangements at their *lomtun*, the festive house (Tomalsing's residence) for the initial customary ceremony. As they wait for the village chief (*Hulak Hiyang Thambalchou*) to arrived at the place and start the evening session, the *zutin* pot with a mug is readied in the middle of the house with the prepared meat chutney. As the village chief arrives escorted by two *Ruis* all the members assembled greets and takes their respective seats that are arranged accordingly to their political hierarchical position and status. Then, a *Rui* serves the chief the *zutin* who performs the *Tongkaipa*, the opening prayer for the session followed by the first *zurum* with *zutin* wine. Then, *Keirung* the Finance Officer (*Hiyang Bukunsing*) who chairs the session seeks the approval to the village chief and assistant-chief for the *think-bompa* ceremony i.e. *think-tumpa think-tepa* ceremony meaning, ‘taking down and counting the scrolls sticks’ (see Pic.39). This is the re-assigning the council's political portfolios, where the *Keirung* proposed them as, “Think choi rui tamae” means, ‘shall we begin to hold the scrolls or sticks’ i.e. counting and re-assigning the political portfolios. Only when both the two chiefs approved *Keirung* performs the *tongkaipa* prayer with *zutin*, provided by a junior

*Hachari* (the Information Secretary). In the mean time another *Hachari* brings in the *Lungkum* (a small basket where the scrolls or small bamboo sticks are kept) the porch or cache and gives it to *Keirung*.<sup>2</sup> He inspects the scrolls or sticks carefully for any damage and if there is none he tosses it saying “think bomrui tamae” meaning, ‘shall we assemble the scrolls now’. Thereafter, he starts counting and assigning and re-assigning their political portfolios by name placing the scroll/stick horizontally one by one on the ground accordingly, where the members present responds they are present. When the whole formality is over he says again, “think kairui tamae-a” meaning, ‘shall we roll up the scroll sticks back’. For each act he seeks the approval of the *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* who noted their heads in positive responds telling him to go ahead. The Chothe call this whole process of assignment and re-assignment or counting of the various political portfolios as “think-bompa” literally, ‘assemblage of the scrolls or sticks’ or ‘counting of portfolios/years’. The Meitei called it as “cheithaba” (Cheitharol kumpaba) meaning, ‘the falling or counting of the stick’.

To signify that this *think-bompa* act is over another *zurum* is followed, after which the *Keirung* himself who sits facing north makes the *thoukeipa* informally, unlike two *Hachari*’s from his own seat saying, “Kareng leihu pashieni juhaisomluk heichoi sheini amma maesho-ae, cheiche lousa tamae”, then after everybody breaks the *cheiche* bamboo V-stick, “shakum zuma sumshrui tamae”, which means, ‘My lord and king, the couple alike, the *juhais* seem to be waiting for us with his sixty men so let us began serving ourselves by throwing our *cheiche* (bamboo stick).’ As they serve the meat chutney there follows the *zurum* again.

It is important to note here that the *Keirung*’s informal act of *thoukeipa* unlike the two *Hacharis* is because his socio-political position is considered almost equivalent with *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* as the echelon group. Perhaps, if there is any change in the political position of the members by promotion his new duties and responsibilities are reminded officially by the *Keirung*, henceforth the person from this day is fully authorised with his role and responsibility.

**The Ceremony of *Urinta Thoukeipa*:** When the village chief (*Hulak*) and his colleagues notify to the members present that they want to take their leave to rest for the night from the

*lomtun* festive house, that is after all the official formalities like political assignments i.e. *think bompa-think tepa* and other ceremonies are over, one of the *Rui* provides the chief *zutin* to make the *tongkaipa* valedictory prayer followed by *leizu zurum*. After which two *Hachari*'s performs the *thoukeipa* ceremony, the formality of official report (this *thoukeipa* formality is similar with the *Tang-ngarinta thoukeipa* as explained above). Thereafter, two *Ruis* escorts the chief to his house. It is a social-norm for the two *Ruis* who escorts the chief to immediately report the safety of their chief to the assistant-chief (*Luplak*) or the next in political hierarchy as soon as they return to the festive house (*lomtun*). Similarly, if *Luplak* or *Zupai* wants to leave the festive place the same procedure of *tongkaipa* followed by *zurum* and *thoukeipa* ceremony by two *Hacharis* or *changlai* are followed for each of them accordingly. They were also similarly escorted by two *Ruis* officially till their home one after the other. They said in olden days the number of escorts was large but now since they are very few, only two persons were made mandatory. When the three political heads leave the place, *Keirung* becomes the overall in-charge of the elders groups for the rest of the night. As part of their custom only after the three village leaders leave, then only other members of the group can leave the place, if they so desire to go home and rest, otherwise they continue drinking and rehearsing their folksongs for the festival. However, to wind up the session the *Keirung* as a custom performs the last *tongkaipa* before he leaves the place.

## **Day 2 (Tuesday Morning) - The *Tang-ngarinta Think-bompa* Ceremony**

Like the *Urinta* council of elders, the following morning the *Tang-ngarinta* members also assemble at their *Ruishang* by 6-7 am in their full traditional attire for the *think-bompa* session. For this session the *Zujongs* make the arrangements like drums, *zutin*, *may-tum* and other essential items. The proceedings are similar with the *Urinta*'s *think-bompa* ceremony as explained above. Instead of *Hulak*, the *Pakhanglakpa* executes as the head of the group being the senior most leader who performed the first *tongkaipa* prayer with *zuting* followed by *zurum*. After which the junior *Lomjui* brings in their *Langkum*, the porch or cache or the small bamboo basket that contains the scroll sticks from outside the house which are hung in the north corner of the veranda and give it to *Hancha* who precedes the *think-bompa* session similarly like the *Keirung*. Subsequently, *Hancha* concludes his duty by officially

acknowledging *Pakhanglakpa* and the *Leihu jokpa* the village priest with the *thoukeipa* act, after which the junior *Lomjui* took back the *Lungkum*, and keep it back in its original place.

After this *Tang-ngarinta thoukeipa* ceremony is over they await the members of the council of elders (*Urinta bungkung*) i.e. two *Ruis* who would come to collect the village drums for the next drum tuning ceremony. The *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* being in-charge of all the sacred items and other important village properties also keeps the village drums with them. In the mean time two members of *Tang-ngarinta* i.e. *Zujongs* deliver the package of cooked meat curry called *kharai* to the members of absentee's house as part of the tradition. This meat package delivery system is known as *Kharai chenpa*. When the two *Zujongs* return to the place after the delivery then, only the ceremony of *thoukeipa* is performed by two *Lomjuis* to the *Pakhanglakpa* and *Leipu* village priest, after which the *Pakhanglakpa* concludes the socio-religious ceremony with *tongkaipa* prayer with the *zuting* to their gods followed by *zurum*.

**The Ceremony of *Hung Matheipa*:** While the ceremony of *think-bompa* is going on at the *Tang-ngarinta ruishang*, the council of elders readies for the “hung matheipa” meaning, ‘tuning of the drums’ ceremony. When the village chief arrives escorted at the festive house, he performs the invocation prayer *tongkaipa* with *zuting* for the *Innampei* festival saying, “Oh, great God *Lungchungpa-o, api Leima, apu Potlungpa*, as we are to begin our festival please bless us and protect us from any untoward incidents, and let there be no rain nor any natural calamities during these occasions” (*Apu leihu Lungchungpa-o, api Leima, apu Potlungpa,... shidui huipi no-o shiwang huipi no-o nangna atha ahoi pepi-o,...*). This first opening prayer, *tongkaipa* and *zurum* (*zuron*) is called “*Muipa zuron*” meaning ‘taming with the wine’. After this ritualistic prayer the two *Ruis* goes to collect the village drums at the *Tang-ngarinta bungkung* or *ruishang*. When the drums are brought the chief offers the *tongkaipa* prayer again for the tuning of the drums ceremony. One will notice at the side of drums a small package of the *may-tum* (meat chutney) is tied as the meat share for the drums signifying as an entity. After the *tongkaipa* the two *Hacharis* begin tuning the drums with three typical rhythmic beats several times till perfection (see Pic.29). They wind up the morning session when they feel they are satisfied with the sound of the drums and rhythms and the drums are kept outside in the veranda. To conclude the morning session the village

chief performs the *tongkaipa* prayer by saying, “let us begin serving the meat chutney now as I have started” (*Tum sum sharui-yo, keisu thousowe*), followed by *zurum*. Soon after this, lunch is also being served by the host (*Lomtun*) where everybody partakes in the meal. They rest for a while after the lunch and ready themselves for the afternoon *Fho parakpa* ceremony.

However, one very significant religious norm or taboo observed during this hours while tuning the drums is that it is forbidden to completely stop beating the drums even if they are all engrossed in conversation. They say it is also forbidden for all the villagers to have lunch before they complete the ceremony of tuning these drums. This prohibition was said to be more stringent in early days than it is today. Normally, the host provides lunch only for the council of members and the meat share (*kharia*) is delivered to each absentee member’s house by the junior *Ruis*. After the lunch the drums are brought inside the house and continues to tune for a while, to signify that the council of elders have finish their lunch, and that the drums are fit and ready for the festival to begin. The same formality of *Urinta thoukeipa* is perform again by two *Hacharis* when the chief (*Hulak*) desires to leave the place, he is escorted by two *Ruis* till his house. A similar procedure is followed with *Luplak* and *Zupai* (*Yupai*) too when they decides to leave the place to rest.

### **Day 2 (Tuesday Afternoon Session) - The Ceremony of *Fho-parakpa* and *Chamtun lam***

By 2:00 pm all the *Ruis* dress in their full traditional attire assemble again at *Lomtun* house for the afternoon session of war dance known as “*Fho-parakpa*” meaning ‘shield movement’, and “*Chamtun lam*” meaning ‘sword dance’. When all re-arrangements are done, the two *Ruis*, as a custom, goes first to *Yupai*’s (*Zupai*) house to inform that everything for the afternoon session is ready, who thereby all proceeds to *Luplak*’s house and similarly proposed *Luplak* to go together to the *lomtun* the festive house. Here the *Luplak* perform the *tongkaipa* prayer with *zuting* in the veranda of the *lomtun*’s house facing the east followed by the *leizu zurum*, after which all the members present proceed to the village chief’s house to officially invite him for the inauguration of the festival.<sup>3</sup> The chief who is expecting them warmly welcomes and greets them. The chief then, performs *tongkaipa* sitting in the extreme south-eastern side of his veranda for their protection and safe journey so that any untoward incident or misfortune would not befall on them, followed

by *leizu zurum*, after which he leads the group in procession to *Lomtun*'s house. According to them this particular chief's prayer is said to be very important. If any bad things or signs appear on their way it is taken as a bad omen that something bad would occur during their festival and will spoil it. So, extreme care is taken and children are cautioned about their play at such hours.

When the chief (*Hulak*) enters the *lomtun*'s house he first steps in with his right foot, this is similarly followed by *Luplak*, *Zupai*, *Keirungs*, *Hacharis*, *Lomjuis* and the others on the basis of their hierarchical position and status, and occupies their respective seats accordingly as arranged. The host and his wife occupy the middle of the house on the south side in front of the *sawai-zu* pot and the *Tang-ngarinta* members sit in the north according to their hierarchical positions. When the *Ruis* completes distributing the *may-tums* accordingly, the senior *Keirung* (Hiyang Bukunsing) chairs the session by offering the *tongkatpa* the introductory speech, after which the chief offers some of his *may-tum* (chutney) and also breaks the *cheiche* (the V-shaped bamboo chord) and performs the *tongkaipa* prayer with *sawai-zu* above the offerings, followed by the *sawai-zu* and *leizu zurums*.<sup>4</sup> Then, when the chief pronounces "let us serve the chutney" (*tum sumshrui-o*) then only, everybody eats the chutney. When they are all done with it, the *Ruis* bring in the drums attached with *may-tum* to signify the drum's share. In the mean time, a senior *Hachari* prepares for the *Fho-parakpa* or shield movement dance. Here the *sawai-zu*, fermented husk rice beer is used for the first time for the *tongkaipa* prayer instead of *zutin* and the first person to taste it should be a *Hachari*, only after he recommends, it is served to the three prominent village heads i.e. *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai*.

***Fho-parakpa* (Shield Movement):** One of the *Hacharis* dresses in typical warrior style by draping his *deir* (dhoti) high and wrapping the *Chouchung* shawl criss-crossing tightly over his chest and arms like the armour, where he tied the knots behind his back and also wrapped his head (*luje*) with the traditional scarf. Then, he grasps the shield (*Fho*) with his left hand and the sword (*cham*) with the right. As he readies he salutes the *Hulak*, *Luplak*, and *Zupai* the three prominent political heads and also the *Keirung*. After that, he stands on the extreme western side of the house and suddenly bends down in the form of picking up his shield and sword from the ground by touching it and with a clamour, 'Oooo,,, hoi...' he

runs towards the front door jumps with his shield and sword in the act of defence and chopping his sword like a warrior in a battlefield. This symbolic warrior act is called *Fho-parakpa* ‘the shield movement’ dance (see Pic.22). This particular *Fho-parakpa* act is repeated three times, after which the drummers perform a typical drum beat signifying that the ceremonies of the festival are in progress, followed by the *zurum*. According to them this shield movement dance is in honour of the shield for helping and protecting them from the blade of their enemies’ sword and spears that led them to many victorious wars and battles. It is part of the victory ceremony symbolised by the jubilant dances.

***Chamtun Lam (War/Sword Dance):*** After the *Fho-parakpa* ceremony, two *Hacharis* dress in their traditional attire perform the war or sword dance called “Chamtun lam”. The two *Hacharis* both grasp the decorated sword in their right hands, put the peacock’s feathers between their headgear, and dance to rhythmic beats of the drums and songs thrusting forward their hilt swords (*chumtun*) in jubilation of a victorious war encircling the house (see Pic.66). This slow monotonous rhythmic dance of slaughtering the enemy is repeated with some extra style according to the songs and drum beats. These war dances are now symbolic representation of their victorious wars and battles. The singing and dancing continues till evening, but to conclude the afternoon session the chief performs the *tongkaipa* so that everybody can go and have their dinner and come back for the late evening session.

## **Day 2 (Tuesday Evening Session) - The Ceremonies of *Haizu* and *Lamzu***

As soon as the village chief returns to the *lomtun*’s house for the evening session, the host performs the *tongkaipa*, followed by *zurum*, and immediately the singing and dancing continues. One important aspect of this evening session, at the end, is that they have to sing two types of special commemoration songs dedicated to the memory of their great ancestors or forefathers the legendary heroes who have contributed in uplifting their society in the past. The first commemoration song and dance is known as *Haizu* which means, ‘relinquishing the wine’, and the second song called as *Lamzu* meaning, ‘wine taken in the country side’. Before the first *Haizu* commemoration song and dance begins, the host performs the *tongkaipa* with *sawai-zu* after which two *Hacharis* perform the *thoukeipa*

ceremonial act to the *Hurak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* like their ancestors. After this act the host again performs *tongkaipa* followed by three *zurums* in-between the song sung marking its stages.

For *Lamzu*, the second commemoration song, the *Ruis* replace the old wine pot with the new one and after a few minutes of break, the same procedure like *Haizu* is followed. However, when these particular commemoration ceremonial songs and dances are over, the two *Hacharis* again perform the *thoukeipa* act to *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* respectively as a custom to wind up the socio-religious ceremony. Then the three leaders are escorted one after the other, as explained above in the *Urinta thoukeipa* ceremony. While the rest of the members continue drinking and practicing the *Sikang-la* (the bench songs) till late in the night. It should be noted here that it is taboo to completely stop beating the drums till the last part of *thoukeipa* act and the *tongkaipa* prayer, because they believe different sound beats would misinterpret its meaning to other neighbouring people. According to them it is said that no enemies can attack or wage war during one's celebration or festival.

### **Day 3 (Wednesday Evening) - The Lineage Festival (*Innku Rin Neipa*)**

The term *Innku rin neipa* means, 'lineage festival'. As part of the custom every lineage celebrates its own festival in their lineage or clan's head i.e. *pipa*'s house who are also a members of the council of elders (*Urinta*). As a result every member of the village council visits the house of each *pipa* or member of the council of elders (*Urinta*) to taste their wine i.e. specially *sawai-zu* (fermented husk rice beer) starting with the village chief as the head till to senior most *Rui*. The other term for this custom of visiting and tasting the wine in each *Urinta* member's house is known as *Tuichum loipa*, meaning 'visiting houses where the water/wine is filtered'. The name derives from "filtered wine" as the family of lineage or clan's head filters the *sawai zu* that is brewed for the purpose of this festival.

By 3-4 pm all the village council members gathered at the *Lomtun*'s house, proceeds first to the village chief's house, singing along with the drums to relish and taste his *sawai-zu* wine. As soon as they reach the chief's house, they take their respective seats accordingly and the *Leibaks* serve the *sawai-zu* to the chief who performs the *tongkaipa* prayer by offering little of his *may-tum* meat chutney and also breaking the *cheiche* (the V-shaped bamboo stick) on the ground, after which the *zurum* with *sawai-zu* and *leizu* are served to all

members present on the basis of the political hierarchy where the meat chutney is also taken with the wine. As they relish it compliments are made to the host. Subsequently when done, and before moving to the next *Luplak's* house the chief being the host performed *tongkaipa* as a closing prayer. Likewise the same procedure is followed in the house of *Luplak*, *Zupai*, *Keirung*, etc. and to all the members of council of elders, where the host or head of the family performs the prayer *tongkaipa* but not the village chief or priest. The last house to visit should be the *Lomtun*, the festive house whatever his position and status may be, because they have to continue the singing rehearsal and perform the conclusion ceremony of the day. At *Lomtun's* house only when the host performs *tongkaipa* then only the three leaders leave the place to rest while the others continues drinking and singing.

This *Innku rin neipa* or lineage festival is celebrated for three days i.e. Wednesday - Friday and only in the evening. The rich and wealthy *Urinta* members' often provide dinner along with drinks. The process of preparing and extracting this brew *sawai-zu* fermented husk rice beer is considered a long tiring work because it is extracted by filtration method. In order to maintain quality it is collected in small earthen pots of two litres size in which the youth; *Leibaks* and *Tangshas* are entrusted to oversee this task the whole night. So, the village youths divided in groups go to each *Urinta* members' house for this task and have to go through two sleepless nights.

#### **Day 4 (Thursday Morning Session) - The Tradition of *Meishei Huppa***

The fourth day is divided into three sessions; *Meishei huppa*, *Innku rin neipa* and *Innampa jairik honpa*. Literally, *Meishei huppa* means 'binding the torch stick'. It is a tradition of binding the stalks of thatch (*Ching-ngan/lang*) into small bundles for lighting at night usually used for various purposes like this festival. This tradition has been practiced by the Chothe for many centuries, since the time when there was no electricity, petrol-max lamps or nickel torches. Since, electricity is now available in the village the torch stick has become a symbolic custom to mark the occasion. They say in olden days the youths; both boys and girls early in the morning goes to the forest to collect the stalk of the thatch (*Ching-ngan/lang*). They return to the youths' dormitory (*Nungak-Luthei ruishang*) and tied it into small bundles and distribute it into three equal shares to keep in each house of *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* as stock for any emergency lighting. It is compulsory for all the youth to

contribute their torch sticks; even the absentee members are not spare. According to them the tradition of keeping such *Meishei* (torch stick) in large quantities or stock in earlier days was because there was no nickel torch, petrol-max or electricity. As a result this *meishei* was use as torch for any events during the night: like in times of festivals, feasts, preparation for war and battles, sudden village chaos and disputes occurring at night, etc. They also claim in olden days it was also given to the guests, visitors or friendly travellers who passed the village by night when no modern lighting system were available. This thatch stalk is also use in certain rituals as well as for fencing the wall of a house, while the leaves or thatch (*ra-nyi*) is considered the most durable roofing material in the region. Except for this tradition there is no important ceremony for the hour, as a result the members of the *Urinta's bungkung* organise a combined meal at their *Lomtun's* house especially for the youths who keep vigil for two whole nights in filtering the *sawai-zu* (fermented husk rice beer).

**Second Session: *Innku Rineipa*:** The same procedure of *Innku rineipa* like the previous day is followed in this second session where all the members first assembled at *Lomtun's* house by around 2:30-3 pm and proceeds to chief's house. Finally they converge either at the festive house (*Nungak-luthei ruishang*) where dinner is served. One will notice so far that only the village elders are enjoy with their privileges and status in drinking and feasting, which is why it is considered as the “elders festival” (*Urinta rin*).

**Third Session (Evening) - *Innampei Jairikhongpa* and *Tongthi Gitpa* Ceremony:** The evening session is known as *Innampei jairik hongpa*, meaning ‘the youth coming to whole the night at the festive house’. The day is also known as *saphei jairik hongpa lungni* meaning, ‘youth coming to whole the night at the side of the house’. After dinner all the village council members assembled around 5:30-6 pm at the *Nungak-luthei bungkung* and when all necessary arrangements are made, two *Leibaks* were sent to escort the village chief. Women and children also begin arriving at the place. Their traditional sitting arrangement is such that the host and his wife sit in the middle of the house in the south side just in front of the big *sawai-zu* pot (the wife on the left side of her husband). The wine pot is placed in the centre of the house bounded by two benches in the east and north. In the southern side of the row i.e. on the right side of the host are the reserved sits of *Urinta bungkung* members;

*Hulak, Luplak, Zupai, Keirung* and *Hacharis*, etc, while on their opposite side i.e. on the north side of the house the *Tang-ngarinta's* members sit according to their hierarchical positions from west to east. Two youths; *Hithang* and senior *Leibak* sits behind the big *sawai-zu* pot and behind them on the west are the girls and women folk. The special guests or invitees occupy their seats according to their political position and status.

The inauguration ceremony to mark the occasion is known as *Tongthi gitpa* which means, 'insertion of the wine pipes'. This ceremony is carefully done by an expert who is either *Hithang* or *Thangsha* according to the formula assisted by one of them. There are seven *Tongthi* (bamboo wine pipes 2½ ft long). Each pipe represents the seven clans or *pipa* or the members of council of elders. The formula is that two pipes should be inserted first for the host of the house (*lomtun*) and his wife in the southern side of the wine pot. Secondly, three pipes are inserted for the *Hulak, Luplak* and *Zupai* respectively in the eastern side, while the other two pipes are inserted in the northern side (first inserting the pipe in the western side and then toward north-east). The two pipes are meant for guests and commoners but the other five wine pipes in the southern and eastern sides are specifically reserved for the host, his wife and the *Hulak, Luplak* and *Zupai*. When the *Tongthi gitpa* (insertion of bamboo wine pipe) is over the host performs consecutively the two offertory prayers, the first with the *sawai-zu* and the second with *leizu*. The host first closed the opening of his *sawai-zu* pipe with his thumb and pulls out of the pot and as he conjures he offers it slowly releasing it three times. After this a girl provides *leizu* to the host and he similarly offers the prayer for the second time. When completed, one of the *Hithang* or senior *Leibak* inspects all the pipes for any complication. Then, he first invites the brewers i.e. the womenfolk to come and taste their *sawai-zu* from the big pot, which is called as "hipot" (imploring). Subsequently, one of the *Leibak* makes a formal invitation with a typical courtesy to the three leaders; *Hulak, Luplak* and *Zupai* to taste the special *sawai zu*, then followed by *zurum*. After which the host announces that the *may-tum* will be served and followed by *zurum* again. Since, the *sawai-zu* pot has a large capacity of about 50 litres, the *Hithang* who sits behind in-charge of the wine constantly fills water into the wine pot to the brim from time to time as extraction continues.

