

“A NARRATIVE OF TANGKHUL HUNDUNG: MY PRISTINE VILLAGE”

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ABSTRACT

The Tangkhul people, also known as the Tangkhul Nagas, are a culturally rich Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group residing along the Indo-Myanmar border, primarily in Ukhrul and Kamjong districts of Manipur, India, and parts of Myanmar. This study focuses on Tangkhul Hundung, a village renowned for its strong community bonds, rich agricultural practices, and vibrant cultural heritage. The villagers, speaking the 'kavolo' dialect, are predominantly cultivators and are known for their hospitality, health, and unity. Tangkhul Hundung is managed by a village court, ensuring peaceful resolution of issues and harmonious living. The history of the Tangkhul Nagas traces back to the Mongolia Province of China, with significant migration events shaping their current settlement in Northeast India. The transformation from a life of animistic practices to Christianity in 1936 brought profound changes in their lifestyle. Festivals, especially the Mahaphanik (Bee Festival), play a crucial role in their social life, reflecting their gratitude for harvests and community well-being. The study underscores the villagers' dedication to non-violence, equality, and communal love, making Tangkhul Hundung an exemplary model of cultural integration and peaceful coexistence.

Introduction

The Tangkhul people, also known as the Tangkhul Nagas, are a prominent Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group residing predominantly along the Indo-Myanmar border. This community primarily inhabits the Ukhrul and Kamjong districts in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur, with a significant presence also in neighboring regions of Myanmar. The name "Tangkhul" was given by the Meitei people, the major ethnic group of Manipur.

Renowned for their rich cultural heritage, the Tangkhuls are particularly noted for their love of music. Their songs are typically characterized by a calm and serene quality, mirroring the peaceful lifestyle of the Tangkhul people. Music plays an integral role in their daily lives and social functions, reflecting the community's deep-seated traditions and harmonious way of life.

Festivals hold significant importance in the social and cultural life of the Tangkhuls. These celebrations are intricately linked to their agricultural practices, which have been the primary occupation of their ancestors for generations. As an agrarian society, the Tangkhuls' festivals are tied to the seasonal farming calendar, marking various phases of agricultural activities such as planting, harvesting, and other farming-related milestones. These festivals not only serve as a time for communal gathering and celebration but also reinforce social bonds and cultural values within the community.

Among the most notable Tangkhul festivals is Luir Phanit, which marks the sowing season. This festival is a time of joy and merriment, where traditional songs, dances, and feasts are enjoyed by the community. Another significant festival is the Mangkhap, celebrated during the harvest season, which includes thanksgiving rituals for a bountiful yield. These festivals are a testament to the Tangkhuls' deep connection with nature and their reliance on the agricultural cycle for sustenance.

The Tangkhul community comprises approximately 500 villages, each with its distinct dialect. Despite the linguistic diversity, Tangkhul Tui, also known as Tangk tui, serves as the common and most widely spoken language among the Tangkhuls. This shared language facilitates communication and unity among the various Tangkhul villages, preserving a sense of collective identity and cultural coherence.

The Tangkhul society is traditionally organized and well-structured. Each village operates autonomously, with its own local governance systems led by village elders and chiefs. These leaders play crucial roles in maintaining

social order, resolving disputes, and upholding customs and traditions. The Tangkhul people follow a patrilineal system of inheritance and clan affiliation, which forms the basis of their social structure.

Historically, the Tangkhuls have been known for their bravery and resilience. During British colonial rule in India, the Tangkhuls actively participated in various resistance movements, showcasing their indomitable spirit and desire for self-determination. In contemporary times, the Tangkhuls continue to strive for the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage while adapting to modernity and socio-economic changes.

The traditional attire of the Tangkhul people is another aspect of their rich cultural heritage. Their clothing is adorned with intricate patterns and vibrant colors, symbolizing different aspects of their identity and social status. The traditional dress for men includes a wraparound cloth known as 'pheichom' and a shawl called 'haora,' while women wear a skirt called 'phanek' and a shawl known as 'khui.' These garments are often handwoven and passed down through generations, reflecting the community's skilled craftsmanship and artistic sensibilities.

