Religious beliefs and practices of Thadou tribe in Chandel district, Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Thadou tribe is living in the Chandel district of Manipur. Rice is their principal food and they are non-vegetarians and fond of drinking wine made from rice or maize. Their family is an inherently joint family. Marriage is through negotiation known as Neila. They are controlled by their Chiefs. Agriculture is the main occupation of many Thadou. They believed in one Supreme God called Chung Pathien. It is the concept of Chung Pathien or the source of "All Creation" that is considered to be the highest benevolent God who lives in heaven or sky. Goodness and kindness are associated with the benevolent spirit while all the misfortune, diseases, and death, etc are believed to be the work of evil spirits. Ritual ceremonies are closely related to malevolent spirits to avoid being troubled and to benevolent spirits for ensuring good health and prosperity. Primitive faith and belief underwent change with Christianity. Most of the component of the study based on ethnography account. This paper mainly highlighted their beliefs, rituals, and practices of the Thadou tribe in Chandel district.

Keywords — Thadou, Supreme God, Chung Pathien, Benevolent, Malevolent Spirits, Chandel District, Manipur, Ethnography

1. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is grouped into four main ethnic communities - Meiteis, Meitei pangals those inhabiting the valley and 33 major tribes in the hills dividing into two main ethno denominations, namely Nagas and Kuki-Chins. According to 2001 census, the Scheduled Tribes population was 7.41 lakhs. Thadous is a Kuki tribe of Manipur. They are dispersed in several districts of Manipur and also recognized scheduled tribes living 35,086 (32.3% of ST population) in Chandel district of Manipur. The total Thadou population in Manipur was 1, 90,595. Chandel District (formerly known as Tengnoupal District) came into existence on May 13th, 1974. This district is located in the south-eastern part of Manipur. It is the border district of the state. Its neighbors are Myanmar in the south, Ukhrul District in the east, Churachandpur District in the south and west, and Thoubal District in the north. It is about 64 km away from Imphal. National Highway No. 39 passes through this district. Moreh is only town where the international trade center of the state lies on the southernmost part of Chandel District. When the Trans-Asian Super Highway comes into existence, Chandel district will be one of the gateways to the Asian countries. It is a hill district with an area of 3,313 sq km. It has four subdivision namely Chakpikarong, Chandel, Machu, Tengnoupal. These studies are based on ethnographic method of beliefs and practices of Thadou people living areas in Chandel district of Manipur.

Thadous is one of the hill tribes of North-east India who live in more specific areas of Manipur. Thadous are the second largest tribe in Manipur. Thadous are non-vegetarians and fond of drinking wine made from rice or maize. Generally, Thadou family is an inherently joint family. Marriage is through negotiation known as Neila. Thadous are controlled by their Chiefs. Agriculture is the main occupation of many Thadou. Basketry, poultry, weaving, and cane work are the traditional crafts of Thadous. From time immemorial, the Thadous have a culture of their own and distinct language, literature, dress, social life, and self-government, livelihood, defence, marriage, divorce, naming a child, Kut Festivals, Sagol Kengkhai, Vaphol lam, Lakoi lam, Khongbai lam, Lamkuol, Saipikhup, such, folk dances, Jhumming, Domestic animals, Religion, Hunting etc. Thadous are as a tribe and as a language-cum-culture and customs. Thadou tribe covered about 32 clan/sub-clan were classified by the British Ethnological Research Department.

2. BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Supreme God of Thadou called Chung Pathien. He is considered to be the highest benevolent God who lives in heaven or sky. He is believed to have created the universe and all the living beings. All the people firmly believe that everything concerned with prosperity, growth, and strength in life is nothing but the free gift of Chung Pathien. He is considered omnipotent and omniscient. Thus, he is all powerful but he does not want any propitiation or worship or appeasement. Therefore, they never constructed any place of worship nor did they offer any sacrifices to the Supreme Being but rather to certain spirits called Thilhas, both benevolent and malevolent who wield a profound influence on their life and culture. Goodness and kindness are associated with the benevolent spirit while all the misfortune, diseases, and death, etc are believed to be the work of evil spirits which needs to be
appeased or propitiated. So, elaborate rituals with offerings and sacrifices of animals or whatever is required must be performed to appease the evil spirits with the belief that if the evil spirit gets satisfaction out of the sacrificial offerings, it will not harm them. Hills, forests, and rivers are conceived as having some potentialities and the people have to interact with them all the time for their existence and perpetuation. They offer sacrifices of different kinds of animals to the selected places wherever they consider being the abode of spirits. So, ritual ceremonies are closely related to malevolent spirits to avoid being troubled and to appease evil spirits for ensuring good health and prosperity.