Soon after this *tongthi gitpa* ceremony, five very important and indispensable songs called "Nimok-la" (devotional songs of Sun worship), first have to be sung, without which

they are not allowed to begin the dancing. Thus, after singing all the five *Nimok-la* songs, only the boys (four-five of them) in full traditional dress begin dancing the *Chamtun-lam*, encircling the northern pillar of the house till the song is over. Each song is replaced with a new batch of boys' which continues till late into the night, followed by *zurum* after each song. Later when the *Hulak* and *Luplak* decide to leave the place the host performs the closing rite *tongkaipa* and they are escorted to their respective houses one after another. After a while all the elders left the house, leaving only the youths; the boys and girls the opportunity to socialise and inter-mix freely, which is why it is called *Innampei Jairik hongpa* or *Saphei jairik hongpa lungni* (youths coming to whole the night).

The significance of this Thursday evenings session is that five *Nimok-la* songs which are compulsory are sang before they start dancing. Secondly, only the boys dance, and no girls participate in this war dance (*Chamtun-lam*). Thirdly, the opportunity and liberty to socialise or hang out or date a girl of his choice is openly given from this evening. Fourthly, as an amusement the youth are given the liberty to steal any consumable items at mid-night like; domestic fowls, fish, fruits, vegetables, etc. which have to be consumed that night itself, provided they are not caught red-handed. This stealing act is purposely encouraged by their senior members of the youths as part of training to test their skills and talents as well as to develop fearlessness. If any complaint arises from the villagers their leaders boldly defend their boys with excuses like the boys are young, innocent and just having fun and they should not take it seriously.

#### **Day 5 (Friday Morning Session) - Drinking of Turmeric Juice (*Ishantui Inpa*)**

The Friday morning is marked with a ceremony called *Ishantui inpa* (drinking turmeric juice), which is considered an indispensable part of the festival. Turmeric is pounded by the youths and the juice collected in a small pot. Everybody drinks with a belief that it cleanses the stomach and intestines of a person infested with worms and they will remain healthy and strong for the whole year. The ceremony is carried out in the front courtyard of the youths' festive house, where the three village leaders/chief; *Hulak*, *Luplak*, *Zupai* and the *lomtunpu* (the host) sit on the veranda facing east. The *Tang-ngarinta* members on the north, the boys in the northeast and the girls in the eastern side sit on the mats, while the *Urinta's* members sit on the southern side of the courtyard. There are three small pots filled with *Ishantui*,

*sawai-zu* and *leizu* along with three small glasses and three small gourd mugs (*Uum*) for each pot, placed before three senior girls (*Sikan nu*) accordingly (see Pic.67).

The morning dance session begins from inside the house. When the *Tang-ngarinta*'s members begin singing, the boys begin the war dance as if they are still continuing with the night session. Then, after completing three songs they came outside dancing (first) and singing to the front courtyard. When the song is completed they stop dancing, and as a break the three *Sikan* girls one after another accordingly take the *Ishantui*, *sawai-zu* and *leizu* in a glass, and first give it to the village chief who offers the *tong-kaipa* prayer one after another, followed by a *zurum* after each offerings. Then, they began serving to others on the basis of seniority. So, dancing and singing continues but they have to sing the "Meebo-la" songs (commemoration song of their ancestor or lineage or the clan head's) before they conclude this session, each song followed by *zurum*. By the last song few selected dancers approach the three leaders sitting on the veranda and after slightly bowing dancing three times with their *Chamtun*, they suddenly change the drum beats and so also the dance form called *Airekung lam* meaning, 'peacock's dance' (hand twisting dance). They conclude this morning session by dancing inside the house with *tongkaipa* performed by the host, after which everybody prepares for the common feast.

There are three important aspects in this session. First, it is the cleansing of the stomach and intestines with turmeric juice (*Ishantui*). Secondly, at least one *Meebo-la* songs is compulsorily sung, so the host clan's song is usually chosen. The third aspect is the new dance form called *Airekung lam* (peacock's dance) performed at the end of the session.

**Afternoon Session - Sire and Najui Dances:** Soon after lunch, all members assemble inside the house for the main celebration. As the song begins, two *Hacharis* initiate the *Sire lam* (the dance of animal's rounding) without *Chamtun* (hilt sword) as an introduction to the new dance in which two girls join them. The boys' dance is known as *Sire lam* and the girls dance called as *Najui* (young girls) dance or *Leikoi lam* (flowers twisting dance) meaning, hand twisting dance. After each song, new batch of boys and girls dances, where even guests were encourage to dance with their girls. During this dance session the boys were encouraged to call out a girl of his choice to dance together, and if he cannot pull her out he is mocked and teased. However, at the end of the session they have to sing certain

ceremonial songs; *Shang-phou-la* (drying paddy's song), *Athin-la* (eliciting/provoking song), etc. in which only the girls dance and compete amongst themselves by exhibiting their dancing skills. The one who danced gracefully and perfectly is adjudged as the best dancer of the year. Many *zurums* follow after each song and dance. In this session no rites or rituals nor *Chamtun* the hilt sword dance is performed. This celebration of singing and dancing has strong emotional attachment with the Chothe people where some elders express their nostalgic memories of the past how they danced around bonfires with their admirers.

***Nungak-luthei Sikan Ongpa Ceremony:*** The conclusion ceremony of the afternoon session is known as *Nungak-luthei sikan ongpa* (youth sitting for explanations). It is done before concluding the dance session where three senior girls sit on a bench in the northern side of *sawai-zu* pot facing the host, and three boys sat in the western side facing east in which as part of the Chothe custom, three *Sikan-la* songs are sung in honour of three clans represented by the three senior girls. After this, the *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai* join them taking their respective assigned place and wine pipes of the *sawai-zu*. Then, a *Leibak* formally tosses to all as, "Shall we all sip together again" (*maiyam chup sisarui-o*) and the three leaders sip the wine, after which the senior most girl distributes her tobacco leaf (*thakna*) to each of them; first to the *Lomtun* the host of the house and to his wife. Secondly, she gives it to *Hulak*, *Luplak* and *Zupai*, and thirdly to the three boys respectively on the basis of seniority. This particular formality of sipping the *sawai zu* from the pot and distributing the tobacco by the girls is repeated three times. When the girls complete their turn, the three boys exchange their sitting position with the girls and the same procedure is followed, in which after each sip of the wine, the three girls continued to distribute the tobacco leaf. After this formality the girls return to their original places. But the three boys who represent the three clans designated as; *Tanglai-chang*, *Tuishak-chang* and *Tanghung-chang* moved to the northern side, and thus, perform the last *Sikan-ongpa* ceremony with *thoukeipa* act. Though the *thoukeipa* act is same the referral terms are different for each unit of the village council.

**Friday Evening Session - *Inku-rineipa* or *Tuichum loipa*:** After the *Nungak-luthei Sikan-ongpa* ceremony is over all the members proceed to *Hulak's* house for the *Inku-rineipa* or

*Tuichum loipa* as described above. The same procedure is followed except that the *tongkaipa* and *zurum* is conducted in the veranda outside the house and instead of *may-tum* (chutney) some edible sweets are provided. As they continue the celebration eating and drinking three/four boys dances around the courtyard till the song ends. The village chief offers some money to the boys in appreciation and gratitude for dancing in his house, considered as an ominous sign for happiness. One of the *Tang-ngarinta* members receives the money and cheers on behalf of all, wishing the chief and his family a prosperous life for his generous donation. This customary procedure of *Tuichum loipa* is similarly followed among all the members of the council of elders' (*Urinta*) hierarchically, but the last house should be the youth's festive house (*Nungak-Luthei ruishang*). After completing the customary formality, the boys continue to stay the night and celebrate the whole night.

The Chothe, in olden days, traditionally believes that if a person was able to host a big feast (merit) he was considered wealthy, prosperous and blessed by the gods. It is also said that even the evil spirits do not dare disturb such a family for fear that he has many friends and relatives because of the people's commotion and noise of music. The Chothe believes that the sound of drums and gongs is said to be unbearable to evil spirits, as substantiated by their folktale '*Pu Kinjantepa*'. Therefore, singing and dancing in any house is always welcome and considered a privilege, so a tip is offered in kindness to the group.

#### **Day 6 (Saturday Evening Session) - *Bampui Jairik Hongni***

There are no ceremonies or programmes on Saturday morning and afternoon, so the villagers re-energise themselves. But around 5-6 pm everybody gathers for the evening session called *Bampui jairik hongni*, meaning 'the day the proposer comes to stay' at the girl's house. In accordance to the custom, a boy that wishes and desires to marry the girl proposes and seeks the permission of her parents and begins living with them, in order to serve a three year marriage labour service (see Yuhlung C. Charles 2007). For the ceremony the old *sawai-zu* wine pot is replaced with a new pot, and the similar procedure as the *Tongthi gitpa* ceremony like on Thursday evening, is carried out.

However, Saturday night is meant for the girls where most of the night's session is given to the girls for cheering and teasing the proposed girl to be wed. Soon after the *tongkaipa* offertory prayer and other formalities the girls begin singing; *Tamparai-la*,

*Hungchong bangpa*, etc. where both the boys and girls dance the whole night (see Pic.68). But later, the village chief (*Hulak*) performs his *tongkaipa* and leaves the place escorted officially by two/three youths till his house, after him *Luplak* and *Zupai* also follows suit. After the three village leaders leave like Thursday night the boys and girls are given the opportunity to mingle freely and develop intimacy among themselves, and enjoy their freedom, drinking, joking, stealing, eating, etc. But any quarrel or disagreement amongst them is reported to their unit leaders who will be punished the next morning. The *Innampei* and *Bampui* festivals are like intimate formal celebration giving an opportunity for the boy to propose a girl or initiate for the arranged marriage, who henceforth, begin serving his three year marriage labour service in the girl's house.

#### **Day 7 (Sunday Morning First Session) - Closing Ceremony (*Konjai Jaicheipa*)**

Since, the Chothe begin the festival with a benediction prayer they similarly conclude with a valedictory or thanks giving prayer for the blessing bestowed during the festival. This valedictory prayer is known as “Konjai Jaicheipa” meaning, ‘the closing divination’. The procedure is almost the same as the benediction ritual at the sacred-grove, but just that the valedictory is performed in the morning. After completion, they return to the village chief's house, sprinkle some water with *tai ren* leaves and also apply little mud collected from the deities' site to the members present there, starting with the village chief. After both takes their respective seats they report their divination prophesy to all of them, and as part of the conclusion session the village chief performs *tongkaipa*, after which all proceed to the festive house (*Nungak-luthei ruishang*) for the next session.

**Second Session - Youth Initiation Ceremony (*Leibak Manpa*):** After the valedictory ceremony, the next morning's session is the youth's initiation ceremony known as *Hayan* or *leibak/ luthei manpa* and the sports hour. Any individual who wishes to be initiated into the youth congregation (*Nungak-Luthei*) or any *Tang-ngaringta* member wish to perform a simple promotion ceremony it is carried out at this session. The initiation fee of a boy to be *Leibak* is a rooster (preferably red in colour) and a bottle of *leizu* (liquor), and for a girl it is also a bottle of *leizu* and a bundle of tobacco leaves (*thakna*).<sup>5</sup>

Any simple promotion ceremony of *Tang-ngarinta* members and if any individual wishes to state a petition or grievance to the council of elders (*Urinta*) is carried out at this session by offering a bottle of *Leizu*. However, after such ceremonies (if any), the youth ready themselves for their indigenous games and sports such as *Tabun*, *Tanghung-lungthong*, *Zuhom lakpa*, etc. at the open spaces (*Laman*) to rejuvenate themselves after all their responsibilities, which is another entertaining session.

**Evening Session - Dismantling Ceremony (*Ashina Sikan ongpa*):** Around 5-6 pm at the youth's festive house (*Nungak-luthei ruishang*) all the members assemble for the dismantling ceremony (*ashina sikan ongpa*). The procedure of this formal ceremony is similar to the *Nungak-luthei sikan ongpa* ceremony stated above, where three boys on behalf of all the youth perform the *thoukeipa*, after which the ceremony of removing the seven bamboo wine pipes (*tongthi*) from the *sawai zu* pot is carried out. The removal of wine pipes is exactly reverse from the insertion method i.e. the guest pipe is first removed, followed *Zupai*, *Luplak*, *Hulak*, and thirdly the host wife's pipe and last, the host pipe. After which the big pot and all other wine pots are all taken outside the house to signify that the festival of *In-nampe* and *Bampui* has ended harmoniously. But the members of village council begin preliminary discussions for the *Lamleh leithoipa* (village road/gate) ritual.

## **7.2 Achui Rin Festival**

*Achui rin* or *Chultuk rin* or *Tuituk rin* is another very important festival of the Chothe celebrated with merriment and joy for seven days which begin on or after the first Full-moon in the month September (*Langpan* in Meitei). It is believed that the name of the festival derives from *achoi* means, 'yeast'. Therefore, it is commonly called as *butoi rin* (bread festival). *Achui rin* is generally considered as the festival of youths, while the *Innampei rin* as the festival of elders. J. Shakespeare briefly describes this festival as practice by the Chawte and Purum that it is celebrated "before cutting their jhum, sacrifice a pig and go down to the stream and sharpen their daos..." (1912: 169). Though the natures of two festivals are different, many socio-religious aspects are similar in many ways. Therefore, I have omitted the repetitive socio-religious practices like the rituals, and

ceremonies as it has already been described (above) in the *Innampei rin* and only the significant differences are highlighted below.

**Day 1 (Monday):** The whole benediction ritual (*Heiruk keipa*) procedure of paying homage and tributes to their Supreme Guardian God at the deities' site and the appeasement rite (*Lou houpa*) for the village deities of four directions are similarly performed like the *Innampei rin* festival. But the significant difference is that the *Tang-ngarinta think-bompa* ceremony i.e. *think-tumpa think-tepa* of assigning and reassigning of the political portfolios with the stick or scroll, instead being performed the next day, is almost simultaneously performed in the evening with the council of elders (*Urinta*) at their respective places.

**Day 2 (Tuesday):** In the morning the council of elders at its festive house or assigned *ruishang* performs the festive inauguration ceremonies of *Hung matheipa* (tuning the drums) with the *Muipa zuron*. In the afternoon the *Fho-parakpa* (shield movement) and *Chumtun lam* (hilt sword) war dances are similarly performed accordingly like the *Innampei* festival. According to them if the family that hosts the youth's *ruishang* is rich and wealthy, they offer lunch to all the village council members as part of the inauguration ceremony. Then, in the evening by 5-6 pm after dinner the village elders gathered at the youth's *ruishang* and the drinking and singing rehearsal for the festival continues till late in the night. In the mean time some youths distributed in groups go informing every youth's house that the ritual ceremony is over and so they can start preparing the indigenous bread (*butoi*) for the festival from tomorrow morning onwards.

**Day 3 (Wednesday):** No programme or ceremony is conducted in the morning and afternoon as time is given for every family to pound the rice into flour to prepare the local bread (*butoi*) for the grand festival. But the *Tang-ngarinta* members in the afternoon busy themselves carrying out their inauguration ceremonies of: *Muipa zuron*, *Fho-parakpa* and the *thoukeipa* like the council of elders (*Urinta*) did yesterday. For the ceremony, two *Tang-ngarinta* members officially go to invite *Pakhanglakpa* (like the village chief) at his resident after performing *tongkaipa* for their safe journey. The *Pakhanglakpa* on reaching the *ruishang* perform *tongkaipa* with *zuting* wine by directly taking it from the pot holding

*tongthi* (bamboo pipe) after offering his *may-tum* (a piece of meat) and breaking the *cheiche* (bamboo v-shaped stick) on the ground. While the *Tang-ngarinta* inauguration ceremonies are going on, some youths at about around 4-5 pm began the bread collection from each member's house meant for the evening refreshments. They deposit all the collected bread to the senior most girls (*Nungak mapi*) and she re-distributes the bread into three shares and sends them to the other three senior girls to take charge of later distributions.

***Tuituk Rin:*** Around 5-6 pm, after dinner everybody begins to assemble at the river bank in their new traditional attire for the *Tuituk* (water discovery) festival as soon as they hear the sound of drums. After they sing the *Tui-ron la* (song of flowing river) the village priest performs the ritual (*Tuituk lethoi*) with *zuting* on the running water with a *tongthi* (bamboo wine pipe) by directly taking it from the pot. When he is done all the villagers assembled, cleanse themselves in the river by washing their faces, hands and legs or at least sprinkling water on themselves, so in accordance they sing the *Waiwa la* (bright/ illuminate song) and proceed towards the festive house, stopping at three stations or junctions signifying traditional break from a long journey in which some youth entertain the people by dancing around to relieve themselves from exhaustion. On reaching the festive house the tradition of tying the small bundles of dog meat (*Muithidang/Yuithidang*) accordingly with a string from the *sawai-zu* pot to the western horizontal bar of the house (*khandang*) is performed. This *Muithidang/Yuithidang* tradition is no longer practiced by the people now. Then, after the host performed the opening *tongkaipa* prayer followed by *zurum*, the ceremony of *tongthi gitpa* (insertion of the bamboo wine pipes) is carried out, in the same way as the *Innampei* festival, as explained above. After this ceremony the drums are given to the women folk or girls who sing their folksongs *Tamparai la*, *Ajun la* and some other selected songs for few hours, after which they return the drums to the men, who then continue their songs and perform the war dance (*Chamtun lam*). Here, the significant differences are: unlike in the *Innampei rin* where the men folk initiate the singing, it is the womenfolk who start the singing. Another important socio-cultural difference is that only the senior leaders or elders perform the dance with the girls as an introduction to mark the festive occasion, where the young boys are refrained from participating in this evening dance session. Later, the host perform the closing prayer, signifying the end of *Tuituk* festival and everyone retires.

#### **Day 4 (Thursday)**

Since, there is no strict formal ritual and ceremony on Thursday morning the village elders simply gathered, who eats the dog meat (*Muthidang*). However, any initiation ceremony of the youth (*Nungak-luthei*) or a simple promotion ceremony for any *Tang-ngarinta* member is carried out at this session, including any public petition or grievance by paying the required fees. They say the villagers often put up their petitions and grievances on this day because they consider the decisions are lenient and merciful as the chiefs are in good spirits. The day is also mark as the beginning of the *Achui* (*chultuk*) festival, so a common meal is usually organised by the council, who invites special guests or friends from far and near to join them. On the basis of the division of labour every villager does their jobs accordingly, where the women folk cook rice and prepare other items like chutney, boiled vegetables and *outti* (a kind of plain curry), while the men folk cook the meat curry.

Then, by 5 pm all the village council members assemble inside the festive house to begin the *Achui* festival where the host (*Hulak*) performs the *tongkaipa* opening prayer, followed by *zurum*. After which they begin to sing the *Achui la* and some of the youth leaders also begin dancing the war dance (*chumtun lam*) around the pillar of the house as a ceremonial introduction. After singing at least three songs they proceed outside the house in the front courtyard where the young boys and girls including the children, who are waiting outside, join them after immediately forming two lines; boys (outer side) and girls (inner side). Song after song the same war dance is performed circling the ground, sometime the dance leaders are also change and the drum beats becomes faster. There are also breaks in between the songs and dances, followed by *zurums* each time. During the main break, some village youths entertains the people with their expertise by performing skits and dramas, jokes, western dances, singing competitions and others. After this main break they continue their traditional song and dance, and conclude the session dancing inside the house, by performing the closing prayer *tongkaipa* by the host, followed by the *zurum*.

#### **Day 5-6 (Friday-Saturday)**

There are no ceremonies or programmes on Friday and Saturday morning and afternoon as people loiter around house to house tasting their local bread and wine. But by 5-6 pm after dinner all villagers gather at the festive house for the youths' dancing session

that is carried on till late at night like on Thursday. However, the dancing session on Saturday evening ends a little early because they have to perform the closing socio-religious ceremony of the *Achui* festival. By the last song of the festival the dance leaders (only the boys) enter the house dancing with the singers and after encircling the pillar three times they go out to the front courtyard and continue the dancing again. This dancing inside and outside the house is repeated thrice and finally ends inside the house. After this the ceremonies of *tongthi-lashukpa* (removal of the bamboo wine pipes) and *thoukeipa* by the youth are performed accordingly. However, some of the elders say that in early days the Saturday afternoon was spent in punishing and penalising the disobedient youths (*sikan ongpa*) by *Pakhanglakpa* where some were penalised with a bottle of wine as fines.

### **Day 7 (Sunday)**

The valedictory ritual (*Konjai jaichepa*) for the *Achui* festival is similarly performed like the *Innampei* festival with almost the same procedure, where the village priest reports to their village chief about the result of the valedictory divination. Soon after this, the youth began their games and sports like shot-put throw (*Tanghung lungthong*), javelin or hunting.

### **7.3 Analysis of the Festivals**

From the above description it is observed that all the Chothe festivals begin on the first Monday on or after the Full-moon of the lunar calendar. It also shows clearly that the Chothe practice three basic forms of worship in their daily practical life. The foremost thing is that they adore, revere and worship their Almighty Heavenly Supreme Gods *Thangvan rengpa*, *Pu Lungchungpa* (*Pakhangpa*), *Pi Leima*, who represents the cosmic-nature the elementary gods. The second form of worship is the reverence shown by honouring their ancestors with respect and gratitude, and the third form is the appeasement rituals offered to the lower gods or other deities to be on safe side. This is clearly observable from many of their rites and rituals like in the benediction and valedictory rituals, and also in many parts of their socio-religious ceremonies. The second important aspect is the different types of divination being performed in all major rituals as prescribed accordingly. Another significant aspect is that the *tongkaipa* prayer followed by *zurum* which is always performed before and at the end of any ritual or ceremony to signify the beginning and end of it usually

at the same place as seen in *innku rin*, *Fho parakpa*, *chamtun lam* and *thoukeipa*, ceremonies, like the Christians.

#### 7.4 Merit Feast (*Lohchou- Maichou*)

The Chothe have different types of merit feasts. The tradition of giving merit feasts by the village chief or some important village member is known as *Lohchou-maichou*, literally ‘feast of great face or pride’ (merit feast). It is also called as *Manrung* meaning, ‘payback the earnings’ in the name of God for the blessings. There are also special feasts given by girl’s parents on behalf of their daughters before they are married; similar to modern birth day feast or celebrated. Some of the merit feasts are: (i) *Theelhong loh*, (ii) *Hungchoi na lochou-maichou*, (iii) *Oukloh-Shiroh*, (iv) *Najui-loh*, and (v) *Taiton loh*.

1. ***Theelhong Lohchou-Maichou***: This is a very grand merit feast, where the host usually erects a monolith by offering a Mithun (bison) and several pots of wine (*zu*). In such a feast even the neighbouring dignitaries like village chiefs, relative and friends are invited for the ceremonial feast. Such merit feast is hosted by a very rich and wealthy man who wants to show his gratitude to God by sharing his wealth and blessings along with his friends and relatives. The monolith has no religious significance but it is erected in memory of his honour and contribution to the society. They said no ritual is strictly performed, except that an egg is broken on the forehead of the Mithun or buffalo just before it is killed, and some wine is offered to the God. T.C. Das had mentioned that besides the *laman* and *ruishang* they found in some village, raised plate-forms, roughly rectangular in shape, covered with slabs of stone... (1945: 45). These are the relics of the *theel-hongpa* a merit feast thrown by a rich villagers in order to attain social position and status in the society by erecting a kind of monolith as a sign of their posterity of God’s blessing. The relics of such two monoliths still exist on the ridge of *Bungkung Lamshu*, an old settlement site, above Ajouhu village. The old ruin monolith in the north is said to have been erected by a wealthy Mareem man now commonly known as “Mareempu theelhong”, and the other is also commonly known as “Yuhlungpu theelhong” which is in the south (see Pic. 52 & 53).