In recent years, the Tangkhul people have made significant strides in education and economic development. Many Tangkhuls have pursued higher education and professional careers, contributing to various fields such as education, healthcare, politics, and the arts. Despite these advancements, the Tangkhuls remain deeply rooted in their cultural traditions, continuing to celebrate their festivals, music, and customs with fervor and pride.

Tangkhul Hundung

Tangkhul Hundung is a village located south of Ukhrul in Manipur, bordered by Thoyee in the west, Shingkap in the north, Ithum in the south, and Alang in the east. The local dialect of Tangkhul Hundung is 'kavolo.' The villagers are predominantly cultivators, growing a variety of crops such as rice, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, cauliflower, beans, mustard, and naga chilies. Hunting and fishing are still practiced for food consumption. The village has 137 houses and an approximate population of 600.

Tangkhul Hundung is blessed with rich soil and minerals, which support the cultivation of various crops and fruits. The villagers are kind-hearted, good-looking, and notably healthy, with no reported cases of disabilities or severe illnesses. One of the village's most admirable traits is its strong sense of community; despite belonging to different clans or communities, the villagers live as one family, showing love and respect for one another. Guests are warmly welcomed and treated as part of the village.

The village is governed by a village court composed of selected members who manage all village affairs, including development projects and festivals. Their efficient management ensures that any social or political issues are resolved peacefully, maintaining a harmonious environment. Tangkhul Hundung is also recognized by other Tangkhul villages for its exceptional hospitality and kindness. The village is particularly famous for its Mahaphanik festival, also known as the Bee Festival.

History of the Tangkhul Nagas

The Tangkhul Nagas, once renowned headhunters, trace their ancient roots to the Mongolia Province of China. Their history is steeped in rich cultural traditions and remarkable resilience. The journey of the Tangkhul Nagas from their original homeland to their current regions is a story of endurance, adaptation, and cultural evolution.

The Tangkhuls have inhabited the hilly and mountainous regions of northeastern India and parts of Myanmar since the 11th century. These rugged landscapes have shaped their way of life, compelling them to rely heavily on wildlife and nature for sustenance. Traditionally, the Tangkhuls have been skilled hunters and foragers, adept at navigating their natural surroundings and utilizing the resources available to them for survival. This deep connection with nature is evident in their cultural practices, rituals, and everyday life.

Among the various Naga tribes, the Tangkhuls stand out as one of the most distinguished groups. Their distinct language, customs, and social structures have garnered them a prominent place within the broader Naga community. Historically, the Tangkhuls, like many other Naga tribes, engaged in headhunting as a warrior practice, which was integral to their cultural identity and social hierarchy.

The migration of the Tangkhul Nagas from China to different parts of northeastern India was driven by a combination of wars, hardships, and the search for more hospitable lands. This arduous journey took place around 10,000 B.C., marking a significant epoch in their history. During this migration, some members of the Tangkhul community stayed back in China, while others ventured towards the Indian subcontinent, eventually settling in

the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. This dispersion led to the formation of various Tangkhul settlements across these regions, each adapting to the local environment while retaining their core cultural identity.

A pivotal moment in the history of the Tangkhul Nagas, along with other related tribes such as the Maos, Poumeis, Marams, and Thangals, was their gathering at Makhel village in the Senapati district of Manipur. This convergence was not just a migration waypoint but a significant cultural and historical event. At Makhel, the tribes erected monoliths, known as Maki, to commemorate their separation and dispersal into different directions. These monoliths, standing to this day, serve as enduring symbols of their shared heritage and the unity they once experienced before branching out to form distinct communities.

The erection of monoliths at Makhel was a monumental event that encapsulated the Tangkhuls' collective memory and their reverence for ancestors. These stone structures are not merely historical artifacts but sacred sites that continue to hold cultural and spiritual significance for the Tangkhul people. They represent the enduring spirit of the Tangkhuls and their determination to preserve their heritage and honor their past.

Throughout their migration and subsequent settlement, the Tangkhuls have maintained a strong sense of community and cultural identity. Their social structures are characterized by a deep sense of kinship and mutual support. Traditional governance systems, led by village elders and chiefs, have played a crucial role in maintaining social order and cultural continuity. These leaders are responsible for upholding customs, resolving disputes, and guiding the community through various challenges.

