

SIGNIFICANCE AND SYMBOLISM OF TATTOO CULTURE AMONG THE NAGAS

Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment for the award of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History and Archaeology

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Yilobemo bearing registration No. 785/2017 has completed his research work on “Significance and symbolism of tattoo culture among the Nagas” under my guidance and supervision.

The present work is original in its content and has not been submitted in part or full for a degree or diploma in any other university.

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DECLARATION

I, Mr. Yilobemo, hereby declare that the Ph.D. Thesis, titled “Significance and symbolism of tattoo culture among the Nagas”, submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, has been carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. R. Chumbeno Ngullie. The work is original, and the thesis or a part of it has not been previously submitted to any other university or institute.

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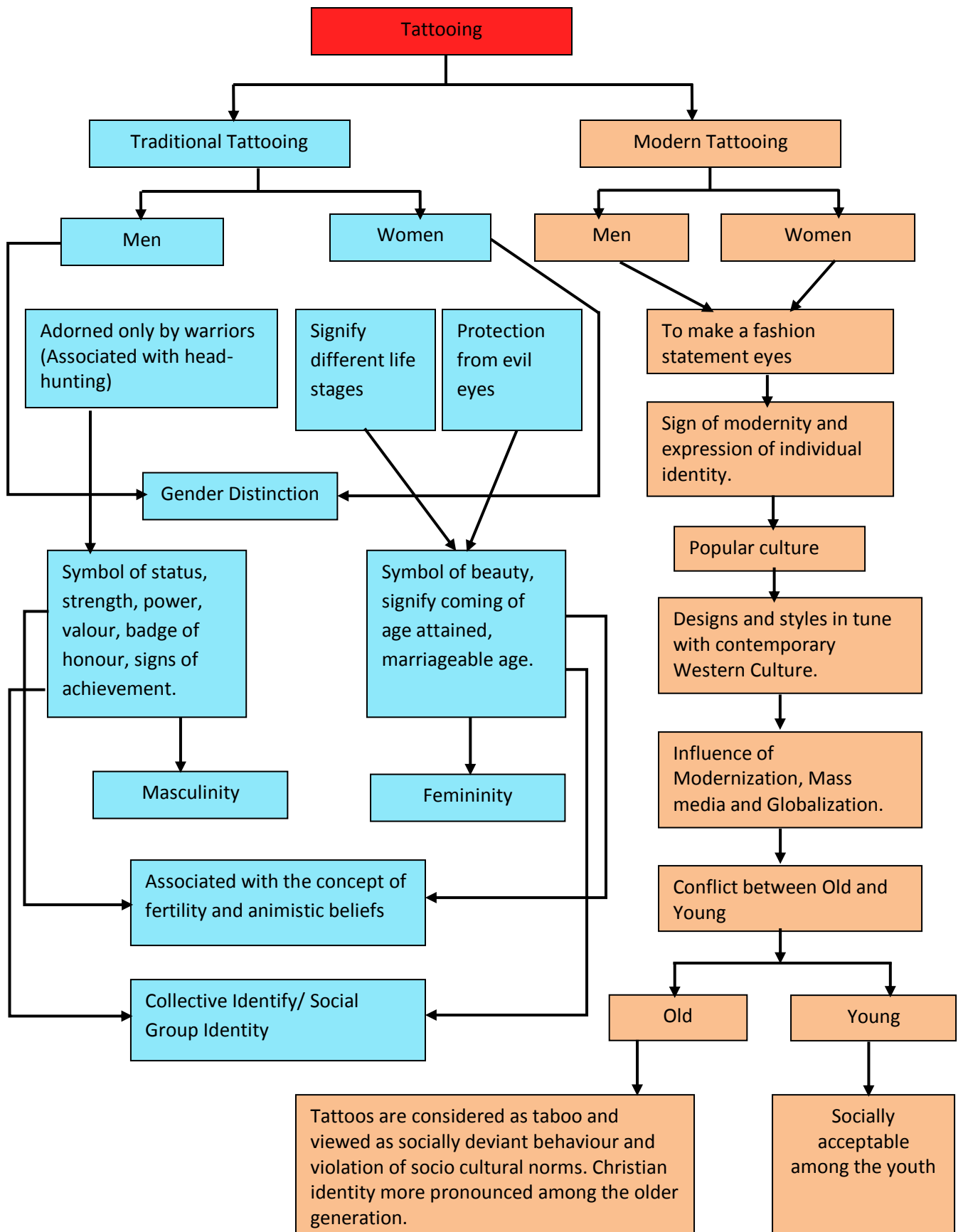
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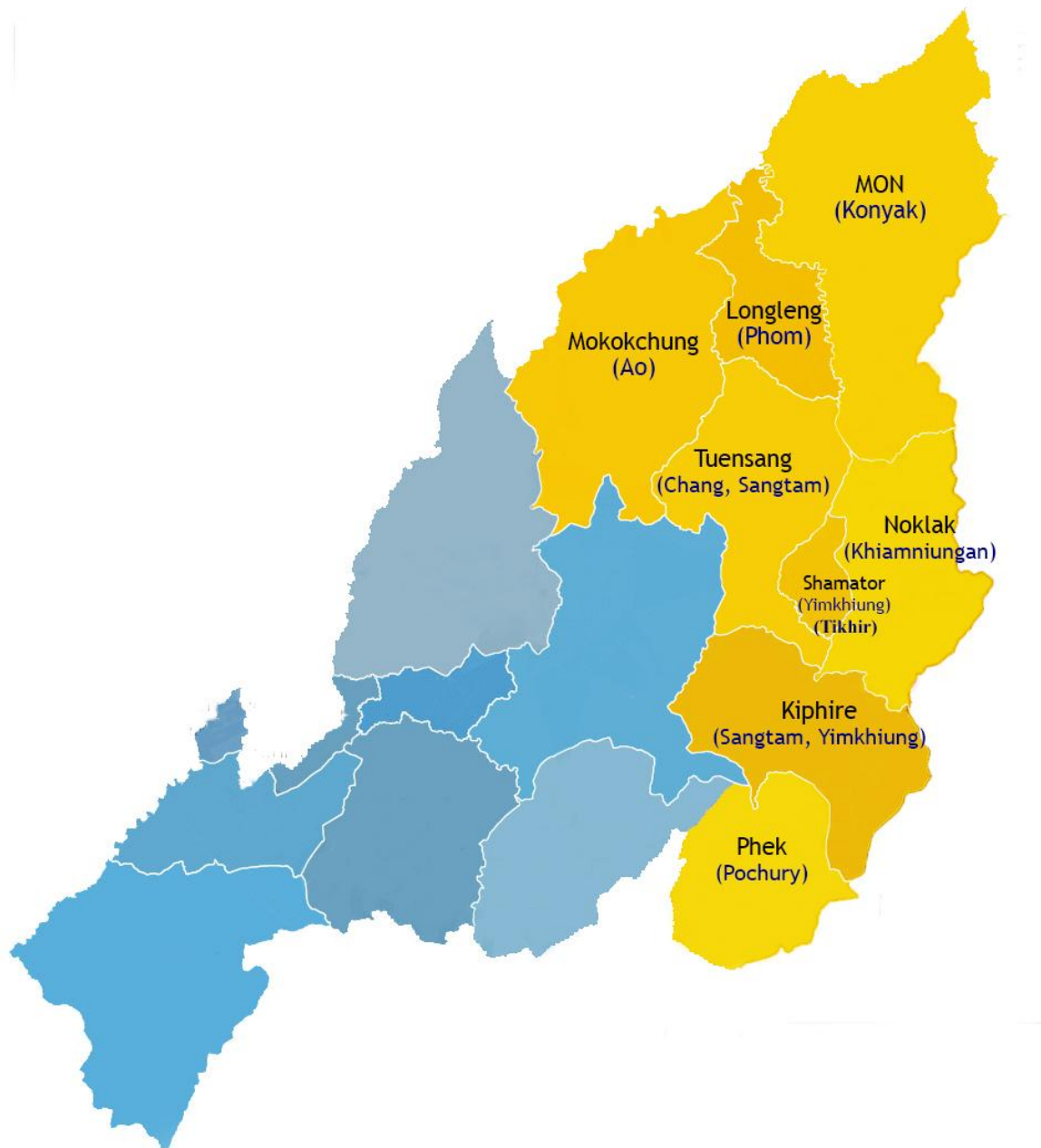
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2. Courtesy: Burning Compass