2. ***Hungchoi na Lochou-Maichou:*** This is a feast completely different from the other as it is celebrated by carrying drums in the field prior to plantation. So, the name itself bears as *Hung-choi* means, ‘hold - *choi*, the drum - *hung*’ and it is celebrated just for a day. The main purpose of this feast is that the field owner offers a pig, rice beer and liquor to the people so as to help him complete his jhuming or plantation. As a result the people will fix a day shortly after the notice and all members help him.
  
3. ***Oukloh-Shiloh Lohchou-Maichou:*** It is a feast very similar with *theelhong* but there is no erection of a monolith. Here the host or the rich man makes a burnt (*loh*) offering of a pig (*ouk*) or a cow /oxen (*Shil*) and invites only his clan members or kinsmen including his relatives like sisters, daughters and grand-daughters if any. The *maksa* the son-in-laws of the rich man comes and does all the necessary work and joins the feast. However, in most cases the village chief and elders are invited too. No serious ritual is involved here but divination is sought with the pig’s spleen and the liver by the village priest (*atheimpu*). The pig that is killed inside the house is examined for the ominous sign. Normally the pig (*ouk*) for such feast should be a minimum of three feet in length or six *weis*. In this kind of a feast the *maksas* are responsible for all kinds of arrangement for the successful feast which is marked by eating, drinking, dancing and singing the whole night around a bon-fire. When the group feels satisfied they approach the host or donor of the feast and acknowledge his generosity that they are contented with his offering, therefore, wishing him and his family a prosperous life in the coming years.
  
4. ***Najui-loh or Lohm Rin:*** It is a kind of family or lineage feast especially given in honour of the married daughters by their parents or lineage brothers, where the sons-in-law or brothers-in-law are also invited to join the feast. The Meitei called it as “ningol chak kouba” (dinner invitation of married sisters). There is no specific ritual, except offering some foods and drinks before they eat. According to them the *najui-loh* feast strengthens their matrimonial and social relationships, where the son-in-law or brother-in-laws often helps his wife’s family as a compatriot or alliance partner when need arises to both.

5. ***Taiton lohm Rin:*** It is a feast offered by the senior most girls of the village at her house, by her parent before she gets married or an extension of the *Bampui jairik hongpa rin* of *Innampei* festival. It is like bidding farewell party to her friends, in which the feast lasts for three days and three nights. For this particular feast a tent or hut like structure is constructed in front of the house by the village youth. The name of the feast is derived from “tai-ten”, meaning, ‘farm hut or tent’ because in olden days youths often made baskets (*tai*) in such farm huts in groups. This feast or party is not mandatory for all the girls only the rich and wealthy families hosted such extra feasts.

### **7.5 Folk Culture of the Chothe**

Folk culture comprises all the folk behaviour and activities that are practiced within a group or society imbedded as part of their tradition. The study in folk culture like folklore and oral traditions is becoming important of late in the academic field as it has been introduced in different universities as an academic discipline of an inter-disciplinary subject in the School of Social Sciences. The need for the introduction of the subject in the School of Social Sciences is felt because of the close inter-relationship and the richness in its subject matter which contains valuable information for deeper analytical study to construct and understand the concept and its symbolic meanings of the socio-religious beliefs and practices. It is being encouraged from different angles because certain significant elements help bridge the cultural gap from the available folklore and its folk culture by exploring and unearthing the unknown knowledge that is buried deeply in the oral traditions and ancient practices. Folklore comprises of a broad range of human thoughts and activities that are hard to categorize in one list. Folklore consists of culture, including stories, myths, legends, oral history, music, dance, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs and so forth within a particular population comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture, or group. It also refers to the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The word ‘folklore’ was first used by the English antiquarian William Thoms in a letter published by the London Journal ‘*Athenaeum*’ in 1846. Thus academic and ethnographic studies of folklore often term it as folkloristics.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it will be unwise for any person of religious study to ignore or leave the folklore or the oral history of a

society like myths, legends, folktales, folksongs, folkdances etc., unexplored because such folk culture like folklores explain and reflect the past and present of one's society.

Alan Dundee remarks how a folklorist should study and that "one must always guess the meaning from a context. For this reason, a folklorist must actively seek to elicit the meaning from the folk", he also quotes Malinowski's statement which states "the text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless" (See, Datta 1994: 40). Similarly David Emery also said the word contains a deep and vast meaning in it, common to all people but hard to understand in technical terms.<sup>7</sup> According to him important subjects of folklore that speak of one's culture are like religious beliefs; myths and legends, folksongs, parables and proverbs, folk dance, folk arts, ballads, fairy tales, jokes and superstitions.

According to Birendranath Datta, folklore is "folk learning; it comprehends all knowledge that is transmitted by word of mouth and all crafts and other techniques that are learned by imitation or examples, as well as the products of such crafts... Folklore includes folk art, folk crafts, folk tools, folk costume, folk custom, folk belief, folk medicine, folk recipes, folk music, folk dance, folk games, folk gestures and folk speech, and as well as those verbal forms of expression which have been called folk literature but which are better described as verbal art" (1994: 20).

The above definition shows that folklore comprises all the elements mentioned above which the folk or a simple group of people commonly believe and practice in their social network and inter-relationship as members of a society. Each society also has its own distinctive cultural patterns of folkways, mores, norms, folk art, craft, music, attires, games, folktales, etc. which distinguishes it from the other groups although some may be seemingly similar in many occasions, which may exist either in written or verbal forms. It is also seen that such folklore and folk culture also provides rich cultural heritage of one's society from the socio-historical perspectives. Often such folk culture and folklore, irrespective of whether civilized or uncivilised, urban or rural express their lifestyle in their own ways that distinguishes from the other cultural groups like the Chothe. Therefore, the North-eastern region of India, because of the immense number of groups and sub-groups or tribes and sub-tribes inhabiting in the region has been often referred as, "the anthropologist's paradise" which the folklorists equally term the region as "folklorist's paradise" (Datta 1994: 2).

However, such distinctive cultural patterns are fading and diluting everyday because of the various factors like influence of Christianity, modernisation, westernisation, acculturation and assimilation, modification of customs and traditions. Therefore, to document and record the existing folk culture of one's society is also considered a very important and significant aspect in this ever changing world.

### **7.5.i Folktales**

Folktales refer to traditional stories that try to explain or understand the working nature or the world from different perspectives by different groups of people. Folktales usually have no identified author, but they mirror the values and culture of the society from which they originate. In olden days such stories were orally passed down from one generation to another. The stories are of different nature and character, but often feature moral lesson or explaining the mysticism of life. The stories are usually of the past and distant memories took long ago in faraway places, and are woven around talking animals, royalty, peasants, or mythical creatures. In a folktale, goodness is always rewarded or becomes the victor. Heroes and heroines live happily ever after, while villains are suitably punished. Through the generations, the story may change but the core elementary meaning remains the same.<sup>8</sup>

The folklorist, because of the varied natures and characters of folktales, tries to club all the similar stories into one group or catalogue and the most common cataloguing system is the "ATU Catalogue" found in, '*The Type of International Folktales*', edited by Hans-Jörg Uther (2004). It states that the ATU - numbers system replaces AT – numbers that were in use almost a hundred years, where ATU stands for the surname initials of the folklorists "Aarne, Thompson, and Uther". This initial catalogue is said to have been developed and published in 1910 by Antti Aarne the Finnish folklorist in '*Index of types of folktale*' in German, which was a devised to organize and index Scandinavian collections. However, Aarne's system was translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson, the American folklorist in 1928, and revised in 1961.<sup>9</sup> It is considered that this ATU number catalogue greatly helps if one collects folktales and would like to have summaries of folktales, and also those who intend to compare tales of different countries and cultures.<sup>10</sup> They are: (i) Animal Tales, (ii)

Tales of Magic, (iii) Religious Tales, (iv) Realistic Tales, (v) Tales of the Stupid Ogre (giant, devil), (vi) Anecdotes and Jokes, and (vii) Formula Tales.

According to S. Arokianathan the Tangkhul folktales are classified into three viz.; (1) Supernatural Tales, (2) Animals Tales and (3) Tales of Everyday Life (1982: xxiii). On the above criteria ATU system and Arokianathan, the Chothe folktales may be also classified into five types viz.; (1) Religious Tales: Myths, Legends, Supernatural Tales, (2) Magical Tales: Fairly Tales, Angel and Devil Tales, (3) Man-Animal Tales: Man-Animal, Man-Bird or Man-Insect tales, (4) Adventurer and Romantic Tales, (5) Tales of Everyday Life: Anecdotes and Jokes, Superstitions and others. The Chothe folktales seem to be more prominent with religious and magical tales as their stories mostly contain the supernatural and magical elements. The Chothe being an old tribe, now with a small population their folklore and folktales are declining each day as their great story tellers are also decreasing day by day. Therefore recording of their folktales is considered necessary because some of them have historical connections substantiating certain historical issues. Few selected Chothe folktales are:

### **(1) *Pu Kinjangtepa and the Forest Gods***

Khedon and Mouchung narrate that Pu Kinjang Mareem, commonly known as Pu Kinjangtepa was considered a very skilful and notorious magician. One day as he was cleaning his new jhum field in a dense forest, the Forest god instructed him to stop cleaning the jhum field or else he would face death. But Pu Kinjangtepa instead of giving up out of fear retaliated against the Forest god that since he had nothing to eat and nowhere else to go, he has to clear the forest to cultivate paddy and grow vegetables for his survival. The Forest god refused to accept his request and kept on warning him to give up the area and go to some places. Despite several warnings given, Pu Kinjangtepa dared the Forest god being a skillful magician and he continued cultivating the forest by planting vegetables and sowing paddy. He also appeased him each year with sacrificial offerings like a fowl or a dog. Despite such offerings the Forest god was still unsatisfied. So, whenever the Forest god threatened Kinjangtepa to leave the place, it seems he would sing his magical song in retaliation to the Forest god. The song in free translation as given by them:-

“*Shi-o ring ngo, shi-rangpaye ring ngo,*  
*Chai-ren hung ngo, ling ngo,*  
*Shi- napekke shi-rangpaye ring ngo ...”*

(O-bull be louder, you are a strong bull be louder,  
Oh hide, produce the sound loudly,  
It is you, bull who gave it be strong and loud).

They say Pu Kinjangtepa became annoyed with the forest god because of the frequent threats and menace and decided to kill the Forest god and take his power. So, instead of offering the sacrificial animals properly he tossed it bit by bit disrespectfully. This angered the Forest god and decided to avenge him. Therefore, one fine sunny day, the Forest god gathered all the other gods and tricked Pu Kinjangtepa by transforming themselves into vultures and ate all his ripened paddy, fruits and vegetables grown in his jhum and pretended as if they could not fly due to overeating. When Pu Kinjangtepa arrived at the spot and saw the vultures lying, he thought it was the best opportunity to kill them. He therefore, tied them one by one by the legs and when he was about to kill one of them, suddenly all run and began to fly. Pu Kinjangtepa grasped the rope immediately and hung it to stop them. But since the vultures were in a large group he was taken up higher and higher into the sky and when he could no longer hold on to the rope he slipped to the ground and died.

Pu Kinjangtepa is still remembered by the Chothe because they consider him as a great magician who instils in them the use of magic against the evil spirits and gods and how appeasement offerings help them. They called these Forest spirits or gods as *Lamhel* and his wife as *Sarui-Lamhel* (Das 1945: 192). Besides, it reflects the limit of man’s power in the use of magical charms and spells. It also signifies the kind of things that the evil spirits or gods did not like or could not bear, like loud drum or gong sounds. The story is treasured by the Mareem or Marim clan since it is associated with their clan.

(Source: Kh. Khedon and M. Mouchung of Khongkhang village)

## **(2) *Api Shumdornu: The Widow with the Magic Gong***

According to Pr. Roushi, when the Chothe settled around Ahu Lungsuk there was an old widow called *Api Shorhum*, commonly known as *Api Shumdornu* meaning, ‘the grandmother who possess a gong’. The gong magically produced sound by itself at unusual

times signifying a bad omen to the village. So, whenever the gong produced a sound the entire village faced chaos and certain problems like village disputes or feuds, quarrels among families and relatives, sudden death of a villager, etc. Since every villager complained of her unusual gong sound, the old widow *Api Shorhum* or *Api Shumdornu* hung it on the tree, but when a problem was expected the gong itself sounded again warning of the village of certain misfortune. Therefore, the old widow took it down and placed it before her feet and whenever the gong began to sound mysteriously she would step upon it so it would not produce the sound. Subsequently, it is believed, the gong was completely submerged under the ground with her feet and even left a mark on the ground when it finally disappeared. They claim that some people have sighted the gong re-appeared three times mysteriously at different places, one place is assumed to be in Tipaimuk River, an old settlement region.

*(Source: Pr. Roushi)*

### **(3) *Lungkang: Neibui and the Demigod Rocks***

This story narrates the weakness of a man before a woman. It tells how a simple man Neibui, during his hunting expedition got a magical talisman from the demigods and became rich. But because of his stupid persuasive wife he finally succumbed to death.

According to Kh. Khedon and M. Mouchung of Khongkhang, one day Neibui went hunting into the deep forest following the upstream river of Tengenupal hill range, but unfortunately he did not get even a single animal that day. Since he had gone too far it was too late for him to return home. So he decided to spend the night in the forest under a big tree but as he got closer he saw two large stones below it. Since, one of the larger stone was wide and flat like a bed with plenty of space; he decided to sleep on it instead on the big tree. The stone derived its name from this incident and was called “Lung-kang” meaning, ‘stone-bed’. However, that very night Neibui had a very strange dream. He saw the spirits of the two large stones transforming themselves into male and female demigods, where the male demigod was angrily grilling his wife that he wanted to kill Neibui for sleeping above him and disturbing him, without identifying who and what type of person Neibui is. So, the female demigod pacified her husband that Neibui had a wife, children and also relatives. She pacified and rationalised the male demigod that if he killed Neibui his wife and children

would suffer from hunger and poverty and he would be responsible for it cause. Such justification good words of the female demigod reverberated the male demigod to rethink, thus he spared Neibui's life that night.

According to the Chothe elders, the next morning too, Neibui, instead of going home went hunting the whole day but proved futile and unluckily again. So, he reluctantly returned to the same place and rested for the night again, as he had no better option. Accordingly he dreamt that very night again the same demigods coming out of the stones and the male demigod, furious and wanting to kill him. But the female demigod stopped him by explaining that Neibui's wife was expecting a child soon and that she also intended to attend to her delivery and see the child.<sup>11</sup> This made the male demigod more furious at Neibui for coming back but he was completely helpless hearing the news. Thus, Neibui's life was spared again as the female demigod implored her husband. But the male demigod assured his wife that he will not kill Neibui anymore but he will put a condition in which he dies by his own strength and power.

Hence, the male demigod confronted Neibui and inquired what brought him to the place and what he wanted? Neibui introduced himself and shared his unfortunate hunting expeditions, and then told the demigod that he wanted a kind of magical power in which he did not have to work so hard but be self sufficient with food grain for his family. The male demigod, after deep thought granted his wish by placing on him a condition that the moment he revealed the secret of his magical powers to any person, he would die instantly before he completed telling the story. Thus Neibui accepted the condition and acquired the magical power (the magical charm is not mentioned by them in their narration).

Henceforth, Neibui became very rich and wealthy soon because of the magical power. Later, his wife who was completely ignorant before but she became suspicious from the rumours and decided to find out by her. One day she secretly followed her husband to the jhum field and found him resting in his hut. Neibui later got up from his nap in the evening and his magical charms on the grasses which he grasped, and then buries it. Just then, mysteriously according to his action all his rice plants were cut and pile up in heaps as if someone had done it. His wife was amazed seeing the things from her hiding place and became more curious. After Neibui left the place she went and removed the grass and suddenly all the rice plants reverted to their places. She immediately buried the grass but the

miracle did not work anymore, frightened she hurriedly left the place. On reaching her home Neibui's wife asked him what work he had done for the day, when Neibui replied, she told him that she saw the rice plants were still standing when she came by their field side after collecting firewood, Neibui ignored her. But the following day, when Neibui reached his field he was rather surprised to discover all his rice plants were standing and he began to wonder who undid his work. Subsequently, he re-performed his magic and completed his harvest. But he became sceptical about people and his magic power. However, one day when his curious and worried wife carelessly questioned him about the past incident and his magic he became doubtful about his wife.

Thereafter, Neibui's wife began persuading and nagging everyday, asking Neibui to tell her about his secret charm. But as Neibui refused to talk about it because of the commitment he had with the demigods, their relationship began to get sore, and she accused him of selfishness and mistrust. Ultimately, since Neibui could not bear her ill behaviour anymore, one night after the dinner as they lay down on bed to sleep he began to narrated his secret story; about his unfortunate hunting expeditions and how he luckily got the magical charm or talisman. Thus, they said as Neibui narrates his secret story to his wife his legs and hands began to freeze slowly and he finally turned into a stone before he could complete his story. However, his wife did not know about it as she was deeply engrossed in the story until when he did not respond to any of her questions. Thus, Neibui a simple farmer who became rich in one night died in his sleep under the influence of his persuasive wife after breaking his promise, a condition placed by the demigod.<sup>12</sup>

The story portrays how one acquires certain kinds of magical powers in dreams or accidentally from certain places. It also explains the inter-relationship between man and gods (demigods) or the metaphysical world of the gods that co-exist with the human world. It also describes how the gods live and function like the human beings, how the gods despite possessing certain power are not allowed to miss-utilise their power or harm any man at their own wish and will take full control of any human being without proper justification even if they trespassed their territory or irritate them. Time is always given to repent and forgive any wrong doer before any action is taken by them. It indicates that certain uniform moral principles or universal rules regulates or govern the two worlds by the Supreme God rationally. For example, Neibui could have been easily killed by the male demigod on the

spot but he was spared because the female demigods defended his conduct rationally on the pretext of his status and conditions. The Chothe believe that if a man dies when his wife is pregnant the deceased's soul would enter into the unborn child and disturb the family line. Hence, a woman or baby who dies at parturition is buried outside the village cemetery for fear of such reasons. As W.J. Goode explains that deities take notice of man's actions, further man's welfare, desire man's attention, sometime punishes men, and are not invariably 'good' as they also have 'moods', etc. (2000: 9). However, the story is also connected with one of their superstitions that, a man should never tell all secrets to his wife while sleeping on the bed, if he does so, they believed he would not live long.

(Source: *Kh. Khedon and M. Mouchung of Khongkhang village*)

#### **(4) *Thaowon Saamthanu: The Lady with the Beautiful Hair***

This story is based on the lamentation dedicated by her lover Chungthang to 'the lady with beautiful hair' commonly known as "Thaowon Saamtharnu" whose birth named is "Shorha". It is said that her hair was so long, black and exceptionally beautiful that even her seven brothers helped in drying her hair on the bamboo beam. Accordingly it is believed that because of her beauty she was captured by the Manipur king who later made her one of his queens as "Nunghil Chaibi" (the biological mother of King Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz).

According to Neilut Makan (Satrapa) this story occurred when some of them settled around the Imphal at Yangpankung few centuries ago. One fine day Thaowon Saamtharnu or Shorha, the lady with the beautiful hair went to bathe in the Nambul River and some of her loose hair fell into the river. Accidentally one of her loose hair that fell into the river was swallowed by a fish and the fish floated down the river as it could not digest and reached the Langthabal palace area. Fortunately or unfortunately some of the king's soldiers of Langthabal palace who were washing themselves in the same river saw the floating fish and caught it for dinner. Neilut said when they cut open the stomach of the fish they were astonished to find a single hair which was extremely long and black inside the fish stomach that fills their brass bowl (*kori wanshang shiya tiya*) to the brim. They were so amazed that they took it to their Meitei king and presented to him, who after seeing such a long hair, assumed that the girl must also be beautiful. He immediately ordered his soldiers to search for the girl among the nearby settlers upstream. After an intensive search in the area by

distributing flowers to all the young girls in the surrounding villages a soldier spotted her. Thus, Thaowon Saamtharnu was forcefully captured and taken to the king's palace, despite her and her parent's wishes. The Chothe village chief (Pu Punem Marim) also objected to such a breach of marriage in spite of explaining to the king her current marital status as she had been already engaged to Chungthang who was serving his three years marriage labour service. However, the Meitei king refused to send her back as he was deeply in love with her beauty and immediately solemnised a marriage. Thereafter, as part of the Meitei tradition Thaowon Saamtharnu (Shorha) was given a new name by the king's court.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Thaowon Saamtharnu or Shorha is still remembered by Chothe because of the lamentation song dedicated by Chungthang her Chothe lover after she was captured by the Meitei king and deserted him.<sup>14</sup> This ballad or love song points to the unsolved mystery with regards to the true identity of King Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz of Manipur and his genealogical parents. Some of the stanzas of the ballad are given below with free translation:

*“Athi thranlui-o kei ta te-a.*

*Kadanna-o Saamthar ta kadangna, lesip zaiya,*

*Lesip neimalummae kadangngai, dictak kadand nga-o*

*Shorha ta kadangna peshei ammae...”*

*‘Thainu Saamsang ngo tuiraka tanye –ye*

*Adid tul pha-ainge adid tul pha-ainge*

*Kori wanshang shiye, tiye,*

*Thainu saamsang ngo tuiruka tanye,*

*Chinrui-o Thaowon no o-ye,*

*Thaowon no lupa shum, kon anui shum, kon aroi hui no o-ye*

*Thaowon no taineren, rei leibe yui-o, teye thaowon no...*

*Korpa mayang wanchei-o athi thranlui-o kei tati-a,*

*Korpa mayang wanchei khallo athi thranno lui-o,*

*Ahring thlanlui-o kei tati-a...”*

[The meaning of the ballad is that, Chungthang knew Shorha (Thaowon Samtharnu) the girl with the beautiful hair very well as they had lived together (serving his marriage labour) for few years and there is nothing to doubt his love for her. The second stanza says, his lover (Shorha) was captured by the Meitei (*wanchei*) king because the soldiers had found

her long beautiful hair inside a big fish stomach that swallowed it. So, people tells that when the king learned about her long beautiful hair that filled a brass bowl (*Kori wanshang shiye tiye*) up to the brim, he proclaimed that he had found a true wife. He was helpless in the tussled because the king had overpowered him with his soldiers. The third stanza laments that his relationship with Thaowon was incomplete and should have been earlier tied their bonds of love with the gold and silver gongs, so that, no one could break between them, and also by applying the fragrance of their favourite flower on each other as a symbol of their true love. Then, the fourth stanza emphases about his first meeting at Kakwa market (on Indo-Myanmar road near Imphal) after she was captured, where he expressed his love asking her to come back to him, and both can do away with the child of the black foreigner Meitei the brass or copper man (*korpa mayang wanchei*) which she was carrying in her stomach. In spite of his earnest request she refused the idea for certain reason but she left the place after giving him a bundle of tobacco leaves.<sup>15</sup> The fifth stanza points that no one knows Shorha or Thaowon better than he does because the small scar (*pasek*) on her left breast (*nachung*) was the mark left by him when he fondle her when they lived together.