Despite the geographical dispersal, the Tangkhuls have managed to retain their linguistic and cultural coherence. The Tangkhul language, with its various dialects, serves as a vital link among the different Tangkhul villages. This linguistic unity is a testament to their resilience and adaptability in preserving their heritage across generations.

The Tangkhul Nagas' journey from their ancestral lands in Mongolia to their current homes in northeastern India is a testament to their resilience, adaptability, and cultural richness. Their history is marked by significant events, such as the gathering at Makhel and the erection of the monoliths, which continue to shape their identity and community life. As they navigate the complexities of modernity, the Tangkhuls remain deeply rooted in their traditions, ensuring that their unique cultural legacy is preserved for future generations.

History of Tangkhul Hundung

The people of Tangkhul Hundung, known as Kabvomee by other Tangkhul villages, have inhabited this region for over a millennium, with their presence tracing back to the 11th century. Nestled in the verdant hills of Manipur, this village has a rich and complex history that has shaped its unique cultural identity. Tangkhul Hundung is home to nine clans: Rimai, Kashung, Awungshi, Saru, Shinglai, Moli, Khonghay, Tantene, and Langza. Each clan has its own distinct traditions and histories, yet they all contribute to the vibrant tapestry of the village's heritage.

In the early days, life in Hundung was marked by its harshness and the villagers' barbaric practices. The villagers worshipped spirits known as runfu, or demons, and performed numerous rituals to appease these entities. One such ritual was Chuithung, an alcohol festival characterized by feasting, dancing, and the consumption of large quantities of alcohol by young boys and girls. This festival was a highlight of the villagers' social calendar, reflecting their inclination towards revelry and indulgence. Hunting and farming were the primary occupations, but the villagers also spent much of their leisure time drinking rice beer in large groups, reveling in a life of pleasure.

The introduction of Christianity to Tangkhul Hundung on September 4, 1936, marked a significant turning point in the village's history. The arrival of Christian missionaries brought profound changes to the villagers' beliefs and way of life. Christianity instilled a sense of discipline and purpose among the people, leading them to abandon their previous practices and rituals. The villagers embraced their new faith with fervor, dedicating themselves to God and adopting a more structured and moral way of living. This transformation had far-reaching effects on the social and cultural fabric of the village.

In the decades following the introduction of Christianity, Tangkhul Hundung experienced remarkable progress and development. The village, blessed with rich soil and abundant natural resources, became prosperous. Agriculture flourished, and the villagers' standard of living improved significantly. Today, Tangkhul Hundung is

a thriving community where the people are healthy, kind-hearted, and united. Despite belonging to different clans, the villagers live together as one family, treating each other with respect and equality.

The story of Tangkhul Hundung is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people. From its early days of barbaric rituals and indulgence to its current state of prosperity and harmony, the village has undergone a remarkable journey. The legacy of the nine clans continues to thrive, enriching the cultural heritage of Tangkhul Hundung and ensuring that its history is remembered and celebrated by future generations.

Festivals of Tangkhul Hundung

Tangkhul Hundung is renowned for its vibrant and culturally significant festivals, with the Mahaphanik, or Bee Festival, standing out as one of the most celebrated. Held annually between October 10th and 20th, the festival takes place just before the harvest season, marking a time of both celebration and gratitude.

The Mahaphanik Festival lasts for two to three days, transforming Tangkhul Hundung into a lively hub of activity and festivity. Villagers prepare for this grand occasion by showcasing the best of their food, vegetables, and crops. The feast is a highlight of the festival, featuring a rich array of dishes such as chicken curry, beef, pork, and the unique and traditional bee delicacy, which is a local specialty enjoyed by all. The preparation and presentation of these dishes are a testament to the villagers' culinary skills and their commitment to celebrating their agricultural bounty.