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INTRODUCTION

The human body occupies a central role in human culture, functioning as a physical embodiment of individuality, community identity, and societal norms. Its significance is multifaceted, spanning social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions, and reflects the interconnectedness of physicality and cultural expression.

The body serves as a canvas for cultural and personal expression. Through adornments, modifications, and behaviours, individuals can protect their identities, beliefs, and values. This is evident in practices such as tattooing, body piercing, and clothing, which can symbolise everything from personal experiences and aesthetic preferences to group affiliations and societal status.

Furthermore, the body is deeply intertwined with cultural norms and societal expectations, often reflecting prevailing beauty standards, health, and acceptability standards. These standards, which can vary significantly across different cultures and time periods, can influence individuals' perceptions of their bodies and shape their behaviours, from diet and exercise to clothing choices and body modifications.

The human body serves as a powerful medium of communication, capable of conveying a vast range of messages without uttering a single word. We express emotions, attitudes, and social information through various forms of body language such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and even how we adorn our bodies.

Facial expressions often communicate our emotional states—joy, anger, surprise, fear, disgust, and sadness can all be easily read on the face. Posture and gestures can indicate our attitudes, confidence levels, and reactions to the people or events around us. How we present ourselves, through our choice of clothing, hairstyles, and physical fitness, sends messages about our personalities, our socio-economic status, our occupation, or our sub-cultural affiliations. The fashion and beauty industries thrive on this form of communication, and norms and expectations about physical appearance can vary widely between different cultures and societies.

The body serves as a potent medium for expressing and interpreting nonverbal cues. It's a fundamental aspect of human communication, playing a vital role in our social interactions and understanding of each other.

Body Adornments include tattoos, piercings, makeup, jewellery, and other forms of body modifications. These often serve to communicate personal or group identity, cultural heritage, personal beliefs or values, or aesthetic preferences. They can also serve as rites of passage, marking significant life events or transitions.

In addition, the body serves as a site for cultural rituals and practices. For instance, rites of passage often involve specific actions or modifications to the body, symbolising the individual's transition to a new social role. Such rituals underscore the body's role as a medium through which cultural traditions are enacted and preserved.

Foucault's view is that the body is a site upon which societal power dynamics, personal identities, and cultural norms are written. In other words, the body is not just a physical entity but a social and cultural one, subjected to various forms of regulation, discipline, and control. For Foucault, the body is deeply intertwined with knowledge and truth. Power/knowledge, a term he often used, is the interplay between the systems of power that regulate society and the forms of knowledge that support and derive from these systems. The body, therefore, is not just a passive entity but actively participates in the construction of knowledge and truth (Foucault 1980). It is important to note that Foucault's analysis is less concerned with the body as a biological or physical entity. Instead, he is interested in the body as a social and cultural phenomenon, an object and target of power and knowledge.

Body decoration is seen as part of a representational formulation of the body. Decorative elements symbolically present particular ideas, particular subjective meanings, which are materially 'inscribed' on the body in order to convey those ideas and meanings. However, the body itself remains an object, only given meaning through the use of decoration (Boyd 2002: 142).