3. CEREMONY

Thadou society is religious ritual forms an integral. Since they believe in predominance and interference of supernaturalism in their daily affair, a number of rituals are performed. Some important rituals are: Chang- Ai is a festival performed by a person who harvests paddy much above his requirement for more than a decade and express thanks to God for beautiful harvest conducted under sole supervision and direction of women. Sa-Ai ceremony is performed by man who kills a tiger, an eagle (Muvanlai), a wild bear, Thoche and Vengke. And the ritual is performed to gain complete dominance over spirit of killed animals. Chon ceremony can only be performed by a person kills 7 each of animals killed in Sa- Ai and everything else must be in multiple of seven. Khuongchoi Ceremony concerns religious rites involving young boy and girl directly in competition with evil spirit, called Thilha, in order to earn fame for Lom or young organization of village, which combines with a sense of festivity. Besides they also perform certain ritual to please supernatural being for socio-economic and another purpose in their day to day life. Today, primitive faith and belief express with Christianity. Their ignorance and belief which led them to offer sacrifice and offering to evil spirit are ceased. Their belief in existence of one God makes it easier for them to profess Christianity, which in turn has a profound impact on their socio-cultural life.

4. FAMILY INSTITUTION

Thadous family is patriarchal, the father is the head of the house. His words are obeyed by his wife and children. They practice both joint and nuclear family. Permanent family in which the eldest son called „Upa” lives with his parents, unmarried brothers and sisters, in addition to his own children. Essentially, type of family of the eldest married son of a man having three or four generations living together is called a joint family. Another type of family is called a nuclear family where younger brothers called “Naopa” established their own family with his wife and children. However, such nuclear family becomes joint family in course of time, when a man forming nuclear has a married son with his own family and children.

5. MARRIAGE

In terms of marriage, there are four forms of marriages among the Thadou: Chongmu, Sahapsat, jol-lha’,kijammang. The latter two, Sahapsat, jol-lha’, are non-ceremonial betrothal forms akin to elopement. The first of these forms involves the following elements 1) the negotiation of a bride-price between the parents of the groom and the parents of the bride 2) the establishment of a date for the removal of the bride from her parents’ house to the home of her espoused 3) the sending (by the groom) of strong elements 1) the negotiation of a bride marriage is performed by man who kills a tiger, an eagle (Muvanlai), a wild bear, Thoche and Vengke. And the ritual is performed to gain complete dominance over spirit of killed animals. Chon ceremony can only be performed by a person kills 7 each of animals killed in Sa- Ai and everything else must be in multiple of seven. Khuongchoi Ceremony concerns religious rites involving young boy and girl directly in competition with evil spirit, called Thilha, in order to earn fame for Lom or young organization of village, which combines with a sense of festivity. Besides they also perform certain ritual to please supernatural being for socio-economic and another purpose in their day to day life. Today, primitive faith and belief express with Christianity. Their ignorance and belief which led them to offer sacrifice and offering to evil spirit are ceased. Their belief in existence of one God makes it easier for them to profess Christianity, which in turn has a profound impact on their socio-cultural life.

6. BIRTH

Birth of a child is given high importance. For barren women, certain rite is usual performed at her parental home. Since descent is reckoned in male line preference is always given for a son than daughter. A child is given a name as soon as it is known whether it is a boy or a girl. It is customary to add last name of paternal grandfather/grandmother to name of eldest grandson/granddaughter. Similarly, a part of name of maternal grandfather/ grandmother is added to name second son/ daughter. Other children are named after any friend or near relative of both father and mother. Celebration of child birth called Naodop-ju and Naodopare prepared for local midwife including close kinsmen of family. Nodop-ju is name of wine (now replaced by tea) prepared and naodop-an is food prepared for occasion. After a few day time or after two or three years a ceremony called ‘Naopui’ is done. Here a child is brought to its maternal uncle’s house with gift of traditional shawl meant for maternal grandparent and rice beer (no tea) which is served by their Tucha and Becha. Maternal uncle in return kills a pig or mithun for feast keeping hind leg called Samal of killed animal for child’s family to take back with them. He then performs Lhalho (a rite to ward off the evil eye and any future illnesses).