During the Bee Festival, the entire village comes alive with vibrant entertainment. The youth of Tangkhul Hundung play a central role in organizing and hosting various activities, including traditional dances, music performances, and games. These events not only provide entertainment but also reinforce the community spirit and cultural heritage of the village. The festival serves as a social gathering point, drawing visitors from neighboring villages who come to savor the delectable food and partake in the lively celebrations.

The Mahaphanik Festival is not just a time of revelry; it also holds deep spiritual significance. It is a moment for the villagers to express their gratitude to God for the guidance and protection received throughout the year. The festival serves as an occasion to seek blessings for a bountiful harvest and the continued well-being of the village. Through rituals and prayers, the villagers acknowledge their dependence on divine favor for their agricultural success and communal prosperity.

The Bee Festival exemplifies the rich cultural traditions and communal bonds of Tangkhul Hundung. It is a time when the village's historical practices blend with contemporary celebrations, creating a unique and cherished experience. The festival not only strengthens local ties but also fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among the villagers. As the festival draws to a close, the community reflects on the blessings of the past year and looks forward to a future filled with hope and abundance.

Culture

The culture of Tangkhul Hundung is a rich tapestry woven from deep-rooted traditional beliefs, practices, and customs that have been preserved and cherished for centuries. This cultural heritage reflects the village's historical evolution and the enduring values of its people.

Ancient tools and weapons, such as bows and arrows, axes, knives, swords, and spears, hold significant historical and cultural value for the people of Tangkhul Hundung. These artifacts are not merely relics of the past but are revered symbols of their ancestors' craftsmanship and way of life. Despite the passage of time, these traditional tools are still respected and used in various aspects of daily life, maintaining a tangible connection to the village's history.

One of the defining features of Tangkhul Hundung is its egalitarian social structure. The village operates without any formal social hierarchy, and every individual is treated with equal love and respect. This sense of equality is a cornerstone of the community's values, fostering a familial atmosphere where everyone lives together as one cohesive unit. The absence of social stratification reinforces the strong bonds between villagers and enhances their collective sense of identity and belonging.

Artisanship is another vital aspect of Tangkhul Hundung's cultural heritage. The villagers are skilled in creating traditional attire that reflects their unique identity. Men typically wear Lairung, a traditional garment that includes the Kabung Hora leishing, a long shawl made from hand-woven materials. This attire is both functional and symbolic, representing the village's craftsmanship and aesthetic sensibilities. Women, on the other hand, adorn themselves in saikhui mingohairo kasaing, a type of phanek, which is a traditional wrap-around skirt. These garments are not only practical but also serve as a visual representation of the village's cultural heritage.

Traditional items such as Kazai (spear), Khey (long knife), Barai (traditional basket), and Mahaa (axe) continue to be integral to the daily lives of the villagers. These items are used in various activities, including hunting, cultivation, and domestic chores. Their continued use highlights the villagers' respect for traditional practices and their practical application in modern life.

Hunting and cultivation remain the primary sources of livelihood in Tangkhul Hundung. The villagers' deep connection to the land and their reliance on traditional practices for sustenance underscore the enduring importance of these activities in their cultural identity.

Festivals play a crucial role in interpreting and celebrating the village's social life, beliefs, culture, and customs. They serve as a vibrant expression of the community's values and provide an opportunity for villagers to come together, celebrate their heritage, and reinforce their communal bonds. Through these festivals, the rich cultural traditions of Tangkhul Hundung are preserved and passed down through generations, ensuring that the village's unique identity remains a vital part of its social fabric.

Religion

Christianity is the predominant and singular religion practiced by the villagers of Tangkhul Hundung and the broader Tangkhul Naga community. The adoption of Christianity by the Tangkhuls marks a significant chapter in their history, reflecting both their openness to new ideas and their adaptability in the face of external influences.

The Tangkhuls were among the first communities in Manipur to embrace Christianity. This transformative shift occurred during the period of British colonial rule in India, which facilitated the spread of Christian missions and the introduction of Christian teachings to various regions. Prior to this religious transition, the Tangkhuls practiced their ancestral religion known as Hao. This indigenous faith was deeply intertwined with their daily life, cultural practices, and societal norms, embodying a complex system of spiritual beliefs and rituals specific to each village.