The pervasive preoccupation with beauty represents a universal cultural phenomenon, transcending societal hierarchies from the most primal to the most advanced civilisations. Humans, being inherently concerned with self-optimisation, devote substantial efforts to enhancing their appearance. The body, in this regard, serves not only as a vessel for existence but as a canvas for self-expression, a potent and silent orator articulating identity, status, and aspirations.

Particularly in Western societies, thinness is lauded as an embodiment of beauty, transforming this physical attribute into a culturally approved desideratum. A subtle yet incessant pressure permeates these societies, imposing a socially acceptable body aesthetic. The slender ideal exerts a gravitational pull, drawing individuals towards conformity through

methods ranging from strict dietary protocols and exhaustive physical exercise to invasive surgical procedures. This societal fascination with thinness signifies not merely an aesthetic preference but, more critically, a cultural mandate implicitly pressuring individuals to strive towards its attainment.

Yet, these beauty norms, far from being confined within their culture of origin, seep across cultural boundaries, shaping global perceptions of beauty. Their impact is particularly discernable in the beauty standards prevalent in non-Western societies. Chinese society and other Southeast Asian cultures, for example, have seemingly incorporated aspects of Western beauty norms into their own. Fair skin and large eyes, traits typically associated with Western aesthetics, are revered and pursued, an inclination reflecting a nuanced amalgamation of indigenous and external beauty norms.

In the pursuit of these prized attributes, skin-lightening creams and surgical procedures to enlarge the eyes have gained popularity, revealing the lengths to which individuals are willing to go to achieve the cultural ideal. The usage of such creams and surgical operations reflects not only personal preferences but also societal pressures and the hegemonic influences of global beauty standards.

Indeed, the impact of Western beauty norms on these societies serves as a compelling demonstration of cultural diffusion, the process by which cultures borrow and integrate elements from others. As societies increasingly interact, whether through trade, travel, or technology, their norms, including those pertaining to beauty, invariably intermingle, fostering a homogenisation of beauty standards. Appearances or aesthetic displays serve as crucial navigational aids in our social environments. These exterior manifestations, arrayed before us in configurations that are often pre-established, equip us with a plethora of cues to interpret and navigate the complexities of our social worlds (Peter Corrigan, 2008).

However, it is essential to underscore that while Western beauty norms wield significant influence globally, they do not replace indigenous standards. Rather, they coexist, often melding with local norms to create unique hybrids that reflect a blend of tradition and modernity, local and global.

Obsession with beauty is a common thread that binds humanity together, no matter where or how people live. Traditional tribes across the world, each with their unique cultures, have always had their own ideas of beauty and ways to express it.

In Papua New Guinea, the men of the Huli Wigmen tribe grow and shape their hair into fancy wigs, decorate them with colourful feathers, and see this as a sign of beauty. This

isn't just about looking good – it symbolises their status and maturity in the tribe (Haensel, 2020).

In the heart of the Amazon Rainforest, the Kayapo tribe expresses their sense of beauty through body painting. They use natural dyes to draw patterns on their bodies, which say a lot about the person, like their age, whether they're married, and how brave they are (Lacey et al. 2014)

In New Zealand, the Maori people have a unique tattoo tradition called Ta Moko. This isn't just a trend or fashion statement - these tattoos tell a story about the person's family, tribe, social status, and what they've achieved in life (100% Pure New Zealand, n.d.).

Humans constantly strive to transform our bodies and the way it looks. Tattooing and body piercings are viewed as a form of body decoration. It is seen as a way of beautifying the body. According to Reischer and Koo (2004), Bodies are modified for many reasons: to register participation in a social group, to claim an identity in opposition to a social group, and to signal a significant change in social status. However, the overarching theme and primary end of most bodywork is the pursuit and attainment of beauty. Cultural meanings and values reside in and on the material body; the body not only reflects these constructions but also has the capacity to challenge them. The body thus serves as a vehicle for social action even as it signifies social realities.

Body decoration, as a fundamental component of human cultural expression, constitutes a critical dimension of the representational formulation of the human body. These decorative elements, extending beyond mere aesthetic embellishments, serve as potent symbols, encoding within themselves distinct ideas and subjective meanings.