In this way, Chungthang's ballad or lamentation song for his lover Shorha or Thaowon goes on which is substantiated by the folktale "Thaowon Saamtharnu" or "Shorha". According to the folktale, Shorha bore a son and her father (grandfather of the boy) visited his daughter on her child's naming ceremony day with the *Awa-ampi* (the traditional Chothe shawl) as part of their custom and named the child "Waireng". After the event, she immediately called back her father and secretly disclosed about the serious primogeniture issues and the conspiracy of the decree in the palace to kill all the male children born by any other queens other than the Head queen. Soon, her father secretly took away her son to his ancestry village in western region and lived among them but after four-five years her father brought back her son to the palace so that the mother and son acknowledge their biological relationship. But from that day onwards she refused to let the boy and her father go back to the village. Therefore, Thaowon found work for her father as a gardener in the palace garden so that she can be with her son every day, though both returned to their village every evening. Neilut said soon this relationship was found out by the Head queen and she secretly attempted to kill the boy. But Thaowon was informed by her loyal servants about the plot and she immediately informed her father who escaped with

the boy to a group of his relatives far in the north considered to be the Thangal-Liangmei tribe of Manipur. It is said even after many years the Head queen did not bear any son and the king (probably Charairongpa) was desperate for a son to succeed him who one day declared before all his wives in the court that if any of his wives concealed a male child to bring him out so that he could appoint him as his heir. On the basis of the king's assurance Thaowon presented the king her son Waireng, who took the boy on his lap and announced him as his successor. Neilut said according to the folktale this very act of the king was strongly objected by the high priests and the royal family members of Meitei. Henceforth, from that day onward the boy Waireng became popularly known as "Pamheide" or "Pamheiba" meaning, 'forbidden to embrace or hold onto one's lap' in Meitei because he was considered to be the illegitimate child of Shanti Das Goswami (*Korpa mayang wanchei*).<sup>16</sup> The core element of this folktale is that a beautiful Chothe lady Shorha or Thaowon Samtharnu who was already engaged to a Chothe man was forcefully captured by the Meitei king who made her one of his queens, and later bore a son and subsequently became a great king of Manipur. The latter part of the story is obscured with confusion but seems to exist among the Meitei and some are found in the literature.

(Source: Mk. Neilut of Old-Wangparal)

**Some Common Folktales of Chothe are given below:**

1. The Python and the *Bakton*
2. The Last Day of the Python
3. The Python and the Thatch Story
4. *Api Shumdornu*: The Widow with the Magic Gong
5. Pu Kinjangtepa And the Forest Gods
6. *Lungkang*: Neibui and the Demigod Rocks
7. The Legend of Shantheihoi and Yangngeir (Lungtun Maythanu)
8. *Thaowon Saamthanu*: The Lady with Beautiful Hair
9. *Loiyang*: The Shining Beam
10. The Legend of *Lungshun Tanna*: Stone Cutting (See Pic.58)
11. *Rengchangnu*: The Cicada Girl
12. Pidonnu: The Chothe Lady and Chingkhei the Moirang King <sup>17</sup>

13. The Love Story of Hoilil and Leipu
14. *Langchong Thanni*: The Farewell song of Langchong
15. Thamchang (Panigrahi) and his Magic
16. The Story of Runkungpu and Rangshaipu: The Magic Competition
17. *Asha Changnu*: The Lady who Transformed into an Animal
18. *Malanu- Ata Sari*: Malanu and the Seven Brothers
19. The Dog and the Eclipse Story (See In Biman K.Das Gupta. 1985)
20. Ramudol: The Story of a Young Man and the Evil Crow
21. Waireng Jurnu and Toudonnu, the Witch
22. The Fairy Tale of Jonthei and Lengleng
23. Tangkim Yulung and his Talisman
24. Mushanpa Yulung: The Notorious Magician
25. Ngente Leikintha or Lukhrabi Yumpham of Leimatak
26. *Kolihou*: The Naughty Twins
27. *Sampum*: The Snatching of Ahu Sampum Village
28. *Siki Anatee*: The Story of Small Coins

### **7.5.ii Folksongs**

In Chothe folksongs or songs are called as, “la or laa”. Folksongs are also considered a very important source of the cultural elements in socio-linguistic and cultural studies. It has great significance as it substantiates various problematic issues when dealing with the past culture. The folksongs reveal the folk lifestyle, folk ways, folk culture, and even suggests origin, migration of a tribe and places of war and battle. However, the predicament about Chothe folksongs is that now only few people, especially the elders, know how to sing them since most of the youth have been influenced by modern western and Hindi songs. Moreover, as the population of the indigenous people of the world is shrinking every day recording of their folklore i.e. folktales, folksongs and various other folk traditions becomes essential because of their significance in the socio-religious implication.

Birendranath Datta has broadly divided indigenous folksongs into six (with sub-categories) as; (i) Songs of Religious and Devotional Content, (ii) Songs of Ceremonies And Festivals, (iii) Songs of Love And Yearning: The Enduring Passion, (iv) Lullabies, Nursery

Thymes and Children's Game-Songs, Songs of Jest and Humour, (V) Ballads and Other Narrative Songs, and (Vi) Miscellaneous Material (1994: 50).

Similarly, the Chothe folksongs may be broadly divided into three categories and sub-categorised as viz.; (1) Devotional or Spiritual Songs, (2) Festival or Ceremonial Songs, (I) Seasonal or Harvest Songs, (Ii) Funeral Songs, and (3) Secular Songs; Comprises of (I) Lyrical and Ballad Songs and (Ii) Love Songs, both Traditional and Modern. Most of the folksongs reveal their historical events and cultural lifestyle as some are dedicated in memory of their great leaders, friends or love stories, with deep underlying meanings. But unfortunately many of the Chothe are now unable to understand and fully translate the deep meanings of such traditional songs even if they can somehow sing, which is another sad story. The decline for the taste of folk music is partly because of the influence of Christianity, modernity and westernisation. The impact of decline is not felt only by Chothe but found even among minority tribes like the Anal, Lamkang, Chiru, Tarao, Moyon, Monshang, Maring, Kom, including big tribes like Tangkhul, Kuki and Mizo too.

Below are some of the selected folksongs. All the folksongs are categorized under various themes and especially, sung during the festival days or during specific ceremonial occasion.

**(A) Some Common Types of Chothe Festival and Ceremonial Songs are:-**

1. *Innampei or Jarr rin la* - residential or post-harvest festival song celebrated in the month of Phairen-Lamta, Jan – Feb.
2. *Airokuk la* - song of rooster head, sung on the fifth day of the *Innampei rin* festival.
3. *Lathui la* or *Alam tulsukna la* - courtyard song, a song sung when the boys and girls dance during the *Innamepei rin*.
4. *Aho-ralthui la athouna* - war preparation and campaign song.
5. *Shang phou la* - a song about drying the rice in the sun after harvest.
6. *Meeboh la* - clan or lineage song composed in memory of the heads, songs of events.
7. *Hungchong la* or *phei la* - song of drum jumping the secular meaning is mat or gossip song, sung only the womenfolk during leisure.
8. *Sikang la* - herd dragging song, sung after the completion of each stage or section of the festive session in reference to the youths which is divided into three types.

9. *Achui la* or *Tuituk rin* or *Chultuk* or *Yangpal rin la* - song of yeast festival or festival of water discovery.
10. *Tui-ron la* - river flowing song, sung at the river bank just after performing the rite.
11. *Waiwa la* - bright song, sung on the way to a festive place after the river rite in three stations dancing.
12. *Siroh-chouna la* or *Reng la* or *Phomkalna la* - song of animal's burning, or king's song or coronation song.
13. *Aihung thangna la* - song of rooster's crow in the morning that signifies the dawn.
14. *Shanghong rin la* / *Shang la* - pre-harvest song when the grains are filling their ears.
15. *Chothepea boithi la* / *Athi la* - funeral songs, sung after the burial so that the dead body may decay soon and the soul may rest in peace.

**For example:**

**(1/i) *Inn-namepei rin athouna la*:** The first part of *Inn-nampepe rin* song celebrated in the month of February (*Chothe gee Khunung Esei (CKE)*, page: 11)

*Anachamma ro pungpreyodo*  
*Lamcharo o: o: anchamma siktuirera sera a:*  
*Anchama ro pungpreyodo*  
*Lamcharo o: o: aae' hungproua ae:*  
*Sera: aa: ase aya.*

(This song speaks about the close relationship between men and the swallows. It says that the swallow (*hungprou*) always lives wherever human being lived, and therefore, it build its nest in such houses unlike other birds and keep them company.

**(1/ii) *Inn-nampepe rin ashuna la*:** The closing song of *Inn-nampepe* festival (*CKE*, page 24, song no.73)

*Kronso omni sukki e – e:*  
*Foirong kidanno o: o:*  
*Dammo thangtanna choirowe/*  
*Damnu kithang talle e – e:*  
*Kishi laiyeta a, aa:*

*Thangtingi e kuompire choiro o-we-*  
*Ase-e, ya-*

(The song signifies that since there was no more wine left except the last wine pot that is preparing now so the festivity should be over by then. It says the sun has risen know that the wine pot that is boiling is the last one. Damnu, the girl from the area had brought it. She ran and even brought what he had left secretly at a corner too...).

**(2/i) Achui la Athouna:** First song of *Achui rin* or yeast festival sung inside the house celebrated in September (*Chothe Khunung Esei. CKE, page: 93, song No.01*)

*Aniyok ke-a- yoke a: a*  
*Lengkuwai sa – rongnge!*  
*Lengkuwai -se rongnge.*  
*Tare kareng-ngo u-wa-*  
*Lamtangnge animok se a;*  
*Nimokse e; e'*  
*Sakting e: dangnga nimokse-e.*  
*Lengku wai se serong-nge e; e;*  
*Korowai rasungta; re;*  
*He- hoiya, ho hoiya.*

(This reflects how the youth began to prepare yeast for fermentation of the wine for the forthcoming festival, as yeast is an important ingredient for the wine. 'Pound the grains hard and sieve it well with the winnows. It is for our king, whom we adore and honour. People from different direction will come and visit him to taste his wine. So, it is our credit to give them our best wine, and the yeast seems to be catalysing fast').

**(3) Tamparai la:** Women/girl's playful song (see also *CKE. Page: 65. song no.1*). Since, the songs are often sung in two groups or parties 'S' stands for *ashai*, the Singer, while 'R' stands to *ashang*, the respondent.

*Ashai (S): Tamparaiyo – arokko o: a-, Nashak paye a, yaiyoi a liya,*  
*Ashang (R): Nashak paiye a yaiyoi a: a:, Lam leng - puna langlo a: a liya/*  
*S: Tamparaitang theiroupao leng lengmo/, Hoiraimeliya oina/*

- R: *Lengchungnu lawangnu leibu yuchu, Leibu range liya oina.*
- S: *Thingpe yungnge thuiya lamdai panne/ Chinghung laiying pereiyoy/*
- R: *Thingpe yungnge thuiya lamdai shanne, Shanarai ying pereiyoy/*
- S: *Shimakeroi nommo o: o:, Shiyashukle wairo e/*
- R: *Shiyashukle wairo e/, Liya oina - shiya taiyo*
- S: *Nachouwe-e tonsham bouwa, Choumoe liya oina*
- R: *Shimataiya nommo o: o:, Theiyai hungle wairo e: /*
- S: *Shimataiyoy nachou owe e tonsham, Bouwa chouma e: /*
- R: *Shimakeroi nommo o: o:, Shorashukle wairo e/*
- S: *Shima taiyoy nachou we e tonsham, Bouwa chouma e/*
- R: *Shimakeroi nommo theihu, Waiye wairo e/*
- S: *Shim taiyoy nachou owe e tonsham, Bouwa chouma e/*
- R: *Shimakeroi nommo o, Shumni shukle wairo e/*

(This is one of the most common folksongs especially sung by the women folk in praise of the Almighty God saying that, the Almighty God is the greatest God of all. He is the creator of all living beings and there is no other god as powerful as Him. And among all His creations human being is His best creation that is why, all the other creatures are submissive to Mankind. As the sun disappears after the day, the moon reappears again at night and shines on them such is the wonder of His creation for mankind).

### **(3) Meeboh la (Commemoration Song of their Ancestors or Clans/ Lineage Heads)**

This *Meebo la* (naming song) or *Inn-ku la* (lineage song) is a collection of clan and lineage songs which are divided into two parts: first is the main clan song known as 'tul-la', while the second is the lineage song called 'inn la' also called 'Yaifuna la', which I have omitted. But the general summary of these songs is that the songs are sung in praise of their forefathers for the credibility of their achievements by adducing their names and the work they have done. The second part or the subordinate song is dedicated to current lineage Head credited for their ability to inspire and motivate his own group of people and fulfilling all the necessary duties as their heads. But the lineage songs somehow differ from region to region since the community split from the western region many hundreds of years ago. The

forefathers who bore the clan's names (*Meebo-la*) and the current lineage heads of the Lamlanghupi village are given in accordance below:

1. *Khiyang (Hiyang) Hulpu-gei la and Khiyang inn-la = [Bunghong (Thambalchao)]*
2. *Yuhlung-gei tul-la and Yulhung inn-la = [Chaotloi (Aramshing)]*
3. *Thao-gei tul-la and Thao-gei inn-la = [Thapun (Tonjao)]*
4. *Mareem-gei tul-la and Rimphungchung inn-la = [Thaidam (Chungbujei-Pilling)]*
5. *Makan-gei la and Makan-gei inn-la = [Tollei (Mareem) lungchan]*
6. *Parpa-gei tul-la and Parpa-gei inn-la = [(Ngaihong /not available)]*
7. *Runkung-gei tul-la and Runkung inn-la = [(not available)]*

**(B) Some Common Secular Songs are:-**

1. *Hurpi sukna la-* (cave song, dedicated to how they come out of the cave)
2. *Ahu-tui yongna la* - (a song in search of settlement)
3. *In sakna la* - (song of house construction, sung at the time of house construction)
4. *Lou wat la* - (harvest or mowing song)
5. *Ajun la* - (love songs, sung like the Muslim qawwali songs)
6. *Horam la* or *nungak-luther lah* - (dance song of the girls and boys)
7. *Awa la* - (bird song, sung during the houpalka festival)
8. *Hring la* - (dusk song, sung at the time of dusk)
9. *Hawar la* - (morning's song)
10. *Rall la* - (war songs)
11. *Hung choi la* - (jhum song, sung by taking drums in the field as they feast)
12. *Laou thouna la* - (plantation song)
13. *Nunpinu phom thouna* or *Bungte la* - (the lifting of the rock)
14. *Adit chomna la* - (a love song of gladness)
15. *Kadir junpa la* - (playful or puzzle song)
16. *Bultrumna la* - (rolled rice song)
17. *Kumjai rin la* - (half yearly festive song)
18. *Horang la* - (invoking love songs)
19. *Hloumupi/ ramu awa la* - (bird songs)
20. *Ashei / selrung maingokna la* - (playful songs).

For example: ***Hurpi Sukna La (A Song of Cave Comming Out)***

*Ashai (S): "Ahurra katho-ah hurpi katho-ah,  
hurpi taital lomara chingei yo kanai cheti ae,  
Ashang (R): Hurpi taitel loma range, nahrat koiha cheti ae,  
Karuipa oh, inhong ronro sonayai cheti, ae.  
S: Rasuko, rasuko, lungite tul rasuko,  
R: Lungdite tul rasuko suko lajinge cheti ae..."*

(They dug a hole inside the cave of the hill with their friends. They dug the hole with their friends when they were strong and healthy; they asked even the rocks to move out from their places, so that they could get out of the cave and to be on the surface of the earth ...).

## **7.6 Chothe Traditional Attire**

Many early British administratives/ anthropologists and scholars have remarked about colourful costumes of different tribes of North-east India. McCulloch remarks about some Manipur tribes that, "in making cloth, the Chote, Pooroom, Aimole, Murring, and some of the Tangkool tribes surpass all the rest" (1859: 74). This indicates that the Chothe also excelled in making clothes compared to some other communities and there is no doubt that they still have a variety of colourful clothes which are categorised into male and female according to the motifs and designs called "aam". Some of the motifs are connected with myths and legends. According to Mrs. H. Thambalhoi each motif is credited to particular woman for her design. On the basis of their genealogical myth the first girl who designed the main traditional shawl *ava-aampi* (mother of all bright motifs) is assumed to be Chongnginluh Chongnginchong the youngest daughter of Kachokte and Thanidam which is considered to be the pattern of Dragon-python God. However, the motifs of *Choutana* and *Chouchun aam* are credited to the two sisters; Api Tuisapi Yuhlung and Api Tuithang Yuhlung. The womenfolk believe that perhaps if one forgets the motif of any particular shawl while weaving one is asked to conjure and seriously recite their names lyrically several times until one is inspired and able to think of the shawl or sarong's (*nik*) motif.

The men's shawl comprises (i) *Ava-aampi*, (ii) *Choutana aam*, (iii) *Chouchun aam* (e) *Leirum-tungkap* (up & down), (v) *Pulpur-lamhor*, (h) *Purum-pal*, (vii) *Ralngam bushun*, (viii) *Reng-aam* (ix) *Thalrungir* and (x) *Uikechun*. Besides the shawl, men's scarf or head gear (*luje*) are; (i) *Chouchun lujе* (ii) *Reng-aam lujе* (see Pic.96).

The women's sarong or longyi (*nik*) comprises; (i) *Achoi-am*, (ii) *Ahong punbil*, (iii) *Ahong punshan*, (iv) *Amu shampa*, (v) *Angouyam*, (vi) *Athi punbi* (vii) *Ekuk punbil*, (vii) *Hrunleh*, (viii) *Khentara*, (ix) *Ngouyam*, (x) *Shandolik*, (xi) *Shandorol*, (xii) *Shipir-sipip* and (xiii) *Tunkap nek* (see Pic.98). There are only two kinds of scarves with specific motifs for girls, viz.; (i) *Hrunleh* and (ii) *Tangthum*, while the rest are modified motifs.

All these indigenous attires are weaved by Chothe womenfolk in their simple Indonesia tension loom. The excellent quality, fineness and the pattern of designs of some of these even surpass the modern machine made garments of today. They say that in earlier days, cotton was grown abundantly in their own jhum and courtyards, so plucking, yarning, spinning and weaving are considered hobbies for the young girls and womenfolk. For dyeing the yarn or cloth they use certain kinds of leaves, seeds and barks obtained from different kinds of plants and creepers. The above statement is similarly described by T.C. Das that the Chothe (Purum) indigenous garments "varies more extensively in its design, ornamentation and colour... They are entirely manufactured by the Purum women on their simple looms. Even the yarns for these fabrics are spun by the women folk from cotton grown in their own jhum. The Purum are therefore completely independent so far as their indigenous dress is concerned" (1945: 98). On the contrary, since they no longer plant cotton anymore they now depend for yarn of cotton and wool from the market. The contrasting types of attire in olden days between the Meitei and the hills people was remark by Sir James Johnstones that the Manipuri used snow-white garment by men, and the parti-coloured clothes of the hill-men are being very picturesque (1971: 134).

There are many stories which say that the later kings of Manipur made a decree to various hill tribes to supply them with different types of cloth and other essential materials as tributes and in return they were given salt and sometimes exempted from certain kinds of taxes. However, according to the Chothe oral history when *Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa* (*Meingai*) became the Manipur's king his maternal grandfather Surou (Tarang or Nungkarakpa) always took along with him something like clothes, fat or wax for lighting,

jute ropes, baskets, etc. whenever he visited his grandson Thangmei and daughter Daishin near Imphal. This tradition of giving gifts or exchange of goods was imposed as tribute by the later kings to the hill people. This imposition was denied by Chothe and other hill tribes until and unless the rulers had any historical (ancestor), matrimonial or political connections with them. According to Leikhamchou (89/M) of Tampakhu, the Chothe are said to have helped the Meitei (Poirei) kings whenever need arose from the earliest period till Maharaj Chandrakriti (1850-86) because they considered the Meitei as the grandchildren, being the descendants of Thangmei Pakhangpa the first historical king of Manipur. Various historical accounts like *Cheitharon Kumpaba* and in McCulloch's, *Accounts of the valley of Manipur* also mentions such that the Meitei kings received boats and clothes from Chothe (see Parratt, 2005: 64, 98, 110 and 136; 1887: 64). In the Chothe folktale *Asha Changnu*, it is also mentions how a Chothe boat was mysteriously lost in the Loktak Lake that was given to the Meitei king.

The Chothe are now being classified as a *very small tribe* with a low population which is already under different kinds of socio-cultural threats as “endangered tribe” especially by linguistic department. For example, the use of their indigenous religion, language, customs and motif of their beautiful attire is declining each day. Mrs. Mk. Damin (37) president of the ‘*Chothe Women's Association*’ (*CWA*) and Mrs. H. Hoinu (former president) are against the elder's committee for their unconcern in the socio-cultural issues. Accordingly their grievance is the averring of their traditional shawl's motif by other tribes. The *leirum tongkap* one of the traditional cloth use in early days as king's carpet is now commonly used by the Meitei as theirs, while the *ava aampi* motif is said to have been claimed by the Tarao tribe as their own [see Pic.96 (5)].

## **7.7 Chothe Dance**

Dance is another form of cultural expression. The Chothe have varieties of dance forms that have their own socio-religious meanings in the nature of the dances. T.C. Das also remarks that the Chothe dance appears dormant or inactive, very relaxed like a limping man (1945: 270). Although the Chothe war dance (*chamtun lam*) is very passive in nature it seems to carry a deep symbolic meaning of a victorious war dance where the tired and even the wounded soldiers dance in circle in jubilation with their hilt sword and spear lifted high

with their hands. But now the dance appears to be just a mere symbolic expression of their past achievements and tradition as it lacks enthusiasm. The lack of enthusiasm is believed to be the decline in their population caused by natural calamities and the consecutive plagues in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that killed thousands of them, leaving just few of them to survive.

The other type of dance form commonly called “Aire kung lam” (the peacock’s dance). This dance is like an elicitation or provoking dance of a boy who invites a girl to join him in the dance. It imitates the dance of a bird like the peacock or crane seeking female attention in a fun loving manner by using his sense of humour in the form of dance. The boy bends his body and swings his hands up and down like the wings of the peacock in accordance to the rhythm of the drum and song eliciting the girl to join him. They say in the time before electricity and other modern lightings, they used thatch stalk (*ching-nang/lang*) as torch and danced around a bonfire in a circular motion especially during the full- moon. Common folkdances from the above are; the *Aire kung lam*, *Sire lam*, *Najui lam* and the *Siki lam* because it was often performed in feasts or social or cultural programmes individually or in groups excepting festivals. Some of these dances like *Aire kung*, *Sire lam* are similar with the dance of Kuki-Chin-Mizo speaking groups.