7. DEATH

Broadly death is categorized as natural and unnatural and accordingly the modes of disposal differ from one another. When a person dies of disease or of old age such a death is considered as natural death which is called Thipha. If, however, the body of a person gets swollen before death, it is considered as a case of unnatural death called Thipom. A person who dies in accidents or mishaps like drowning, burning, falling, etc or attack by wild animals or leprosy and epidemic diseases, suicide or is killed by enemies, such deaths are considered as unnatural deaths called Thise. Death occurring for the first time in a family called Sais is also considered as unnatural. Thadous in olden days blame all death whether natural or unnatural to be the work of Thilha (evil spirit) and as such when a person died the men shout out “Where is the Thilha who has taken you away? Let it show itself and tell what will kill it” then they take a dao and hack pillar and post to show their temper and determination of what they will do to the Thilha. Disposal of death varied according to the nature and classification of death. However, with Christianity such belief has ceased. But the belief still continues in some forms when modern medical doctors fail to provide definite reason for the cause of sickness or death. Today all kinds of death whether natural or unnatural have been buried in the village cemetery in accordance with Christian faith by ordained Pastor.

8. DIVORCE

In Thado society, it is permissible to divorce a wife under certain circumstances which may on account of lunacy, cruelty, adultery, repeated unfaithfulness, barrenness, etc. Here, both the husband and wife are equally liable to pay fines, depending on
who was judged to be at fault of the husband, all in addition to bride prices, he would be asked to pay one mithun as divorce price. On the other hand, if a woman commits adultery with another name, the husband divorce her. In this case no fine is imposed. Besides a husband has the right to divorce his wife on the ground of infertility. In this case, the husband has to find one mithun as divorce price. A wife can also be divorced if she disobeys her husband repeatedly and misbehave with the family members while sending back to her parents’ house, she may be given a mithun as divorce price.

9. DOWRY
From an early period dowry has become an important part of the customary laws of the Thadous. It binds the relationship between the two families. The dowry shows a love intimate relationship between the two families in every condition of life whether in times of tears, joys, death, etc. It is regarded as compulsory and necessary for a bridegroom to pay dowry to his wife. It is still in practice among the Thadous.

10. SUCCESSION AND INHERITANCE
The descent is reckoned through male line and inheritance is primogeniture. Eldest son inherits deceased father's moveable and immoveable property. However he has no say over question of property as long as his father lives. No daughter can inherit her father's property even though she may be the only child of her parents. If a family has no son, ancestral property is generally passed on to the nearest male relatives. Thempu literally means wise man, which refers to the Thadou priest and physician. In earlier days the thempu plays an important role wherein almost every occasion his help and guidance is needed. He attends to all sickness, childbirth, marriage, and death. He presides on all religious and social ceremonies. In fact his presence is needed in all the life cycle ceremonies of the traditional Thadou-Kuki life. After Christianity the role played by the Thempu has been replaced by ordaining Pastor and Deacons of the Church.

11. DRESS HABIT
In terms of dress, costmary dresses are different from one tribal community to other tribal community. Thadous men usually wear loin-cloths. It is somewhat like a“ dhoi”. They also wear cloth as a “pugri” about aard or yard or just a little longer. It is tied around the head with the ends or one end sticking up in front. Women wear loin- cloths “Khamtang” which are wrapped around their waists and reach a little over half-way down their thighs. Attached to the cloth, something separately is a string which is passed round the waist and so holds it up. In addition, they wear breast cloth which is wrapped tight round.

12. HUNTING
Hunting is one of the most popular games of the most popular games of the Thadous. They will spend most of their time in the jungles to catch wild animals. They are expert in setting up traps. For instance, a small pine of decomposing animal fresh is placed inside the trap to attract the animal, when the beast touches it, it releases a trigger and thus causes the heavy platform of logs to fall on the prey and thereby may crush it in use. Many kinds of tree gun are also used for birdlime while trapping the smaller sorts of birds.

13. KUTFESTIVAL
The celebration of kut is held by the community after harvesting and gathering of rice from their Jhum fields. In this festival mithuns and pigs are slaughtered for the community's lavish feasting. The festivals were made livelier with the beating of drums, chiming of gongs, accompanied by songs and dances. After the performance of necessary rites and offering of thanks giving prayers to athen (God), the community enjoyed the feast along with various kinds of wine prepared by themselves. The festivals which served as a means of amusement were celebrated enthusiastically day and night which continued for about a week.

14. CONCLUSION
It can be concluded that Thadous are as a tribe and have a language-cum-culture, customs, beliefs and practices. Thadou believed in one Supreme God called Chung Pathien. He is considered to be the highest benevolent God who lives in heaven or sky. He is believed to have created the universe and all the living beings. They believed, Goodness and kindness are associated with the benevolent spirit while all the misfortune, diseases and death, etc. are to be the work of evil spirits which needs to be appeased or propitiated. The coming of Christianity, their belief in existence of one God makes it easier for them which in turn has a profound impact in their socio-cultural life.

15. REFERENCES

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