In essence, the body is used as a tangible canvas upon which these symbols are materially 'inscribed'. Through the medium of body decoration, these ideas and meanings are communicated in a visual and experiential manner, embodying a non-verbal dialogue between the individual and their cultural milieu.

According to Seeger (1975: 212), “Body ornaments should be treated as symbols with a variety of referents. They should be examined as a system in any given society rather than in lucid but misleading isolation as has usually been done in the past.

Each ornamentation or modification, therefore, serves as a codified signal, conveying a narrative that is deciphered within the cultural context in which it is displayed. This transformative process, where the body moves from an unmarked state to a decorated one, highlights the significance of body decoration as a vehicle for conveying symbolic meaning.

The body is not just a biological entity; it also holds cultural and symbolic significance. The meanings and ideas imparted through body decoration imbue it with a sense of identity and a place within a particular social or cultural context. This illustrates the profound interplay between body, decoration, and meaning, highlighting the body's role as a site of symbolic expression and cultural identity. Thus, body decoration underscores the symbiotic relationship between physicality and symbolism in human cultural expression.

According to DeMello, "If the physical body serves as a site on which gender, ethnicity and class are symbolically marked,¹ Tattoos and the process of inscription itself create the cultural body themselves, thereby creating and maintaining specific social boundaries.² Tattoos articulate not only the body, but the psyche as well. Tattoos not only draws the body so that it can be seen but also maps out the shape of the ego.³ If tattoos make the body culturally visible then prison tattoos, and particularly those on the face, neck and hands, make the body especially obvious, and more importantly, express, to the convict, other prisoners, and the outside world, the social position which that body occupies." (1993: p10)

The use of body adornment, arts and crafts as a form of expression is found across all cultures. A tattoo is a form of body modification where a design, image, or text is permanently inked into the skin. It involves injecting ink into the dermis layer of the skin using a needle or a similar instrument. Adorning the bodies in tattoos for decorative reasons is popular across cultures. Tattoos as body art have significance in some cultures, and among some tribal groups, tattoos have deeper cultural meanings attached to them. Some tattoo designs are symbolic and serve as a marker of their identity.

Tattoos can be created for various reasons, such as self-expression, cultural or religious beliefs, personal aesthetics, or as a form of commemoration. The art of tattooing has been practised for thousands of years in different cultures around the world and can hold significant meaning for the individuals who choose to get it. Tattoos can be found in a wide range of styles, sizes, and colours, and their popularity has grown significantly in recent years.

The word "tattoo" comes from the Tahitian word "ta-tu" or "tatau," which means "to write" or "to mark." European explorers in the Pacific encountered these markings in the 18th century and adopted the term. The first recorded English usage of "tattoo" is attributed to Captain James Cook, who wrote in his diary about his 1769 expedition to New Zealand and Tahiti, "Both sexes paint their bodies, Tattow, as it is called in their language." (Guzman, 2011). It's important to note that while the English word 'tattoo' might have originated from

the Pacific, the practice of permanently marking the skin with ink or other pigments is ancient and found in many different cultures worldwide.

Tattoos have been used as a form of body decoration for thousands of years across many different cultures worldwide. However, the meaning and significance of tattoos as body decorations can vary significantly across cultures and individuals. In many cultures, tattoos are important markers of social status, tribal affiliation, or rites of passage. For example, in Polynesian culture, intricate tattoo designs often signify a person's rank, role, and accomplishments within the community.

Tattooing is a rich and diverse practice that spans back centuries, entrenched in the cultural fabric of societies worldwide. It represents a unique blend of artistry, tradition, and personal expression, allowing individuals to adorn their bodies with images that hold deep meaning or aesthetic value to them. Many people view tattoos as a way to express their individuality and personal identity. They might choose designs that represent their interests, beliefs, life experiences, or loved ones. Some people get tattoos purely for their aesthetic appeal. They might appreciate the artistic qualities of tattoos and enjoy the way they enhance their appearance. Some individuals get tattoos to symbolise their spiritual or religious beliefs. This practice can be traced back to ancient civilisations, where tattoos were often used for protection, healing, or religious devotion. Tattoos can also serve as permanent reminders of significant events, people, or places. For instance, some people get tattoos in memory of a loved one or as a tribute to an important life experience.