The dancing dresses for men are the traditional headgear (*Luje*), a peacock’s feather (*I-chang*) for the head, a decorated dancing staff / sword (*chamtun*), a black skirt (*deir*), and a traditional shawl for all men. But now the Lamlanghupi use a white dhoti instead of black skirt probably borrowed from the Meitei (Hindu) in the later centuries, and the white shirt and vest-coat are the modern additions. The women’s costume comprises of the decorated headgear (*leining*), traditional sarong (*nik*) and waist strap (*kangshet*), bangles (*koi*), earrings (*leilum*), etc. The womens blouse (*linglut*) is the modern supplement. Besides the festival, many Chothe wears their traditional attires in any of their social and cultural programmes. Some of indigenous dance forms are:-

1. *Chamtun lam* (sword or victory dance, performed in the *Innampei rin* festival)
2. *Fho lam* or *fho-parakpa* (shield dance or warrior shield defence)
3. *Hungchong lam* (drum dance, in the *Theilhong* feast of merit or coronation)
4. *Siki lam* (mithun horn dance, during the *Shanghong* festival)
5. *Najui lam* (women folk dance, in *bampui* or *Innampei rin* festival)
6. *Sire* or *Leikoi lam* (hand twisting dance, another hand twisting dance without sword)

7. *Ruipi lam* (python dance, a criss-cross circular group dance of the *Innampei rin*)
8. *Aire kung lam* (Peacocks' dance, festival of *Innampei rin*)

### **7.8 Musical Instruments of Chothe**

The Chothe musical instruments used in festivals and feasts celebrations are limited to (1) Drum (*Hung*), (2) Gong (*Shum*), (3) Mithun Horn (*Siki*), (4) Cymbal (*Dai*), (5) Bagpipe (*Rotcham*), (6) Flute (*Huisem*), (7) Bamboo Mouth Piece (*Changchou*), and (8) Violin or Sarinda (*Pena*), (see Pic.94). According to Y. Maipak, in olden days they fixed an auspicious day whenever they wishes to go deep into the forest to cut a tree-trunk for make a new drum. They also seek divination and performed a simple rite along with a special rope meant for dragging the tree trunk to the village before starting a journey. If the omen is good and favourable they go ahead with the plan or mission but if the omen is bad they cancel and fix another auspicious day. In olden days such was the seriousness of Chothe in making a drum. Traditionally, it is forbidden and still a taboo for the followers of Chothe indigenous faith to beat the village drum on ordinary days without the approval of the village chief or council of members. The village drums are removed from the safe keeping and only after performing a simple ritual the drums may be used. The reasons according to them are that various drum beats would carry different symbolic meanings in the past, either to warn the villagers of a sudden war or a surprise attack by the enemy or prepare for the war or give hints to the neighbouring village about attacks, etc. The gong (*shum*) is also another very important musical instrument that has many utilities. It is used as a warning bell at the time when a villager dies or as a bell at the time of war to let people escape; besides as a very valuable bride-price or dowry's object. Most of their indigenous musical instruments are no longer used these days as they are being replaced by modern drums and guitars.<sup>18</sup>

### **7.9 Indigenous Games and Sports**

The Chothe being an indigenous tribe have different types of indigenous games and sports which have become less common because of the influences of modern games and sports. According to the Chothe elders Thambaljao, Maipak, Hongpa, Tomalsing, Bukungsing, Gulapsing, and Jatrasing says traditionally their indigenous games such as; *arung junpa* or *Tanghung lungthong* (shot-put throw), *Shuk* or *shei junpa* (javelin or spear

throw), and *ruikai* (Tug-of-war) are normally organised on the last day of the *Achui rin* festival or on the first Sunday after the festival. But games such as *tabun* (wrestling) and *zuchom lakpa* (snatching the wine pot from a pole) are held after the *Innampei rin* festival at the *laman* (open space) or deities' site. The *Zuhom lakpa* is also an enthusiastic and entertaining sport as the youth compete amongst themselves in snatching the *zuhom* (wine in the gourd/bottle) that is tied at the top of a bamboo pole of about 20-25 ft high. It seems that sometimes the wine bottle is replaced with a fowl and therefore anyone who managed to climb and grab the wine bottle or fowl is acknowledged as the winner of the games (see also, T.C Das 1945: 191).

The two very special village stones are known as *Tanghung lungthong* meaning, 'youth's shot-put stone' which is kept with the village chief (see Pic.15). The bigger stone is considered for the boys while the smaller one for girls. It is said that if any youth manage to lift up the stone on his shoulder and throw it a maximum distance or is able to carry the stone around the village is acknowledged as the strongest youth (boy/girl) of the year. However, many of the villagers believe that if any one dares challenge that he can lift the bigger *Tanghung lungthong* stone easily the stone mysteriously becomes very heavy before he ever gives it a try and the person usually faces defeats. The Chothe believe that the stone has a sort of magical power and one should not simply make challenges. But some of the youth's comment that the difficulty is because the stone is round in shape and it does not have a proper gripping place on it. Similarly, *Shuk* or the pastel about 6-7 ft in length is used as a javelin spear to prove one's strength among the youths. *Ruikai* or tug-of-war is also said to be a common game played among groups especially after the grand *Achui rin* festival. Hunting (*sataipa*) was one of the most interesting indigenous games of the boys organised especially on Thursday morning during the *Achui rin* festival but since, there are no more forests or wild animals around the village (Lamlanghupi), a pig is released instead and the youth runs and catches it to signify the tradition of hunting. As observed it appears to be one of the most exciting and thrilling sports of the Chothe as the whole village echoes with shouts from every direction. The youth who manages to catch hold of the pig is given the title as the best hunter of the year with a bottle of wine but latter the animal is killed for consumption. Common Chothe indigenous games and sports are:

1. *Arung junpa or Tanghung lungthong* (Shot put or stone throw)
2. *Shuk and Shei junpa* (Javelin or spear throw)
3. *Ruikai or Luikai* (Tug-of-war)
4. *Sataipa or Ok manpa* (Hunting or pig catching)
5. *Tabun* (Wrestling)
6. *Zuchom lakpa* (Snatching of wine bottle)
7. *Chongtak lak* (Long jump)
8. *Atanchom* (High jump)
9. *Lamchel* (Race)

Due to the introduction of modern games like football, volley ball, basket ball, and cricket, many of the indigenous games and sports have become less popular among the Chothe youth. Traditional games such as *Tanghung lungthong junpa* (shot-put throw), *Shuk* (indigenous piston for pounding the rice) or *shei junpa* (javelin throw), and *sataipa* or *ok-manpa* (hunting) are no longer played. Often in the intra-village or inter-village or community games and sports competition or even in the *Students Annual Sports Meet* modern games are preferred to the indigenous games.

#### **7.10 Indigenous Herbal Medicines**

The significance of incorporating this subject here is that the village priest (*theimpu*) or local medicine man plays an important role in healing and curing sick patients with different kinds of herbs and shrubs which often involves the use of his magical charms in preparation of such medicines or sometimes if required even a simple rite or ritual might be performed. He uses varieties of herbs, plants, and even inanimate objects like animal bones, thunder-bolt stones, etc., in the treatment and preparation of various types of medicines for numerous ailments and diseases. They also mention numerous types of plants, herbs, shrubs, leaves, barks, twigs, creepers and climbers in making various medicines but to identify and provide the scientific names would require separate and independent research. The fee for the treatment of the sick patient differs from the type of the illness and disease, and also on the nature of their relationship. The priest does not share the types of composition or ingredients used in preparing their medicines as they consider it a secret or a gift from their

god. Note, in most of the medicine prepared they claim to spell their magical charms according to the nature of the sickness and sometimes divination may also be consulted before the sick patient takes any kind of medicine. These village priests or medicine men are sometimes like wizards who are skilful in the art of magic.

The Chothe indigenous priests or the local medicine men (*theimpu*) treat and heal or cure sick patients with different types of diseases by using various animate and inanimate objects. They say that in early days the Chothe village priests used twelve (12) different *jai* or *yai* (talisman) apart from various herbs and inanimate objects in the treatment and preparation of medicines for the sick patients (Khiyang1985:23). The *jai* or *yai* refers to certain kind of talismanic objects that has certain magical powers to grant whatever wish is asked for. The priest initially consults a divination with the *jai* through a sorcerer and diagnoses the symptom of the sick patient, whether it is a natural cause or an evil spirit or the act of witchcraft on this basis, rites and rituals may be performed if required or only medicines may be taken accordingly.

The indigenous village priests or local medicine men who are well-known in the region for their magical skills and healing powers before the advent of Christianity are now being replaced by the modern Christian priests or pastors or reverends and revivalists where some of them are popularly known as “Christian visionaries” or “healers”. Such Christian visionaries or healers are gaining momentum nowadays in curing and healing the sick patients in the North-eastern region of India. From the functionalist perspective the two types of priests i.e. the indigenous village priest or local medicine man (*theimpu*) and the modern Christian pastor or visionary are similar in many ways. First, both are religious men by profession, who perform similar religious functions and activities. Secondly, both consider the evil spirits to be the cause of all kinds of sickness or problems in life. Thirdly, their healing methods are also similar as both emphasise on casting or dispelling the evil spirits by prayers or rites. But some of the differences between the two priests are both address their God differently, the pastor or Reverend or visionary or healer often conducts mass prayers openly in public, while the indigenous priest (*theimpu*) often performs his rites secretly as magic is involved but they also sometimes perform them openly. However, the basic functions and objectives of these two types of religious men are similar in principle, as

their objective is to protect, heal or cure the sick or guide the weak people as power are given to them to do so in different ways.

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### *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> Th. Nabadip expired in 2008 leaving his wife and three daughters. Before he died he was a *Tang-ngarinta* member who succeeded his late father as the village priest on the basis of his socio-political position and status.

<sup>2</sup> This *Langkum* is hung on the left, north side of the veranda and the scroll sticks measures about half feet (six inches) in length. This *Langkum* is the symbolic representation of the cache of ancient days secretly kept where *think*, the scroll sticks represent the political members. On the other hand, these scroll sticks are like sceptre staffs of the ancient days that symbolised the power, authority and position which is similar like a badge or the Identity Card of an individual of modern days.

<sup>3</sup> *Leizu*: It is the first offering rite performed with *leizu* (country liquor/ wine) instead of *zutin* (fermented rice beer) as it is forbidden to perform with it before this part of the ceremony.

<sup>4</sup> *Sawai zu*: It is the first part of the session where *sawai-zu* (fermented husk rice beer) is first used for the ritualistic offering instead of *zutin* (fermented rice beer).

<sup>5</sup> *Youth Initiation*: On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2006 two youths; Mr. Hiyang Roshan (20 years old) son of H. Yaima and Miss. Mareem Thanem (16 years old) daughter of M. Kundo are initiated as a member youth. Four-five of the senior members of the youth in their full traditional attires escorted H. Roshan from his house to the festive place for the initiation ceremony, where some help him carry the rooster, the basket containing wine (*leizu*) bottle and spices. Inside the festive house Roshan sat in the northern side opposite the host of the house (Th. Jatrasing), the host performed the offertory rite *tongkaipa* with Roshan's *leizu*, after which Roshan performed the *thoukeipa* act i.e. touching the ground with his closed fist. Then, he was asked to drink the wine (*leizu*) placed before him in one gulp, after which he took the oath before the council's members by repeating after one of the experts. Then he performed the *thoukeipa* act again and leaves his place. The next step is the chicken's leg divination or *I-ke jan anpa* performed by *Pakhanglakpa* the senior most *Tang-ngarinta* member. For this *Pakhanglakpa* H. Yaima (his father) strangled the rooster by the throat and inspects the overlapping of its leg, who confirmed the death by pulling its tail. The belief is that if the chicken's right leg overlapped the left it is a good omen, but if it is the opposite it is consider a bad sign. Unfortunately, Mr. Roshan's chicken had the left leg overlapped the right but whatever their believed may be such sign are not taken seriously anymore as it often happens. As part of the custom the chicken was prepared according to the *saram-ngaram* where only the elders' relishes it. The girl initiation (*Nungak-manpa*) ceremony is rather simple.

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The host just made the offertory *tongkaipa* prayer in her name (M. Thanem) with her *leizu* and followed by *zurum*. However, the bottle of *Leizu* and *thakna* (tobacco leaves) should be brought in a basket by the youth from her parents' house. Thus, the initiation ceremony was completed in a very simple ceremony, and henceforth, Roshan and Thanem are inducted as full-fledge members of the youth and abide their rules and regulation.

<sup>6</sup> *Folklores*: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aarne-Thompson\\_classification\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aarne-Thompson_classification_system). Accessed on: 7/7/2010

<sup>7</sup> *Types of folklores by David Emery*: [http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/reference/tp/types\\_of\\_folklore.htm](http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/reference/tp/types_of_folklore.htm). Accessed on 6/7/2010

<sup>8</sup> *What is a folktale*: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-folktale.htm>. Accessed on :7/7/2010)

<sup>9</sup> *AT Types of Folktales* : <http://oaks.nvg.org/folktale-types.html> , Accessed on: 7/7/2010

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> It is part of the Chothe tradition for relatives, midwives and grandmothers to attend to any woman at the time of parturition or child birth and give nutritious gift like chicken, fish, egg, milk, banana, etc. from next day onwards for the woman to regain her strength fast from excessive lost of blood.

<sup>12</sup> It is also connected with a superstition that prohibits a married couple to share their inner most secrets by lying together on the bed. The belief is that the husband will not survive long or their happy relationship did not last. The villagers of Khongkhang said that the stones seem to possess certain magical power as it used to misguide the guide who came to see. The circumference of the largest stones is said to be about (10x8) sq ft and still exist in the same spot. The dry season between January-March is considered to be the best time to visit the area but I was unfortunate to go and see for myself because the season was not conducive during my visits.

<sup>13</sup> *Thaowon Saamtharnu or Shorha or Nungthil Chaibi*: Nungthil Chaibi is believed to be the biological mother of King Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz of Manipur, but because of controversy surrounding the real identity of the Pamheiba's father there are different versions about it, which the people of Manipur, in spite of knowing the truth kept it as secret for fear of defamation and repercussion to the lineage and clan. Based on various primary and secondary sources it is evident that Shorha or Thaowon Saamtharnu a Chothe lady with beautiful hair is identified as "Nungthil Chaibi" meaning 'a lady of modest afternoon', named after her informal marriage to the Meitei king, who is believed to be the biological mother of King Waireng or Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz, and also believed to be the illegitimate son of Goswami. According to M.T. Laiba, "Nungthil Chaibi was a Mareem

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Ningol, the daughter of Chothe Marim's chief and was the former wife of King Chairairongba (1697-1709) who had no son and daughter, but had a secret son of Bishnu Goswami and Chaibi (i.e. Pamheiba)" (1992: 61). Lt. Col. H. Bhuban Singh (Retd.) also in his paper, '*Whither Manipur*' too claims that "King Pamheiba was perhaps a Chothe" (The Imphal Free Press, www.e-pao.com). However, from the Chothe oral history the information that Chaibi was the daughter of Mareem chief seems to be an inference because Thaowon or Chaibi's father is considered one of the village leaders who belong to Thao clan (whose father's name still remain anonymous), and therefore she is identified as "Thao-won' and not "Mareemnu". According to Chothe elders the inference could be because Pu Punem Mareem (Marim) was a popular Chothe chief during those days and must have identified with him. Similarly, T.C. Hodson also wrongly projected in the legend of King Garib Niwaz that he was considered as Naga boy because at one time the Manipuris used to marry Naga girls from the great village of "Marām" (1908:11). Here the village Maram probably refers to Marim clan identified with Pu Punem Marim village and not the Maram tribe of the Northern group. It is recorded that Thaowon or Chaibi died in 1696 (Parratt 2005:105).

<sup>14</sup> Standhope Yuhlung in '*Chothe Ngei Athouna Yongna*' mentions that "Chungthang Yuhlung" was the first lover of Shorha or Thaowon whom she was engaged to, before she married the Meitei king (1986: 35).

<sup>15</sup> *Thakna*: The tobacco leave (*Thakna*) was given to a boy by a girl according to the Chothe custom before they bid farewell after a meeting, which signify love and concern and to remember her until they meet again. This custom is now symbolically performed by the Lamlanghupi Chothe during the *Nungak-luthei thoukeipa* ceremony at the end of their *Innampei rin* and *Achui rin* festivals.

<sup>16</sup> *Pamheiba*: According to the Meitei sources, the king's initial marriage to Nungthil Chaibi or Thaowon Saamtharnu or Shorha was strongly opposed because the king himself was engaged to Houbam Makok Selungba his good friend's sister called Numit Leima. H.M. Selungba accepted Charairongpa informal marriage to Chaibi as a personal insult and an offence by defaming his status and royalty. Therefore he accused Charairongpa of breaches against the marriage contract and so he conspired with Shanti Das Goswami, and forced Charairongpa to marry his own sister Numit Leima, who thus became the Head queen. By then, Chaibi or Thaowon was made to stay in the palace harem and became the concubine of the Shanti Das Goswami the spiritual leader of Vaishnavism, who subsequently bore a son of him during her concubinage, and later the child came to be known as Pamheiba or Garib Niwaz (meaning, the philanthropic king referred by the Meitei-Pangal (Manipuri-Muslims). In the ballad it is also mentions Waireng or Pamheiba was the child of *korpa Mayang wanchei* meaning, 'a Bengal foreigner/man with brass mug' this undoubtedly refers to the Vaishnavist priest Shanti Das Goswami. But later, it is said that since the king Charairongpa loves Chaibi so much he accepted her as his second wife and identified her as *Apanbee* literally, 'one who bear forth or married into the house'. Gangmumei Kamei also mentions that Nungthil Chaibi's son was recorded as Waireng Pamheiba and the *Chietharol Kumbaba* recorded that he was born on Saturday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> month of Poinu (Nov-Dec) 1690

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(Kamei 2004: 64, Parratt 2005: 100). Robert Brown mentions that the village where Chaibi's father took her son to hiding was called as Lai Sangkong (god's cowshed) in the western region. This village probably refers to western group of Chothe as they are sometimes referred as gods or magical land or herd's land by the valley people (1873: 61). It is obvious that since, Pamheiba was brought up among the Thangal-Liangmei Naga tribes and so he is generally identified as 'Naga boy'. But it is pointed out that he was not at all by birth, as he, himself declaimed that he was of Naga extraction (Brown 1873: 60-61, Sanajaoba 2004: 240-241). T.C. Hodson also wrote that several life attempts were made on Pamheiba because of the prophecy that says, 'the king would die by the hand of his son' (1908: 79). This is believed to be the later version to justify the royal decree to kill all the male child of the queens because of the primogeniture issue. However, the *Cheitharol Kumpaba* recorded that Chaibi (Thaowon) died in 1696, who is believed to have revealed all secrets to her beloved son about the genuine identity of his father (Parratt 2005:105).

<sup>17</sup> The story of Pidonnu is a romantic tragedy tale between the daughter of a Chothe chief and a prince of Wangnoo of Moirang kingdom which is also historical. The Meitei have even performed many stage shows as drama and even published the play script titled as, *Pidonnu* (without the author's name).

<sup>18</sup> *Gourd*: In olden days such dried bottle gourds are said to use in multi-purpose ways like for storing wine, water, as storage vessel when there are no modern buckets or mugs.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECLINE OF THE CHOITHE INDIGENOUS RELIGION

#### **8.0 Introduction**

The Chothe indigenous religion that once encompassed the entire community has reduced to just 2.85 % of the entire population of 2675 (Census of India 2001). Besides their indigenous religion their age-old traditional socio-cultural institutions have dramatically declined. This gradual change in the social system has altered many of their social structures and functions. Social change being an inevitable process has forced the Chothe indigenous religion and their age-old socio-cultural institutions to a different level and directions of change. Such dramatic changes in the structure and function of the Chothe society may be viewed from different perspectives which may be attributed to various factors. The gradual change in the Chothe society probably began with the advent of Christianity after the Second World-War.

Social change is a dynamic entity and the phenomenon of social change is considered a very complex and an on-going process because there is always the plurality of causation. It is neither automatic nor unopposed. Therefore, every society no matter how traditional, conservative and civilised undergoes a constant change under various factors of influences that may result in the development or decline of the existing social system. So, no society remains static without change. Social change contains varying dialectical modes, affecting both the individual and society in different ways.

The *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* defines, "Social Change is the significant alternation of social structure (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols (1968: 366). Steven Vago defines social change from the perspective of physical phenomenon as, "Social change is conceptualised as the process of planned or unplanned qualitative or quantitative alterations in social phenomena that can be depicted on a six-part continuum composed of interrelated analytic component. For the sake of simplicity, these components are called, identity, level, duration, direction, magnitude and rate of change" (1989: 9).

The above definitions imply that social change is an inevitable, dynamic, progressive or evolutionary process, which evolves social, culture, religious, political and economic elements; thereby bringing about alteration in the social relationship within the speculative time frame. Today such socio-cultural systems are undergoing dramatic changes at micro and macro levels in all types of societies under certain kinds of factors which may be gradual or sudden and disruptive. Hence, the concept of social change has been broadly categorised into two major approaches; evolutionary and revolutionary in nature.

When the British colonial rule began in North-east India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian missionaries also later joined to put their footprints on the soil of North-east India, thereafter influencing and impacting many North-east tribes with their new religious teachings and western education and lifestyle. After the Second World-War these tribes faced drastic change from traditional to a westernised or modernised type of society. This is because of the earnest efforts of the Christian missionaries who brought Christianity and modern education to the region, Christianising and westernising the people. The impact of Christianity in North-east India was first felt in Assam that came especially from Bengal and Myanmar (Burma). According to B. Francis Kalurani the encounter with the colonial ruler led to the beginning of profound changes in the Khasi society. The British heralded the advent of Christianity in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills initiated by Welsh Presbyterian Mission in 1841. Soon western education was imparted so that they could access the gospel written in roman script. It is also said the missionaries discouraged the new Christian converts from participating in any of their festivals and cultural events of dancing and gambling (in Subba 2009:111)

David R. Syiemlieh says that Christianity in Nagaland began with the American British missionaries stationed in upper Assam extending their influences to the Naga Hills. According to him the Assamese convert Godhula was the first to begin Christian mission work among the Nagas by introducing Rev. E.W. Clark to the Ao and established a base at Molung (1990: 33). The second stage of development on education and impact of Christianity by Godhula and Rev. E.W. Clark began in 1871 from the Dicka Haimung Ao village, later joined by Mrs. Clark (Sangma 1992: 191). Subsequently, the Aos underwent significant transition from 1876-1889 where many of their age-old traditional institutions like *arju* (boys' dormitory) and *Tzuukitam* (girls dormitory) and head hunting practices were

discouraged. It is said the priest (*putir*) was replaced with the pastor who was much younger and shallower in traditional knowledge and the period also marked the beginning of colonial rule among them (Kalurani 2009:114). The Catholic had their first influence and impact in Nagaland among the Lothas in 1951 and among the Angami in 1952 (Syiemlieh 1990: 51, 45).

The influence of Christianity in Manipur began with Rev. William Pettigrew 1894 among the Tangkhul tribes (Sangma 1987: 13). This is said to be three years after Manipur administration came under the British administration, and thus began to spread slowly among other tribes. Similarly, there was a religious movement in the states of Mizoram (Lushai hills) by 1890's and Tripura, despite initial rejection and protest by the people.<sup>1</sup> The Christian converts began to discard age-old traditions and opted for modern and western culture instead, thus the evolution and transformation began in the entire North-east India. This implies that had it not been for the British colonialists who first stepped foot in the North-east it would have been very difficult for the Christian missionaries to make a strong impression of their influence among the North-east tribes who now have almost spiritually colonised the entire North-east tribes of India.