The spread of Christianity throughout the Tangkhul community was a gradual process, influenced by the efforts of missionaries who arrived in the region to spread their faith. The new religion provided an alternative framework of beliefs and practices, which the Tangkhuls eventually embraced with enthusiasm. By adopting Christianity, the Tangkhul community found a unifying spiritual identity that transcended their diverse traditional beliefs and customs.

Despite the widespread adoption of Christianity, the traditional beliefs, customs, and practices of the Tangkhuls continue to hold an integral place in their cultural identity. The village of Tangkhul Hundung, along with other Tangkhul settlements, has managed to harmoniously blend their Christian faith with their rich cultural heritage. Traditional practices, ceremonies, and rituals are often incorporated into Christian worship and celebrations, creating a unique synthesis of faith and culture.

For instance, many of the village's traditional festivals, which were originally rooted in ancestral religious practices, are now celebrated with Christian significance. This adaptation allows the villagers to honor their cultural traditions while aligning with their Christian beliefs. The integration of traditional and Christian elements enriches their cultural expressions and helps maintain a sense of continuity with their ancestral past.

The preservation of traditional customs alongside the practice of Christianity exemplifies the Tangkhul community's ability to adapt and evolve while maintaining a deep connection to their heritage. Their religious landscape reflects a broader narrative of cultural resilience and integration, where new beliefs and practices are woven into the existing cultural framework rather than completely replacing it.

Conclusion

The people and culture of Tangkhul Hundung are truly remarkable, presenting a compelling example of unity, hospitality, and cultural resilience. Despite belonging to different clans, the villagers of Tangkhul Hundung embody a spirit of togetherness and mutual respect that transcends clan boundaries. This sense of unity is reflected in their daily interactions, communal activities, and the warm welcome they extend to visitors and outsiders. Their inclusive and friendly nature makes Tangkhul Hundung a particularly inviting destination for tourists seeking to experience authentic and harmonious village life.

One of the most striking aspects of life in Tangkhul Hundung is the villagers' approach to handling problems and political issues. The community is known for its calm and peaceful resolution of conflicts, setting a notable example of non-violence and constructive problem-solving. This approach not only maintains social harmony but also fosters a sense of trust and cooperation among the villagers. Their ability to address challenges with a measured and thoughtful demeanor underscores their commitment to maintaining a peaceful and supportive environment.

This study delves into the lives of the Tangkhul Hundung villagers, offering a comprehensive exploration of their history, culture, religion, and festivals. It sheds light on how these elements interplay to shape the unique identity of the village. The historical journey of Tangkhul Hundung, from its early days to its current state of prosperity, is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people. The rich cultural traditions, including traditional attire, festivals, and artisanal skills, provide a vibrant tapestry of the village's heritage.

Religion plays a central role in the lives of the villagers, with Christianity being the predominant faith. However, the integration of traditional beliefs and practices with Christian teachings creates a distinctive spiritual landscape that reflects the community's respect for their heritage. The celebration of festivals, which blend traditional customs with Christian elements, exemplifies the village's ability to honor its past while embracing new beliefs.

The villagers of Tangkhul Hundung also demonstrate a deep respect for nature and wildlife, living in harmony with their environment. Their agricultural practices, traditional tools, and reverence for natural resources highlight their sustainable approach to living. The village's ability to balance modern influences with traditional ecological knowledge underscores their commitment to preserving their natural surroundings for future generations.

Central to the village's way of life is the sense of unity and love that pervades their community. The absence of social hierarchy, coupled with a culture of mutual respect and inclusivity, fosters a supportive and cohesive social environment. This collective spirit is evident in the villagers' interactions, their handling of conflicts, and their shared celebrations.

Tangkhul Hundung stands as a model of harmonious living, where tradition and modernity coexist in a balanced and respectful manner. The villagers' commitment to unity, peace, and cultural preservation, combined with their welcoming nature and reverence for their environment, makes Tangkhul Hundung a truly exceptional and enriching place. This study highlights the various facets of life in the village, illustrating how the people of Tangkhul Hundung maintain their cultural integrity while adapting to contemporary influences, and how their communal values and harmonious lifestyle offer valuable lessons in unity and respect.