The Chothe, like any tribe of the North-east India that was entirely traditional with their indigenous religion in the past is transforming completely into a Christian society. Change of spiritual faith; from one's religious faith to another is believed to be a personal choice which is determined by one's psychology and social factors. As Malcolm Hamilton says, according to recent functionalist approaches, "Religion is seen to be the product of psychological factor inherent in all human beings and on the other it is seen as providing support for social values and social stability. The two emphasise do not always coexist comfortably" (2001: 133). The Chothe like any society of the world is undergoing dramatic change culturally and religiously. Their socio-cultural system that is considered rigid and complicated in the past is now viewed to be more secular, liberal and democratic.

Despite the rigorous revolutionary change taking place among the North-east tribes due to the process of Christian conversion by forsaking their indigenous faith, we also observe that there are also certain individuals or sections of groups who still reject and refused to embrace the new Christian faith. This traditionalist continues to believe and practice their indigenous religion and age-old custom thereby uplifting their distinctive

ethnic and cultural identity even today. Lamlanghupi village is one good example among the Chothe, where few of them still refuse to accept the Christian religion and continue to practice their indigenous religion even today. Their indigenous religion, marriage and kinship, and political structure continue to exist though in declining condition from being completely acculturated or assimilated to Christianity. Ali S. Zaghal (2000) says the resistance by the traditionalists is because of value determination. According to Zaghal, “Values are central in any society because they influence in one or another the human relations in political, economic and other sphere of life”, (in Ishwar Modi 2000: 125). The term value is defined by George Lundberg as, “A thing has or is a value if and when people behave towards it so as to retain or increase their possession of it”, (in Kurt Baier 1969: 35).

So, in the case of Chothe, social values are shifting from the traditional to the western or modernisation which results in the decline of the traditional social system in favour of Christianity or western culture. In order to examine the factors responsible for the decline and weaknesses or breakdown in the Chothe socio-cultural value systems an interview and interview-scheduled was conducted among 200 Chothe respondents in which 40 respondents were followers of the indigenous faith and 160 Christians (see Table 24).

In the outcome of the question many respondents considered the influence of Christianity, westernisation, science and modernisation, Hinduism, internal breakdown of their social systems, liberalism, Government policies and programmes, urbanisation, environment and demographic changes as the main causes in the decline and weaknesses of the Chothe indigenous religion and other socio-cultural systems. Based on multiple options question, table 25 shows as many as 174 (i.e. 87%) of them considered that the coming and influence of Christianity was the main cause, 105 (i.e. 52.5%) for westernization, while 83 (i.e. 41.5%) due to science and modernization, 81 (i.e. 40.5%) say Hinduism and, 102 (i.e. 51%) consider the breakdown in the internal social systems.

In the context of North-east India it is also observed that most of the North-eastern tribes of India have forsaken their traditional socio-cultural institutions, some partially while others completely, in favour of Christianity like the Chothe because of the influence and impact of Christianity, westernisation, modernisation, Hinduism and internal breakdown in the social systems. As a result the traditional social institutions of these North-eastern tribes have lost or are losing or breaking down day by day in the syncretism with the process of

acculturation or modification of culture or assimilating with the dominant western Christian culture or other religions. It is also observed that in certain cases of syncretism, some tribes or groups of the North-east India who are considered Christian are seen to be more religious in their practice with their new religious doctrines than the westerners. Such groups or tribes may be seen among the Mizo, Kuki and Naga societies as most of the sub-tribes or sub-groups within these larger groups have altered their socio-cultural systems partially or completely to adopt the new western Christian culture. The influence and impact of Christianity in North-east is so powerful unlike in other parts of India that even Fr. J. Puthenpurakal, in the introduction to his book states that, “Probably, there is no other part of India Christianity is so visibly and powerfully present as in the North-East. No other region in India can boast about so many Christians in the administration and the government as in the North-East” (1996).

**Table 24 Distribution of Chothe respondents by age-group (both followers of indigenous faith and Christians)**

<i>Age-groups</i>	<i>Indigenous faith</i>		<i>Christians</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent age</i>
	male	female	male	female		
Youths ( <i>Nungak-luther</i> ) between 20-40 years	10	8	46	14	<b>78</b>	<b>39%</b>
Matured adults ( <i>Tang-ngarinta</i> ) between 40-60 years	6	6	57	8	<b>77</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
Village elders ( <i>Urinta</i> ) above 60 years	8	2	31	4	<b>45</b>	<b>22.5%</b>
	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>160</b>		<b>200</b>	

**Table 25 Chothe respondents who considers Christianity and other factors for the decline and breakdown of their indigenous religion**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Youths (20-40) years</i>	<i>Mature adults (40-60) years</i>	<i>Vill. elders above 60 years</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Christianity	69	64	41	<b>174</b>	<b>87%</b>
Westernisation	32	43	30	<b>105</b>	<b>52.5%</b>
Science and Modernisation	24	32	27	<b>83</b>	<b>41.5%</b>
Other religions like Hindu	21	37	23	<b>81</b>	<b>40.5%</b>
Break down in the internal social systems	23	45	34	<b>102</b>	<b>51%</b>

According to the Chothe, their views on westernisation refer to the western cultural trends like; manners of acting, speaking, talking, dressing, in short the living style. The influenced is acquired after reading certain books, magazines, watching T.Vs, movies, video songs and through friends that changes their attitude and behaviour. Similarly, science and modernisation refers to the science and technology, the modern education system, modern lifestyle, modern transport and communication, electronic gadgets, urbanisation, globalisation, secular and liberal policies, and the various cultural exchange programmes organised at the international/ national/ state/ local levels. The Chothe elders and mature adults, both followers of indigenous faith and Christian respondents believe that the impact of such influences resulted in the change of attitude and behaviour especially among the younger generation who are quick receptors, ready and willing to adopt the new trend of changes and experience the free and independent life style against their rigid social systems. The Chothe elders say that since the younger generations are exposed to such western liberal culture and modern systems their outlook is different from their elders or traditionalists. Such motivational change, are said to be supplemented by the Christian doctrinal teachings giving ample room for an individual or group to negate from the traditionalist outlook.

There are also some Chothe village elders and mature adults respondents (both followers of the Indigenous faith and Christian) who admit that the reason why they cannot uphold their indigenous religion and other socio-cultural institutions firmly is because of “breakdown in their internal social systems”. This is said to be due to frequent internal feuds and conflicts arising amongst the villagers for different reasons in the past which resulted in the slow breakdown and negligence in their belief system and socio-cultural obligations. While such internal feuds and conflicts situation were going on, some of the villagers instead of redressing their problems took full advantage of the situation by leaving their indigenous religion to embrace the new Christian faith in order to escape the burden of severe penalties or responsibilities or other social complications imposed by the village authority on them. It is also to do away with various superstitions and the rigid socio-cultural norms of do’s and don’ts.

As a result of the influence and impact of Christianity many of the sub-tribes or sub-groups of the larger ethnic groups; Mizo, Kuki and Naga are now enduring problems in reconstructing their socio-religious and cultural history because they did not maintain

historical records of the past, being a pre-literate society. Soumen Sen states that tribal religions of the North-east region can be considered as a *pre-literate religion*, as they do not have written scriptures of their own (1993: 23). So, the socio-cultural histories of these North-east tribes were in the form of oral history handed down from one generation after another which became diluted in the process of transitional period. Consequently, when deconstructing their socio-history in order to re-construct many tribes including the Chothe suffer from different kinds of versions, confusing and creating difficulty in the interpretation of an issue or the event. In spite of the deteriorating condition of their age-old traditional socio-cultural system many Chothe individuals are still ignorant about the value of preserving or maintaining it, apart from few regulations or reforms made on marriage and kinship, and political system (See CLAM souvenir 2002). The few regulations formulated are seen in order to maintain uniformity among the villages from diversification because the few Chothe populations are scattered in three different regions or zones.

### **8.1 The Influence of Christianity on the Chothe Indigenous Religion**

With the coming of Christianity in the North-east India its influence and impact have been very powerful in transforming the traditional society into a westernised and modernised type of society. Many of the North-east indigenous tribes and sub-tribes of various ethnic groups have given up their indigenous religion and age-old traditional socio-cultural systems to profess Christianity. The influence and impact of Christianity is also similarly felt by the Chothe which is both evolutionary and revolutionary in nature. It is evolutionary in nature because change is inevitable and occurs gradually from the general perspective. But it is also revolutionary in nature because it brought drastic change within a short period of time among the Chothe and other North-eastern tribes in which the age-old traditional systems that have been practised for hundreds and thousands of years have been dramatically given up by them to profess Christianity. This is due to the Christian missionaries, who, like revolutionary armies (crusaders) have been strongly propagating the message of Gospel or the Good News of Jesus Christ even by going to the remotest part of North-eastern region and among different communities to convince and convert them by different means and forms; through education, by force, theological deceit, supplementing the poor economy.

Milton S. Sangma (1987) describes that the term *Christian* is derived from the *Greek* word “Christ” meaning, “the anointed one”. Those who believe in *Jesus Christ*, follow his *teachings* and were *baptised in His name* are called *Christians*. The first foundation of Christianity in India was laid by *St. Thomas*, one of the twelve apostles in 52 A.D at Cranganore, Madras. So, the influence of Christianity in the Northeast India began in 1626 by two Jesuit (Roman Catholic) Missionaries at Pandu, Guwahati, who were on the way to Tibet and China. However, Christianity reached the soil of Manipur on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1894 at Imphal, and the first tribal community to embraced Christianity were the Tangkhul Naga in 1895 (Sangma 1987: 13). Half a century later, the influence of Christianity or the American Baptist missionary reached the country of Chothe in 1937 but the momentum began only after the Second World-War.

Christianity, through i.e. the *American Baptist Church* arrived in the country of Chothe in 1937 and the first village to felt the influence and impact is Purum Tampak which was brought by Mr. Sitrichiner Ngamneir Moyon on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1937 (*Leiningkhul Baptist Church, Souvenir* 1988: 20). Sitrichiner Ngamneir Moyon, the first missionary or pastor of the Chothe in 1938 baptised few individuals from Tampakhu and these individuals became the first Christians among the Chothe. They are; Y. Waipu, Y. Amudon, Th. Abungjao and few others (ibid: 13). According to them, the villagers refused to live together with them considering it was a challenge against their indigenous faith and also against their custom and tradition. Hence, they were cast out from their village who thereby established a new settlement named as *Ahu Changninglon* with six families on the north-eastern side of Tampakhu. Thus *Ahu Changninglon* is now known as *Ahu Leininghu* meaning, ‘worshippers of God’ derived from the common references in identifying them, and acknowledged as the first Christian village in the Chothe history. Thereafter, the influence and impact of Christianity is felt by the rest of the Chothe villages. The early missionary or pastors of Chothe were; Ng. Bethol Moyon, MR.Thoma, S. Ngamdil, Teba Kiliong and Ng. Mono Monshang who belonged to Moyon, Monshang, Kom and Tangkhul tribes (ibid: 13).

According to the Chothe, the Roman Catholic Church was also introduced to the Chothe in Purum Tampak village in 1946 by two Catholic Zou (tribe) men; Mr. Shemjakhup and Mr. Suonkhen of Singtom village near Sugnu after meeting their Chothe friend Mr. Rakungpu of Tampakhu when they came to discuss their horse trading business. But only

seven years later in 1953 they said some youth of Tampakhu received Baptism from Rev. Fr. Ravalico (SDB) Imphal (St. Thomas Catholic Church, Souvenir, Purum Tampak 2003). With regard to their conversion some of the pioneers of Chothe Catholic gave their personal accounts about their experiences too. The Independent Church of India (ICI) was brought in 1982 by the relative of a Hmar family who marry a Chothe girl and lived in Lamlanghupi. Evangelical Free Church of Independent (EFCI) was brought by some Hmar in the village of Old-Wangparal in 1997. Most of this villagers were earlier American Baptist but due to ideological and leadership conflicts and some internal family feuds which resulted in the breakup and change in conversion of the denomination.

Biman K. Das Gupta also remarks that “When T. C. Das visited the villages in 1936 and thereafter, Christianity did not have any effect. When we visited the Purum tract in 1975, all the villages except those of Lamlanghupi were converted to Christianity. Some were American Baptist while others were Roman Catholic. The American Baptist entered in 1948, while the other in 1953” (1985: 55). Thereby, as Christianity began to creep slowly into their society it resulted in the breakdown of their age-old traditional social systems or institutions which are gradually replaced with the new western Christian cultural system. With regards to the manner of influence and impact some of the Chothe elders describes that the Christian missionaries or evangelists initially preached against the age-old indigenous religion and socio-cultural institutions as a wrong religion, a wrong custom and culture, substantiating their arguments that magical practices are evil and bad, rites and rituals are unnecessary ceremonies with extravagant expenditures. The indigenous tribal gods are mere gods, and not the true Supreme Almighty God, and therefore they will not attain salvation even if they die. On the other hand, the Christian claim their God is the True one and whosoever believed and accepted Him as his saviour will gain salvation from this world. They said such are the messages and propaganda delivered initially by the Christian missionaries to influence and convince the non-Christians. As stated above some law-breakers began to convert to Christianity with the breakdown of the internal social institutions. Such tactics used by the missionaries are said to be “theological deceit” because the tribal too have their own Supreme God though they also worship lower or secondary gods and goddess (In, “*Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, 50 Golden Years*”).<sup>2</sup>

In the later period some converted to Christianity for economic reasons as the missionary organisations provided free fellowship and other financial support to those individual and families who joined in their congregation or ministry. The willingness to be Christian was because the tribal were economically very poor. For example, pastors are paid and given free training in various training centres, as a result the Chothe have a number of pastors (see Table 7). But for the Catholic, their evangelisation policy is somewhat different unlike the Protestants who preached door to door. It is seen that most of the Chothe became Catholic while staying in their boarding schools while also enjoying fee concession from the missionaries if converted. Subsequently, their children convince their parents and thereafter the children of first and second Christian generations also became Catholic at the early age according to the Catholic policy. No doubt, some become Christian by their own wish and will. In this way, the first group of Christian converts began to influence others by their new socio-religious form of group cohesion, modern and western thoughts. This method is said to be “deceit by other means”: ‘Economic conversions’ are carried out by placing “miracle boxes” in local churches. The gullible villager writes out a request – a loan, a pucca house, fee for the son’s schooling. A few weeks later, the miracle happens. And the whole family converts, making others in the village follow suit.<sup>3</sup>

Further the missionaries restrained and discouraged the new Christian converts from participating in their cultural events. For example, Christian Khasis of Meghalaya do not take part in the *Shad-Suk-Mynsiem* festival or the *Nongkrem* festival. Those converted to Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh have started distancing themselves or are made to do so, from festivals like the *Solung* or *Mopin*. The Christian Garos remain cut off from the *Wangla* festival dance. This self-alienation phenomenon is similarly practice throughout the tribal population as part of the Christian doctrine in the initial period.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the predicament, it was in the beginning the Christian missionaries were able to convince and convert at least few people like children, the law breakers of the society or people who were economically poor by helping them financially and spiritually. But gradually the momentum began to twist with the impartation of western education (Roman script) and successful stories of accomplishing and transforming partially or completely the attitude and behaviours of certain people. Subsequently many began participating in the Christian festivities, thus bringing a drastic revolutionary sea-change in transforming many

societies of the North-eastern tribes from traditional to a western and modern Christian society partially or completely within a short period of time.

So, prior to 1937/8 the entire Chothe community believed and followed their indigenous religion but now the socio-cultural scenario is almost completely opposite. On the basis of the Census of India – religion, K.S. Singh indicates that there are only 2.85 % of the entire Chothe total population who still follow their “indigenous religion”, and 8.59 % have not stated their religion as opposed to 88.50 % who are all Christians now (1994: 225). Such high statistical percentage of Chothe given above is similar with many North-eastern tribes because of the revolutionary approach of the Christian missionaries. As Fr. J. Puthenpurakal (1996) emphasises, North-east India has the maximum Christian population as compared to other parts of the country. This remark may be supported by Yogendra Singh’s statement that, “In the past for long time the traditional values and cultural milieu have dominated the society but now it seems that the impact of Christian has (replacing it and) it is presume that it will continue to dominate for long time in the future for certain period to time” (2002: 115). Right now the Chothe have four Christian church denominations, excluding the Presbyterian Church because they have no church of their own yet though few members profess it (see Table 26).

**Table 26 Church denominations of the Chothe**

Sl. No	Church Denominations	Abbreviations	Year of entry	First village
1	Chothe Baptist Church Association	(Ch.B.C.A)	1937/8	<i>Leininghu</i>
2	Roman Catholic	(R.C)	1951/3	<i>Tampakhu/ Phaihu (Purum Tampak)</i>
3	Independent Church of India	(I.C.I)	1982	<i>Lamlanghupi</i>
4	Evangelical Free Church of India	(E.F.C.I)	1997	<i>Old-Wangparal</i>

The table 27 shows the exclusive 62 Lamlanghupi respondents in considering both follower of indigenous faith and Christian, out of which 40 (i.e. 64.51%) are followers of the indigenous faith and 22 (i.e. 35.48%) are Christians. The village of Lamlanghupi has only two Christian denominations i.e. Catholic (RC) and Independent Church of India (ICI). Out of 22 total Christian respondents of Lamlanghupi, 12 (i.e. 54.54%) are youths and 5 (i.e. 22.72%) each from mature adults and village elders respectively (see Table 28).

When certain questions were asked to the followers of the indigenous religion respondents like, whether they would also convert to Christianity if given a chance? All responded in the negative, and said they would remain faithful to their indigenous religion till death (see Table 27). In continuation to the question asked, further some elders says that if their young children and grandchildren wish to give up their indigenous religion and be Christian they will not object to their children’s decision because they are educated and it is up to them to decide. This signifies that the people are now more understanding towards secularism and freedom of an individual’s choice unlike in the past when it was imposed.

In the distribution of the Chothe Christian respondents by age-groups, there are 60 (i.e. 37.5%) who belonged to the youth (*Nungak-luther*), 65 (i.e. 40.62%) as matured adults (*Tang-ngarinta*), and 35 (i.e. 21.87%) categorised as village elders (*Urinta*). Table 29 shows there are more Christian respondents who belonged to the mature adults group compared to the other two age-groups irrespective of their villages. Interestingly most of the Christian respondents irrespective of age-groups also state that the decline and weaknesses or the breakdown of their indigenous religion is mainly because of the advent of Christianity that crept in at the right time and also due to other factors of social change.

**Table 27 Distribution of Lamlanghupi respondents only by faith (both followers of indigenous faith and Christian)**

Religion	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
<i>Followers of indigenous faith</i>	24	16	<b>40</b>	<b>64.51%</b>
<i>Followers of Christian faith</i>	14	08	<b>22</b>	<b>35.48%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 28 Distribution of Lamlanghupi Christian respondents only by age-group**

Age-groups	Christians		Total	Percentage
	male	female		
Youths ( <i>Nungak-luther</i> ) between 20-40 years	9	3	<b>12</b>	<b>54.54%</b>
Mature adults ( <i>Tang-ngarinta</i> ) between 40-60 years	2	3	<b>5</b>	<b>22.72%</b>
Village elders ( <i>Urinta</i> ) above 60 years	3	2	<b>5</b>	<b>22.72%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

However, the Christian views on the above arguments are that since their indigenous religion is decaying and the society being rigid and complicated with their socio-religious norms and the narrow outlook, they believe that the Christian religion is better and true. So

they changed their faith. The Chothe indigenous religion confined to only the Chothe population but Christianity prevails everywhere signifying a universal religion. No matter whatever the followers of indigenous religion say about them they consider that the Christian religion is superior to all other religions, considering as a universal religion, which is why, they claim to believe and practice. With regards to the mistakes and sins committed, they justify that it is human nature to make mistakes and commit sins, which can be forgiven by their Almighty God if one earnestly and sincerely pray for the forgiveness.

Similarly when a question was asked again to the Chothe respondents; “What makes the Chothe indigenous religion different from other religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, on the criteria of; (i) Name of Supreme God, (ii) Doctrines, (iii) Supernatural Powers and (iv) Nature of Worships”. Table 30 shows, out of 200 respondents, as many as 163 (i.e. 81.5 %) claim the difference with (i) Name of their Supreme God. The same individuals i.e. 153 (76.5 %) also responded with (ii) Doctrines, while 132 (66 %) indicated (iii) Supernatural powers, and 157 (78.5 %) of them pointed to (iv) Nature of Worships respectively. This table 30 indicates that the Chothe respondents have a clear knowledge of what element distinguishes the Chothe indigenous religion from other religions like Christianity, Hinduism and many others.

**Table 29 Distribution of Chothe Christian respondents only by age-group**

<i>Age-groups</i>	<i>Christians</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>		
Youths ( <i>Nungak-luther</i> ) between 20-40 years	46	14	<b>60</b>	<b>37.5%</b>
Mature adults ( <i>Tang-ngarinta</i> ) between 40-60 years	57	8	<b>65</b>	<b>40.62%</b>
Village elders ( <i>Urinta</i> ) above 60 years	31	4	<b>35</b>	<b>21.87%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>

After more than half a century some of the Chothe Christians, who are mostly educated began to sense the differences between the religious beliefs and secular cultural practices. These educated people felt that religious belief is more of an individual choice or a personal matter which can be separated from certain cultural elements that are not related with their indigenous religious beliefs. Therefore, they are now concerned in preserving and uplifting their secular cultural elements like certain customs and traditions, social norms, feasts, dresses and games which were once considered irrational and bad from the Christian

perspective. They feel that these cultural elements are necessary to maintain to distinguish themselves from the other tribes or ethnic groups. They accept it was their ignorance to discard all their cultural elements by becoming a Christian in the initial stage. So, people like Y. Maipak and Pr. Vincent have started to openly support the traditionalists with respect to their secular culture as they are aware of its values after being exposed to other societies by various means and methods. H. Kamkhenthang (1988) also states that “there are some roles still played by some of the elements of the tribal religion. Some of these elements are still followed unknowingly while some others are followed as a matter of belief without involving any rituals. Likewise O.L. Snaitang wrote that the Seng-Khasi, a revival movement of the Khasi traditional culture formed in 1899, rejected in theory all that was Christian (1993:1). Such rejection of the Christian ideology and faith by the non-Christians is also seen to be supported by many Christian Khasi and Jaintia people as they encourage and even participate in their traditional festivals, and such days are even declared as State holidays. This suggests, despite being Christian many of them are still emotionally attached to their age-old tradition and customs though they may not be fully involved in them.

**Table 30 Distribution of opinion on difference between Chothe indigenous religion from other religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Youths (20-40) years</i>	<i>Mature adults (40-60) years</i>	<i>Vill. elders above 60 years</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent age</i>
Name of the Supreme God	68	63	32	<b>163</b>	<b>81.5%</b>
Doctrines and its teachings	56	59	38	<b>153</b>	<b>76.5%</b>
Supernatural powers	45	52	35	<b>132</b>	<b>66%</b>
Nature of worships	57	59	41	<b>157</b>	<b>78.5%</b>

## **8.2 Westernisation and Modernisation**

The decline and the deteriorating condition of the Chothe indigenous religion and other socio-cultural systems are also attributed to westernisation, modernisation and the modern educational system, besides other factors by the people. Especially the Christian community of Chothe and many North-eastern tribes have become more westernised by imitating the western Christian culture, since they are free from the age-old traditional religion and rigid socio-cultural systems. They consider their outlook broader, unlike the

traditionalists who are still bound by their socio-religious norms and remain conservative in their attitude and behaviour. So, the Christians who are free from traditional socio-religious norms are more flexible in their attitude and behaviour to adapt to the new changes fostered by the modern education system acquired from the Christian missionary run schools and colleges. The Christians considered alienated from their society, began to slowly negate their traditional social systems which resulted in the decline or downfall of the traditional socio-cultural systems from lack of cooperation. Besides Christianity, it is the introduction of the modern education policy by the Christian missionaries who replaced the local script with the Roman script which fostered the influence and impact among the North-eastern people. According to Fr. Thomas Menamparambil “The boarding houses in Shillong, Guwahati and Dibrugarh have played an important role in the evangelization of the region. They formed lay leaders and well-instructed religious teachers. Every year, a good number from among the senior students were baptized. It was precisely these youngsters that helped plant the church in the Garo Hills, Nagaland, Manipur and to some extent in Mizoram.”<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, with the introduction of modern science and technology and other electronic gadgets, various government policies and cultural exchange programmes organised, have also facilitated in broadening the outlook of the people from their rigid and dogmatic attitude in some way or the other. Various cultural exchange programmes like Church meetings, annual students’ conferences and sports meets organised by regional churches and tribes also facilitate in the exchange of ideas, knowledge and cultural elements which are always in favour of modernisation and westernisation, against the traditionalist. Thus, the traditional social institutions began to decline slowly to conform to the present modern world that results in the breakdown of their socio-cultural structure and functions. For example, there has been a breakdown in the Chothe traditional prescriptive marriage rules the traditional joint family system is now replaced with the nuclear family system, the traditional endogamous marriage system have become exogamous, and the Chothe traditional gerontocratic form of government is replaced with modern democratic election system in all the Christian villages. Such rapid and gradual change of Chothe society may also be seen in the light of Turkey, a traditionalist and conservative society. As Daniel Learner (1957) describes how Balgat, a village of Ankara in Turkey transformed their society in a short span of time when science and technological or electronic machineries

were introduced to them. The village became modernised as people slowly began to access to the radio, TV, two wheelers and many other gadgets and they began to adapt to the advanced western culture. Likewise the Chothe whether Christian or non-Christian have become modernised in a similar fashion. Since, the Chothe society is undergoing change both at micro and macro levels affecting all their traditional socio-cultural institutions like; religion, kinship and marriage, economy and political organisations, its value system have been considerably disrupted in the structure and functioning by the new socio-cultural systems. It also means that most of the age-old traditional socio-cultural systems have been modified or bifurcated in many cases among the Christian societies in order to conform to the Christian doctrines in accordance to their customs and traditions.

In the context of India, Yogendra Singh says that “As for modernization in India, we find a growing trend that traditional role-structures are giving way to modern ones. And those persons following those roles often retain categorical values of tradition instead of those of modernity” (2002: 214). Similarly M.N. Srinivas (2000) also emphasises that the Sanskritisation process among the Coorgs of south India is a positional or cultural change rather than a structural change, in which the lower caste imitates the culture of the upper caste to conform to a modern life-style. As a result of influences of Christianity, modernisation and westernisation many socio-cultural elements of a society have been substituted with something or the other. P.E. Easterling and J.V. Muir also explain how the Greek tradition and customs began to change when modernisation advanced to their society. According to them, “Custom change; and lekythos and loutrophorous ceased to be made around the end of the fifth century. The use of special pots for funerals in Athens seems to come to an end with them, though their forms are imitated in marble tombstones”(1985: 185). Looking from the general perspective the conflicting nature between the traditionalists and modern is described by Clifford Greetz saying that, most traditionalists tend to see changes as undermining their power. They cannot support the secular outlook and the religious basis of the state would be swept away, and with it the theocracy. Secular systems that welcome innovation provide little in the way of organisation and belief. The problem of alienation to society becomes profound and the unevenness of modernisation causes conflict resulting in political instability and chronic dissatisfaction (1971: 68).

Though the influence and impact of Christianity, westernisation, modernisation, Hinduism, modern education, secularism, Government policy and cultural exchange programmes have brought destruction to the Chothe traditional socio-cultural value systems it also has certain positive result in certain areas. In this matter Fr. J. Puthenpurakal (1996) has stressed and emphasises on the role and contribution played by the impact of Christianity especially in the area of education and other vocational and technical educational in different states of North-east India. Similarly, O. L. Snaitang (1993) also emphasises the role of social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people of Meghalaya, with the advent of the British rule in India or Christianity from 1840. He stresses how the Christian missionaries have positively contributed to the process of social change and modernisation especially among the Khasis-Jaintia people and generally the North-east tribes. Amena Passah also states how the Christian missionary has contributed even in the humanitarian services like health care and impacted on the society especially among the Khasis and Jaintias and even brought doctors like Dr. Owen Richard in 1843 by Welsh Presbyterian and Dr. Griffiths in 1879 to Meghalaya (2009: 203, 207). Such a momentum of social change experienced by North-eastern tribes and Chothe is also similarly felt by the African nations. According to George Bond, Walton Johnson and Sheila S. Walker “While traditional religion developed in the context of lineage-based village community, Christianity emerged as this type of society that was giving way to new structure” and that, “one must recognised that religion in Africa is constantly evolving and that the African Christian movements are contemporary expressions of religious change” (1979: 71, 168). This is true, with respect to the Chothe and other North-eastern tribes and even among the African nations as the number of Christian individuals and the percentage of Christian population is increasing everyday through the evangelisation process.

### **8.3 Brief History of the Roman Catholic Church among the Chothe**

The history of Roman Catholic evangelisation process among the Chothe began from Purum Tampak village in 1946 when two Catholic Zou (tribe) men, Mr. Shemjakhup and Mr. Suonkhen of Singtom village near Sugnu discussed their horse trading business with Mr. Rakungpu Chothe. Seven years later in 1953 Rev. Fr. Ravalico (SDB) baptised some

Tampakhu youths. According to them, the event that led them to their conversion bears a very interesting story as some of them still survive to tell their personal experiences.

According to Pr. Vincent of Tampakhu, the two Zou men visited Rakungpu Chothe one late afternoon after they finished dealing with their horse trading business at a neighbouring village. As part of the Chothe custom, Rakungpu formally introduced his two foreign friends who were originally from Myanmar (Burma) to their village Chief Noren Marim and also to other village elders and leaders. After a prolonged conversation they were asked to stay the night at Shilung Parpa's house. That evening when Noren along with his friends paid a casual visit to Shilung's house just before their dinner to bid them goodnight, Noren and his friends were surprised to see them pray with "Sign of the Cross" unlike the protestant (Baptist Church) that was already in their village. This particular prayer with the sign of the cross amazed them who became inquisitive. Therefore, the two Zou men began to explain their religion that the Catholic Church was the first Church established by Christ under the leadership of St. Peter, besides explaining differences between Catholic and other protestant Churches like the Baptists. On the basis of their explanation they felt that if Catholic was the first Church among the Christian denominational Churches they would join it. Thus on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1946, Noren and his friends ask Tomalsing Makan to take in-charge for the next counselling with them (*St. Thomas Catholic Church, Souvenir* 2003: 3).

After a few days Semjakhup Zou visited Tampakhu with his local catechist T. Peter Haokhokam and subsequently, after formal introduction and consultation, they agreed to build a small temporary Church in 1947. Thereafter, it is said T. Peter Haokhokam began teaching some Chothe youth Catholic prayers and songs in *Chin-Tidim* from the Catholic prayer book of Myanmar. Some of the members like Mohon and Puchari who still survive claimed can still recite the *Chin-Tidim* prayers and songs vividly. The memories of those innocent days are still held dear with nostalgia by them (*Ibid*: 4).

As recorded in the *St. Thomas Catholic Church, Souvenir 2003*, it is mentioned that according to Rev. Fr. Joshep Mattam that, Bishop Ferrando, the then, Bishop of Shillong sent Rev. Fr. Marocchino (SDB) to station at Kohima. On the basis of the instruction Rev. Fr. Marocchino visited the Hundung village in Ukhrul district of Manipur on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1952 and found 300 catechumens. Thereafter, the following day he visited Singtom a Zou village in Sugnu on his motorcycle, and after the mass T. Peter and his associates informed Rev. Fr.

Marocchino about Purum Tampak's Chothe interest in the new religion. This matter was reported again to the Bishop Ferrando, where Bishop Ferrando further reported the concerned matter to Bishop Marengo. Thereafter, it is believed that after a serious discussion on the reports, Rev. Fr. Ravalico from Dibrugarh (Assam) was sent to Manipur (Imphal) in 1953, who thereby became the first catholic priest in the state (Souvenir 2003: 04).

Subsequently, it is mentioned that Rev. Fr. Ravalico (SDB) with Mr. Alung Tangkhul visited Singtom village on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1953. And on behalf of the Tampakhu Chothe villagers Mr. Lucas Khamchingkhup Singtom's new Catechist invited Rev. Fr. Ravalico and Mr. Alung to visit Tampakhu, who thereby visited on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1953 and baptised ten (10) children on the very day. The names of these first Catholics children among the Chothe as recorded are: (1) Y. Mohan (James), (2) Mk. Yaiskul (Jacob), (3) Mk. Ranichao (Louis), (4) Mk. Merachaobi (Mary), (5) Y. Puchari (Philomina), (6) Mk. Tikpi (Teresa), (7) Mk Tomalsing (Thomas), (8) Y. Koite (Sara), (9) Mk. Chingkham (Maria) and (10) Th. Leibakchao (John). It is said that all were sent to Dibrugarh, Golaghat and Naharkatia towns for studies except Th. Leibakchao (John) for personal reasons stayed back. However, when Rev. Fr. Ravalico visited the area again on 6<sup>th</sup> Jan.1954 a second batch was baptised mostly mature adults. They were: (1) Y. Sumreng (Paul), (2) M. Mangelei (Monica) (3) Y. Arekpa (John), (4) M. Mongouchaobi (Sabina), (5) Mk. Wanon (Silas), (6) Ramhrun (Babiyana), (7) Mk. Kankung (Peter), (8) M. Chaobihal (Rose), (9) Th. Tenba (Pious), (10) M. Nungshirei (Simon), (11) Pr. Yameng (Rita) (12) Pr. Sumhong (Susana) and (13) Sanarei (Sarah), (St. Thomas ... Souvenir 2003: 4-5).

Therefore, it is said that because of the overwhelming response from the people Rev. Fr. Ravalico established a Don Bosco School (SDB) at Purum Tampak village in 1955 where Mr. Noren Marim Chothe was appointed as the first Headmaster of the school. However, a religious conflict arose within the community as the members of American Baptist Church did not want the Catholic institution in the village, supported by the non-Christians considering it as a challenge to their religion and denomination. They said this objection and uprising was strongly supported by the neighbouring Meitei communities too for fear of religious upheaval. Hence, the Don Bosco School was shifted to Komlathabi, near Pallel in 1959 in the tribal dominated area mainly inhabited by the Chothe, Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Lamkang, Tarao, Maring (ibid: 5). However, it is also mentioned that the

Tampakhu village hosted, *'The Catholic Convention Meet'* from 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1959, where about 900 delegates attended from different walks of life and the deliberators were Rev. Fr. Josheph Kachinramattam, Rev. Fr. George Venturoli and Rev. Fr. Wolestone. In the convention it was resolved to conduct a "Catholic Congress" every year and the first Catholic Congress was held in 1961 at Mitong, a Moyon village, Chandel (St. Thomas Souvenir 2003: 5). As a result, the American Baptist Church has the largest number in Chothe, followed by Roman Catholic, Evangelical Free Church of India (EFCI), Independent Church of India (ICI) and few Seventh Day Adventist individuals.

#### **8.4 Is the Early Christians declining or Siding away from their Churches?**

From the perspective of evolutionary theory one aspect observed is that the early Christians were declining or siding away from their churches. This is because of the contradiction going on at the moment in the context of the North-east India, Africa and the western societies in the rise and fall of the Christians attending their Churches. The number of Christian converts is increasing day by day in North-east India even among the Chothe but there seems to be a declining trend in the west as the Christians attending their churches is falling. Reginald W. Bibby in his case study, *'Religion in the Canada 1990's: The Paradox of Poverty and Potential'*, pointed out that there has been a steady decline in the proportion of Canadians who attend service regularly. He reports that, "By virtually every imaginable measure, organised religion in Canada is in serious trouble, membership and attendance have been steadily declining since at least the beginning of 1950s" (Bibby 1990: 278). Further he states that "The attendance decline has been pervasive, regular attendance that characterized over 80% of Roman Catholics as recently as the mid-1960's now describes only 33%. Just 22% of Protestants are now attending weekly, while attendance among those who identify with no group, along with "others" has remained fairly stable" (see table 31). Similarly, there are sects and religious community that advocate a kind of 'Universal Religion', the objective being focus to social-welfare and development. Could the future of Christian community like the Chothe, North-east tribe and the Africans tribes similarly follow the declining trend like the west or the indigenous religion after few decades?

This is also observable even among the Chothe, when asked about their regularity of their church attendance. It seems it differs from church to church and village to village but the general trend is that women are more regular, punctual and more seriously involved in church activities than the men folk. Most men seem reluctant to attend church regularly because they seem to have got fed up with their routine life since they have been practising it for long period of time without much change.

**Table 31 Decline of yhe Church attendance in the west**

<b>Years</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>
Total National	31%	28%	26%	<b>24%</b>
Roman Catholics	45	41	36	<b>33</b>
Protestants	26	24	25	<b>22</b>
Anglican	24	20	15	<b>15</b>
United Church	28	18	16	<b>15</b>
Conservatives	38	52	64	<b>49</b>
None	<1	<1	<1	<b>&lt;1</b>
Other	17	11	13	<b>15</b>

*Source: Project Canada survey series (p.279)*

Another interesting religious change is seen among the Christianized section of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes, who are so familiar with the Bible drew personal inspiration in the wide spread admiration for the ancient Israelites or Judaism. S.K Mukherjee (1998) says, in the past, this may be due to the influence of the Protestant missionaries who came to Manipur and Mizoram and were inclined to afford more respect to the Old Testament, particularly to the ethical message of the prophets. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo being tribal people readily identified themselves with the Biblical Israelites; particularly some Mizo Christian sects proclaimed they are one of the lost tribes of Israel because a section of them have widely held the notion that prior to their adoption of Christianity, they had been observing a vestigial form of Judaism (Mukherjee 1998: 2). There is an abundance of Chin-Kuki-Mizo literature and numerous journalistic reports to indicate that many of them subscribe to the view that they are of Israelite origin.<sup>6</sup> Lalbiaktluanga (1989) identifies ‘Mizo-Israel’ among sectarian groups that have found difficulty in adjusting with the mainline churches, planted by western missionaries and have, therefore, chosen to break away to form new sects, each of them having its ‘Own emphasis and distinct theology and practice’ (Ibid: 3). Some of the Mizo-Israel have already been settled in Israel as accepted by the country’s law as the return tribe.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, it reflects that any religion like any clothing of a man when it gets worn out it needs to be replaced, either with the same type of cloth or with completely a different one. This means that any types of world religions whether primitive or modern like; Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Confucians, Indigenous (tribal) religions, Christianity is likely to decline for a change. So people need to be motivated and re-instilled from time to time to maintain spiritual harmony and tranquillity so that it remains stable in its structure though it continues to change in cultural patterns. Such religious upheavals and reformation has already happened many times before. For example, Judaism to Christianity, the break up from Roman Catholic to various inter-denominations protestant churches like Calvinist, Presbyterian, Anglican Church, American Baptist Church, Church of God, etc. This cycle of evolution, it is believed, will continue in different forms around the fulcrum of the original faith which also applies to the any indigenous religions of the world. There is always a tendency for any indigenous or tribal religion to fade or decline if the system is not re-instilled with certain socio-religious regulatory norms to continue its stability of existence. Therefore, the North-east India or the African Christians, it is believed, will follow the same trend of decline or its downfall or reformation after certain periods of time like the western societies whose original Christian religion needs to be re-instilled again. Nothing exists permanently in this world as all things are bound to be change.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced courtesy, “*Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram*, 50 Golden Years”, A Shree Multimedia Vision Ltd. Presentation. [www.shabarikumbh.org](http://www.shabarikumbh.org) Accessed on 14/8/2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.:2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.:2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.:2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.:2

<sup>6</sup> Zaithanchhungi 1990; Banerjee 1986, in S.K. Mukherjee, ‘Jewish Movement in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram’ in *Social Movements in North-East India*, M.N. Karna (Ed.), North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong, 1998, pp. 189-198. Posted by Rajen Barua of Housten at FriendsOfAssam@YahooGroup.com on 27-04-2007.

<sup>7</sup> S.K. Mukherjee. 1998. ‘Jewish Movement in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram’ in *Social Movements in North-East India*, M.N. Karna (Ed.), North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong, pp. 189-198. Posted by Rajen Barua of Housten at FriendsOfAssam@YahooGroup.com on 27-04-2007.

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## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary**

The basic objective of this thesis was to study in a holistic manner the Chothe indigenous religion in order to understand their past and ongoing socio-religious history and other socio-cultural institutions. It is qualitative, as it is based on explorative and descriptive in nature obtained by intensive and extensive interview and interview-schedules using structured and unstructured methods. The area on indigenous religion is specifically considered for this study because it is the essence of every society and also one of the earliest established institutions found in every society of the world, whether ancient or primitive or medieval or modern. It also provides one of the best sources to study any tribe as a whole since their socio-economic and political systems are normally guided by one's religious principles.

In this exploratory and descriptive study, many significant and complex religious and historical issues of the Chothe tribe of Manipur are discovered and highlighted that have remained secluded from the public for many centuries. It also explains the identity of the Chothe and other allied tribes from the context of their religious beliefs and practices, and their socio-cultural history. The Chothe indigenous religion, which was once believed and practice by the entire population, is now practiced by just a handful of them, where the majority of the population have become Christians. The pro's and con's responsible for the decline of their indigenous religious beliefs and practices are also discussed at the end of the thesis. It is also found that it is these few resistance traditionalists groups who still continues to uplift their age-old traditions and custom that distinguishes their ethnic identity from other tribes or sub-tribes, although it is in a declining condition. In order to understand the contemporary situation of the Chothe and their historical background it has been elaborated in the introduction, the Chothe as an old tribe of Manipur, along with their social institutions because very little literature is available on them.

#### **Findings and Key Issues of the Study**

The whole thesis comprising nine Chapters has been broadly divided into three sections. Chapters One, Two and Three served as the introduction to the thesis and the tribe "Chothe" in the study. Secondly, Chapter Four, Five and Six form the core of the thesis as

they discuss the Chothe indigenous religion, in the context of their mythology, beliefs systems and their practices. The third section, Chapters Seven and Eight constitutes the subordinate discussion to the core of the thesis, followed by Chapter nine, summary of the study.

### **Chapter One: *Introduction***

This chapter discusses the concept, definition and theoretical formulations on religion explained by various eminent scholars and many others. Secondly, a brief profile of the Chothe, statement of the problem followed by the objective and the research methodology are stated accordingly. Thirdly, a brief note on the confusion of “Chothe and Purum” tribe is described to clear the doubts among the academicians.

### **Chapter Two: *Introducing the Chothe***

Since very little literature is available this chapter describes in totality the geographical location, historical background relating to the genesis of the tribe, migration, demography, literacy and types of neighbour and their influences of the Chothe. Geographically, the Chothe are located on the eastern and western hills side of the Loktak Lake of the Manipur. From the perspective of their historical background and migration it is known that the Chothe belong to the Mongoloid racial stock and speak Tibeto-Burman language of the Sino-Tibetan branch. The Chothe are considered as one of the earliest emigrants or advanced settlers to occupy the south-western region of Manipur prior to 700 A.D. According to their oral history they believe they migrated from southern China in the early part of the Christian era and occupied north-western Myanmar (Shan kingdom), then *Khampat* (Kabaw valley) country. Subsequently they migrated to Lungleh district of Mizoram and settled there for many years before they finally entered southern Manipur and made a permanent settlement.

The Census of India 2001 gives the total Chothe population as 2675. The Chothe believe the cause of de-population or low demography is because of the natural calamities like plagues, famines, drought, wars and battles in the past, low selection potential of mates and assimilation. Severe and exterminating inter-tribal wars and battles with various neighbouring communities, and the tradition of enslaving the captives of wars seem to have been a common tradition practiced in olden days. With regard to their de-population some of them even believe in the superstitions that natural calamities, plagues and famines occurred in 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were the cause of curses from their God and ancestors for the mistakes committed in

the past by their forefathers. Some important historical records of Manipur like *Cheitharal Kumpaba (Ch.K)* and *Moirang Ningthoural Lambuba (MNL)* substantiate such evidence of wars and battles and even plagues.

According to the 2001 Census of India the literacy rate of Chothe is 72.35 % where the number of matriculates and pre-university is the highest in all the villages (see Table 10). Since the Chothe live close by the valley with the Meitei and other adjoining hill tribes like Rongmei, Anal, Moyon, Monsang, Lamkang, Kom and Chiru the frequency of acculturation and intermarriage is found to be very high. There is also inter-language influence on one another too.

### **Chapter Three: Chothe Institutions**

This chapter describes their marriage and kinship, political and economic institutions for a better contemporary understanding of the tribe in study as religion affects such institutions in different ways.

The influence of Christianity, modern education, modernisation, liberalisation, westernisation, urbanisation, globalisation and various cultural exchange programmes organised by different ethnic groups have considerably affected the marriage and kinship institutions. The traditional endogamous prescriptive marriage system of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage system which once became the core issue for the cultural anthropologists in 1950-70's is now in favour of the exogamous cross-cultural marriage system, who prefer to marry girls from outside their community. It is seen that many have adopted and preferred the modern nuclear family to the traditional joint family system. Such attitude for exogamous marriage system is also seen common now among many of the North-eastern tribes.

Lamlanghupi, considered as the parent village of all the Chothe villages still follows the traditional gerontocratic form of government i.e. Village Council system (*Hu-bungkung*) comprising of three houses or units viz.; *Urinta bungkung* (council of elders), *Tangnga-rinta bungkung* (council of middle-ages) and *Nungak-luthei bungkung* (youth's council). The *Urinta bungkung* (council of elders) is the highest executive body represented by the seven clan's heads or *pipa*. It is democratic, hierarchical and non-hereditary in principle. The other Christian Chothe villages follow the modern democratic political system comprising of two houses viz.; *Houkal* (ruling group) and *Loumi* (commoners). The members who occupied the seven posts of *Houkal* are elected for five years tenure each unlike the traditional

gerontocratic system. Though not regular, the followers of the indigenous faith still practice their chief (*Hulak*) and (*Luplak*) coronation ceremonies and other promotional ceremonies.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Chothe. Both jhum and wet cultivations are practiced but as of now majority of them shifted to wet-cultivation. The secondary source of economic income varies from village to village depending on the village location and type of religion followed by them. Most of the Christian villages derive their income by selling the natural forest produces, handicraft products like bamboo baskets, winnows, etc. But the village of Lamlanghupi basically derives their income by selling their brewed wine and liquor (*zu*) which is commercially sold to the neighbouring villages besides using it as an important food item and as indispensable ritualistic item of the people. It is found that the number of individuals engaged in the secondary and tertiary sectors i.e. Govt. employees and those engaged in various private enterprising jobs are increasing in each village with the coming of education and other job facilities.

#### **Chapter Four: Chothe Mythology: The Basic Foundation of their Beliefs and Practices**

This chapter is the first part of the core section of the thesis. Myth is generally understood as a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena. It is a traditional story accepted as history that serves to explain the world view of people and is usually connected with religion. Hence, it provides the foundation of their beliefs and practice of today. Some key points are highlighted.

The *Chothe genealogical myth* tries to explain about their world view, its creation and the origin of their religion and socio-cultural systems. Being ancestor worshipers it also shows the link between their mythical belief and the legend of “Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa”, whom they consider Pakhangpa as the avatar or Divine-incarnate of their Supreme guardian god *Pu Lungchungpa* the mythical Dragon-Python God of the earth. The Chothe believes the intercession of Lungchungpa in the form of Pakhangpa re-instills their religious faith, acknowledged later by Pakhangpa’s extraordinary greatness and mysticism.

It is seen that the *Chothe genealogical myth* also begins with the description that, in the beginning the world was empty and that the Heavenly gods and the Lower gods together created the living creatures and the mankind out of their necessity. The first creature created is assumed to be a water creature called *Ngavok*, the dog fish, followed by an ape (*Ajong*) and finally Human being (*Mamashee*) which is in accordance to the scientific theory of evolution.

It also reflects the most significant of the ‘seven natural elements’ of the world as their principal gods i.e. (1) the Heaven or Sky, (2) the Earth (3) the Sun, (4) the Moon, (5) the Fire (6) the Air and (7) the Water or Rain. These seven cosmic and natural elements is symbolically represented by the seven primary colours of the rainbow thereby relating to the etymology of the seven progeny or clans of the Chothe born by their first ancestors *Ka-chokte* or *Ka-choite* (my hold/stirred child) and *Thanidam* (the moon and sun being alright). It also describes how the Supreme-Almighty God gave in-charged the power and authority over the mythical Dragon God *Pu Lungchungpa* (the Rain or the Sea God) to oversee the descendants of *Ka-chokte* and *Thanidam*. The myth also reflects the good and the bad side of life or the conflicting nature portrayed by the Dragon and the Tiger (*Kamkeirang rengpa*). Similarly, according to their myth the typical prominent nature and character endowed and impersonated in the members of a clan is believed as the blessing bestowed upon them by the Dragon-Python God. For example, the Makan men are generally known for their craftiness and artistic skills, the *Thao* men for their braveness and courageous warrior spirits and the Khiyang for occupying high status in the society. The most important aspect of the Chothe mythology is the promised assured by the Dragon God to his people that he will come in person and dwell with them when they led a settled and prosperous life which fulfilled after many centuries in the person of the legendary King *Chothe Thangmei (Thangwai) Pakhangpa* as the Divine-incarnate of their Dragon God *Pu Lungchungpa*. Historically, it is seen that the Chothe is the only community in the state that venerates or propitiate the mythical Dragon-Python God besides the Meitei and other Sino-Tibetan speaking groups like the Chinese.

According to the sacred manuscript of “Chothe Thangmei (Thangwai) Pakhangpa”, other important literature and the oral history suggests that Chothe Thangmei Pakhangpa (*Meingai*) and Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa the first historical king of Manipur to be one and the same person born by a Chothe girl called “Daishin” the eldest daughter of a Chothe chief Surou and Lenghoinu. Pakhangpa’s mother Daishin is also known differently by different groups of people as *Khamlangtaopi* or *Thamoilembi* or *Leinung Yabirok Yakha Chanu*. But Pakhangpa father’s identity remains mystically anonymous till today. While some Meitei historians seem to wrongly project Pakhangpa’s maternal grandfather Surou to be his father, who is also known differently by others as Tarang or Tupu Likleng or Luwang Langmaipa or Nungkarakpa or Sanarakpa. Similarly Pakhangpa is also known differently by different people as “Meingai” during his childhood, ‘Thangwai atengba’ meaning, as the aide man of King Thangwai Kongding of Moirang. As “King Thingkri Nachoupa” the ninth king of

Moirang after succeeded King Thangwai Kongding. Later when Pakhangpa and his allied forces defeated the Khaba-nganba of the northern group around Imphal valley, thereby he earned the titled “Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa” a name given the by poets and singers on his coronation day as the first Sovereign ruler of the Kangla/Imphal.

It is seen that because of Pakhangpa’s mysticism and his extra-ordinary greatness and personality, the early Meitei have speculated and assumed different concepts and attempted to link with the *Sanamahism* religion mythically to establish his genealogy but failed in many ways because of incorrect inferences. Pakhangpa is also remembered for his passionate romantic long relationship with his beloved wife Sunurembi. A rare red flower called *Kharam Leisok anganba* given to his beloved girlfriend Sunurembi after his successful campaign in the north-western hills became widely known as “Sunurembi Thoukhamlei” meaning, the forbidden flower, after a decree was announced in honour of their passionate relationship and commitment forbidding any person wearing the flower with severe penalty of shaving the hair. From the perspective of oral history and various valuable manuscripts it suggests that Meingai or Chothe Thangmei/Thangwai Pakhangpa or Thingkri Nachouba or Nongda Leiren Pakhangpa was indeed a great warrior, a successful conqueror and an extra-ordinary man with certain power and vision which is why he is revered and worshipped as the avatar or Divine-incarnate of their ancestor God *Pu Lungchungpa*.

### **Chapter Five: Chothe Religious Belief System**

This chapter describes that the Chothe indigenous religious belief is polytheism comprising of cosmologic, naturalistic, totemic and animistic in nature though they believe in one Supreme Being. They also believe in a host of gods and goddesses like many other indigenous north-eastern tribes like the Ao, Angami, Lotha, Khasi, Garo and among the Indian tribes like the Santhal, Baiga, Todas, Gonds and Coorgs, etc. The Chothe being polytheistic reveres, honours and gives importance to the seven primary natural elements of the world as powerful principal gods viz.; (1) the Heavenly or Sky god, (2) the Earthly god (3) the Sun god, (4) the Moon god, (5) the Wind (Air) (6) the Fire god and (7) the Water or Rain God, besides venerating a host of other gods and goddesses. They also believed in re-birth or re-incarnation and therefore, venerate and adore their ancestors. They considered that every animate object has a soul and when they die it becomes a spirit. The Chothe strongly believes in the concept of “three worlds” viz. (1) the Heaven, (2) Hell and (3) the Middle-world. It is

believed that the dead people go to one of these worlds in accordance to his/her deeds done during his life time on earth.

It is observed that the Chothe also believes in totems. Each clan is associated with specific totemic objects as an emblem, a symbolic representation either with an animal, an insect or a plant, through various mythical stories. For example, the totem of Marim (Mareem) clan is the praying-mantis (*shomareng*), for Hiyang (Khiyang) - the hornbill (*phuirang*), Thao - the outer (*sachou*), Makan - the tiger (*kamkeirang*), Yuhlung - *U-chikte* (a brown bushed bird), and Parpa - *shirsim* (a kind of wild vegetable), etc. forbidding the clan members from killing and eating such totems and also the species of the same family.

It is found that the Chothe whether Christians or non-Christians still believes in different types of superstitions like lucky or unlucky, auspicious or inauspicious, favourable and unfavourable related to signs, omens and dreams. Out of 200 respondents both followers of indigenous faith and Christians as many as 114 (i.e. 57%) of them claimed to believed in the existence of ghost or spirits, and 86 (i.e. 43%) indicated that they did not believed it. It is found that most of the Chothe elders irrespective of their faith believed more in their superstitious signs and omens than the younger generations because of their lifelong experiences and social stigma. This significantly implies that the Chothe though Christians are not totally free from any superstitious beliefs and practices that surrounds them because of the past social stigma.

It is seen that 'taboo' meaning "ashei-asi" (prohibited from doing left side or evil or even) in Chothe which was rigidly practice in earlier days with severe penalties to the culprit is found to be liberal, tolerant and lenient now. Certain religious norms prohibited and forbidden from venturing outside the village or the house and also forbidding from doing certain works considering as inauspicious are now usually observed as observance by the entire villagers on specific ritualistic days unlike the past. For example, in the village ritual of *lamleh thoipa* (village gate ritual) and the family ritual of *tuihumpa* (water purification rite). Various social and religious norms and taboos observed on dead ceremony days by the Chothe too have become very liberal in their belief and practices.

## **Chapter Six: Chothe Religious Practices**

It begins with the Chothe "rite-de-passage" which is a complete life cycle process of rituals and ceremonies from birth to dead of a person. Although it is similar with many other societies of the world is seen to be different practically and technically at the micro level and

in its operations. For example, the taboos observed by a pregnant woman, the appeasement rite performed to the Sun and Moon gods during child delivery complication (*noupham chathak*), various stages of child's naming ceremonies like child naming (*ming bohpa*), to develop speaking (*tong-theina*) and purification of the house (*inn-thingpa*). It is also seen that the Chothe are very particular in the selection of a child's name with a belief that if an unsuitable name is given, the child would suffer from certain kinds of sicknesses until his name is changed again. The presence of two very important prescribed persons i.e. the maternal grandfather or uncle, and paternal grandmother or aunty to represent as the 'god parents' of in the child's naming ceremony is a social and religious obligation that is significantly connected with the death ceremony. This is another distinctive socio-religious custom practice by the Chothe unlike many other societies.

The youth initiation ceremony begins from the age of 14/15 known as "leibak manpa" (youth caught) to be a member of the youth congregation (*Nungak-Luthei bunkung*) by offering a rooster/hen and a bottle of liquor or a bundle of tobacco leaves if a girl. The Chothe practice three types of marriage: (1) arranged marriage (2) love marriage or elopement and (3) forced marriage. The first one is the most preferred but the second type is the most common, while the third is seldom practiced. In the strict sense no religious ritual is involved except for the customary ceremonies of paying the bride price and sending off the bride.

It is seen that the Chothe death ceremony is the most complicated one as it involves several rites and rituals even after the burial. The most important person in the death ceremony is the prescribe sword bearer (*champupa*) the "god's son" who is supposed to be the grandson of the deceased. For example, if the deceased is a maternal grandfather or uncle it is the maternal grandson who is obliged to be the sword bearer as the god's son, significantly connected to the birth and child's naming ceremonies. The Chothe grave is unique and complicated in its design since the corpse is buried not exactly below the tomb but on the western side of the tomb where a slanting coffin size hole is dug out for it. Any unnatural death like suicide or woman or child who died at the time of parturition is buried separately outside the village cemetery. Accordingly for such people different types of rituals are carried out separately like village and house purification.

It is seen that the Chothe has a set of religious rites and rituals of varying degrees from simple to complex or minor to major ceremonies. Therefore, on the basis of the elaborateness and its typical nature, it is possible for the Chothe rites and rituals to distinctively categorise into three viz. (1) village ritual, (2) family ritual and (3) personal ritual. For example, the

village rituals; *leihu pottampa* and *lamleh thoipa* are significantly distinguishable because of the elaborate rites and rituals, sacrificial offerings, divination and the observance of taboos by the entire village on such day. The family rituals; *shangkokpa* and *tuihumpa* are similarly distinguishable by the ritualistic nature as only the family members observed the ritualistic taboos either by prohibiting certain food and drinks or refraining contact with the non-family members on such particular ritualistic day. Because of the restriction and taboos most of the ritualistic activities are carried out by the assistant-priest or the family relatives like *Maksas* (brother/son-in-laws) and kindred members. In case of personal rituals; *thawai kokpa* and *punningpa* only the concern person/individual observes the religious taboos and obligation as prescribed by the ritual and is often simple and less elaborate in its activities. Sometimes such rituals are also accompanied with sacrificial offerings.

It is found that magic is seldom practice now by the Chothe unlike the past which was commonly practiced. The Chothe called imitative magic as “Doi-ai” (placing of a fowl) and the contagious magic as “Pot-sem or Kut-sem” (things prepared with hand). The former is considered deadly and dangerous often used in avenging a rival or doing away with his enemies often conducted by medicine man or professional priest, while the latter is targeted to person for personal satisfaction by hallucinating or poisoning the mind like in seducing a girl with a love charm, by distraction to lose a battle.

It is seen that the Chothe believes in varieties of talisman, amulet and charm with a belief that has certain supernatural power of bringing luck and magnetic power in accumulating wealth and also protecting them from certain misfortunes events by wading off the bad-lucks or evil eyes like; *asha-arung* (animal’s stone), *shang-rung* (paddy’s stone).

The Chothe like some other societies also considered witches as a hereditary. There are two types of witches among Chothe that are similar in nature. The first type is known as “khutchai” literally “index finger” or “khut-shei” (long hands) and sometimes called as “khutchei jum” meaning, “pointed index finger”. The second type is known as “lei-shei” meaning, “long tongue”, as her tongue is believed to protrude out when her soul wanders during her deep sleep. Both are generally considered as blood suckers or evil/ devils.

It is found that the Chothe practices different types of divinations (*Tasanpa*) since early days for various purposes and is carried out differently depending on the prescribed nature of the rituals and ceremonies. They are like; chicken leg divination, ginger, spleen and coin divinations etc. The table 22 shows that out of 200 respondents, 103 (i.e. 51.5%) persons believe in the prediction or prophesy of divination while 95 (i.e. 47.5%) persons did not

believe it. In comparison to men and women, it is found women seek divination for family and personal problems than men. However, it is observed that most of the Chothe now consult divination to the professional Meitei priest/ priestess (*Maiba/ Meibee*) secretly for their family and personal problems because of the cheap fees and also in order to maintain confidentiality from others for wrong notion and its implication about it.

### **Chapter Seven: *Festivals and Folk Culture of the Chothe***

Festivals are indispensable elements of socio-religious cultural aspects. Every society whether it is primitive or medieval or modern, celebrates different types of religious festivals and ceremonies according to their belief and concept. Some festivals are in honour of their Supreme God commemorating its birth day or to honour certain important day related with their leader's achievement or to commemorate certain events of the past.

The Chothe in olden days celebrated almost one or two festivals every month some related to spirituality other to commemorate certain socio-cultural events. But now only two major festivals are celebrated annually i.e. (1) *Innampei rin* and (2) *Achui rin*. The *innampei rin* is a post harvest festival celebrated for seven days and is divided into two parts; *innampei rin* and *bampui jairek hongpa*. It is considered as the festival of the village elders (*urinta rin*) or lineage festival (*Innku rin*) because each of the council of elders (*pipa*) brews rice-beer and invites people to join them in celebration. The significance of this festival is the privilege given to boys to propose their mature girls during this festival, and henceforth begin to serve their traditional three years marriage labour service. The *Achui rin* is a festival of yeast, commonly known as bread feast (*Butoi rin*) celebrated for seven days. This festival is considered as the youth's or common festival in which every villager participates in the gaiety dancing, singing and drinking.

The significance of documenting and describing these festivals is that it gives a holistic view of the Chothe about their belief systems and socio-religious and other cultural practices in a nutshell. The various rites, customs and ceremonies observed during these festival reveals the importance of their traditional socio-religious value systems and many insights into their rich cultural heritage and the status of their community of the past. For example, important religious ceremonies like; *Leihu athouna mokpa* (the benediction ritual) and *leihu loicheipa* (valedictory ritual) performed before and after the festival and *Lou-houpa* (the appeasement rite for the village gates deities) shows their religiosity. Other important customary and cultural ceremonies like; *think bompa - think tumpa* (the ceremony of counting

and re-assigning the political portfolios of the village council member's annually), *thoukeipa* (the official reporting ceremony), *hung matheipa* (drum rehearsal), *fho-parakapa* (the shield-movement) and *chamtun lam* (sword/war dance), *meishei huppa* (the tradition of binding torch), *tongthi gitpa* (insertion of wine pipes) and *Ishantui inpa* (drinking of turmeric juice) all significantly reflects their rich cultural heritage and value of the past.

It is observed that the religious significance of these festivals is that each festival follows a set of formula or rules that begins and ends with the offertory, benediction and thanks giving or valedictory prayer and ceremony that involve coin (*Sae junpa*) and chicken leg (*Aike jan*) divination. The prayers for a ceremony often end at the place where it starts. During festival, once they started to beat the drums it is forbidden to stop mid-way until and unless the singing and dancing session is over for different reasons of misinterpretation.

It is seen unlike in the past the Chothe now seldom organised the merit feast (*lohchou-maichou*) because of their poor economy that was once commonly organized in order to gain social status, respect, prestige and reputation in society as a wealthy and rich man. The tradition of planting a pipal or banyan tree or erecting a monolith at a particular village site is now replaced with the erection of memorial stones often by the family members.

Folk culture refers to various folk behaviour and activities which the folks or the villagers commonly practice in their daily lives. It is sad to see that most of the Chothe folk culture that was commonly practiced by them like story telling (folktales), folk dances, folksong, folk musical instruments, folk games and sports and others is fading, in which the system is now being replaced with modern and western cultural systems.

It is found that most of the Chothe folktales are dominated with magical tales, legends, romances, man-animal/bird tales and few trickster stories. Some of their magical tales show the existence of gods and demigods and their magical powers and the interrelationship with man in the same environment. For example, *Pu Kinjangtepa* and the forest gods, *Api Shumdornu*: The widow with the magic gong, and *Lungkang*: Neibui and the demigod rocks. There are also historical tales of tragedy like *Pidonnu* and *Thaowon Samtharnu* (*Nungthi Chaibi*). The tragic story of *Pidonnu* reveals the extreme rigidity of the socio-cultural in the context of strict inter-marriage rule prevailed between groups of people and it also points to the major conflict and estrangement that resulted between two friendly groups into foes i.e. Moirang (Wangoi or Yangoi kingdom) and the Chothe after the incident. The folktale *Thaowon Samtharnu* reveals one of the controversies or secrets with regards to the true identity of King Garib Niwaz or Pamheiba (1709-1748) of Manipur.

On the other hand there is also a considerable decline in traditional weavers who knows how to weave the traditional motif or design or patterns of their shawls, scarves and sarongs as they are now fond of wearing machine made clothes and other attires.

Sadly it is found that most of the Chothe especially the younger generation cannot sing their traditional folk songs anymore as they have been already influenced by the modern and western or Hindi songs and music. Therefore, most of their local songs are now in the modern form. Similarly, traditional games and sports like shot put, javelin throw, snatching of wine pot are seen to be replaced with modern games and sports like foot ball, volley ball which came along with the modern education system. This is also seen to be because of the coveted bigger prize and social prestige and its value as it is being played at the state/ national/ international levels.

## **Chapter Eight**

It explains the *factors responsible for the decline of the indigenous religion of the Chothe*. The Chothe indigenous religion once encompassing the entire community has been reduced to just a handful of 2.85% of the population. With the arrival of the British colonial rule in the North-east India the Christian missionaries also later set foot in the soil of North-east and after the Second World-War the momentum of proselytization to Christianity from their indigenous religion increased in the region, which resulted in the decline of their age-old traditional socio-cultural institutions even among the Chothe. On the basis of the interview and interview-scheduled it is found that the majority of the Chothe attributed the decline or the breakdown or the down fall of the traditional socio-religious institutions to the factors of influence of Christianity, westernisation, science and modernisation, Hinduism, internal breakdown of their social systems, liberalism, Government policies and programmes, urbanisation, environment and demographic changes as the main causes. The policy and method applied by the missionaries in the conversion are; ‘theological deceit’ like, wrong propaganda about the tribal religion; ‘other means of deceits of conviction’ like, an economic and material condition put forth to those who are economically poor to converted to Christianity if they helped them.

In final conclusion, the future perspective of the Chothe indigenous religion appears bleak since the majority of the Chothe population have been converted to Christianity and now with less than 2.85% of them beliefs and practices their indigenous religion. In the interview and interview-scheduled though all the followers of indigenous religion respondents

claimed that they will continue to stick to their age-old indigenous religion I believed that in the years to come especially, the younger generation is likely to convert to Christianity due to the strong evangelisation process. The reason is that due to low numbers, after few years when these few surviving village elders pass away it is doubtful for the few remaining village youth and leaders would be able to shoulder the burden and responsibility in maintaining all their traditional socio-cultural systems who lack deep knowledge and insight into their ancient beliefs and practices unlike their predecessors. Even now, it is observed among the Lamlanghupi that many socio-political positions remain vacant in their traditional village political organisation because they are very small in number and there are no persons to occupy those positions although they continue to uplift their tradition. So, in a short span of time after these few village elders die the history of Chothe would be a completely a different story. However, later if few of them wish to remain spiritually true indigenous believers till their death by avoiding certain rigid norms and other social and cultural practices it would be an exceptional story and a test of time. On the other hand perhaps, if a Chothe man is eventually to change his or her religion at all but not willing to convert to Christianity for certain personal reasons, then he or she is likely to convert ultimately to Sanamahism (Meitei indigenous religion) or Hinduism as an alternative in order to conform to a societal norm to be a member of a society in which he lives being a social and religious man. Therefore, the Chothe indigenous religion is likely to fade away completely from the face of the world with no person to carry on their age-old traditional systems if some kinds of reforms or incentives are not enacted at the earliest to revive their ancient religion.

Since, the Chothe indigenous religion is already in a state of decline it is feared that sooner or later it is going to vanish completely. For those elders who still follows their indigenous religion might still continue practicing but their children are likely to convert to Christianity for different reasons which are also based according to some of the respondents' views. For example, young unmarried girls are likely to marry Christians or Hindus rather than their own, thus excluding themselves from their original societal group. The reason is because majority of the people or tribe in and around the village is now dominated by Christians, and besides the trend of cross-cultural or endogamous marriage is also very common in the region. Therefore, it is most probable that a non-Christian Chothe girl is likely to marry a Christian boy and exclude herself from her original group.

Another aspect is that the village priest (*theimpu*) who is supposed to perform rites and rituals and make divination by direct or indirect contact with their God is incapable of doing

his role precisely now because of his limited knowledge in the art of magical charms and spells to invoke their gods as he lacks proper training and enthusiasm in his assigned role. Another drawback of the problem is that the Chothe village priest should be a person from the prescribed clans of Marim/Mareem or Thao or Parpa or Rangshai to conduct and performed the village rituals and ceremonies, as no other person belonging to clans other than these can take his position and role.

Another perception from the socio-cultural perspective is that since majority of the tribes in the region and the surrounding neighbouring tribes are mostly Christians now and being a tribal community there is always a tendency for the followers of Chothe indigenous religion to join the Christian tribal community sooner or later if they are at all to change their religion under certain circumstances. On the other hand, if they are not willing to convert to Christianity for personal psychological reasons, then the second option would be from the context of religious affinity. Hence, on the basis of religious affinity one is expected to join the group of Sanamahism, the Meitei indigenous religion, or Hinduism as it is dominantly found in the state among the Meitei.

Thus, the Chothe indigenous religion is a polytheistic, cosmic, nature, totemic and ancestor worshipers besides several lower gods and goddesses. The Chothe religion and community as a whole is transforming from traditional to entirely Christianity and modernity but even today we still find some relevancies of their traditional beliefs and practices in the society. Despite the widespread of Christianity and westernization some of these practices survived from which this research work could gather some information to record and document it. It might be mentioned here that these age old socio-cultural institutions like marriage and family, political, economy and religion that are passed on from hundreds of years are breaking down and are on the verge of extinction due to the rapid evangelization and westernization. In this regard the UNESCO in 2010 has pointed out that linguistically Chothe is one of the endangered tribes and therefore more research works and studies are called for. This research work is a humble attempt to explore and help preserve the indigenous religion in particular and the culture and tradition of the Chothe tribe in general.

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