People choose to tattoo their bodies for various reasons, as it is a highly personal and individual decision. Here are some common motivations behind getting tattoos

1. **Self-expression:** Tattoos can be a form of self-expression and a way for individuals to showcase their unique personalities, beliefs, values, or interests. They serve as a permanent canvas for expressing oneself and can symbolise meaningful experiences, relationships, or milestones in a person's life.
2. **Artistic expression:** Many people consider tattoos as a form of wearable art. They appreciate the aesthetic appeal of tattoos and see them as a way to adorn their bodies with beautiful and intricate designs. Some individuals choose tattoos because they appreciate the skill and creativity of tattoo artists.
3. **Commemoration and remembrance:** Tattoos can serve as memorials or tributes to loved ones who have passed away, preserving their memory or commemorating their impact on the person's life. People may also get tattoos to mark important dates, such

as anniversaries or birthdays, or to remind themselves of significant life lessons or personal mantras.

4. **Cultural and spiritual significance:** Tattoos have deep cultural and spiritual roots in many societies. People may choose to get tattoos that are tied to their cultural heritage or religious beliefs to connect with their roots or demonstrate their devotion to a particular faith.
5. **Empowerment and reclaiming the body:** Tattoos can be a way for individuals to reclaim ownership of their bodies, particularly in instances where they have experienced trauma, abuse, or loss of bodily autonomy. Tattoos can serve as empowering symbols of self-acceptance, healing, and resilience.
6. **Fashion and aesthetics:** Some individuals choose to get tattoos purely for fashion purposes or to enhance their physical appearance. They may view tattoos as trendy or fashionable and see them as accessories that complement their style.

1.1 History of Tattooing

Tattooing is a practice that has been around for thousands of years, with its origins likely dating back to the Neolithic period, around 10,000 BC.

Some of the earliest evidence of tattooing comes from Ötzi the Iceman, also known as Ötzi or the Similaun Man; Ötzi the Iceman is a well-preserved natural mummy discovered in the Alps between Italy and Austria in 1991. The mummy is estimated to have lived around 3300 BCE, during the Copper Age, and has provided valuable insights into the lives of people during that time. One of the most fascinating aspects of Ötzi's remains is the presence of multiple tattoos, making him the oldest known tattooed human. Ötzi's tattoos consist of a series of simple lines and dots arranged in groups, with a total of 61 markings identified on his body. The tattoos are primarily located on areas that correspond to acupuncture points, such as the lower back, ankles, knees, and wrists. This has led researchers to speculate that the tattoos may have had a therapeutic or medicinal purpose, possibly serving as a form of early acupuncture or pain relief treatment. The tattoos on Ötzi's body were created using a technique called carbon soot tattooing. This involved making small incisions in the skin and rubbing charcoal or other carbon-based materials into the cuts to create permanent markings. The presence of tattoos on Ötzi's well-preserved skin has allowed researchers to study the ancient tattooing methods and materials used during his time (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023).

The discovery of Ötzi the Iceman and his tattoos has significantly impacted our understanding of early tattooing practices and their cultural significance. The tattoos on Ötzi's body suggest that tattooing may have been used for therapeutic purposes in ancient societies, predating modern acupuncture by thousands of years. Additionally, Ötzi's tattoos offer a unique window into the Copper Age, shedding light on the daily lives, health, and customs of people who lived more than 5,000 years ago.

The Upper Paleolithic period, also known as the Late Stone Age, lasted from around 50,000 to 10,000 years ago. While evidence of tattooing during this time is limited, some tools and materials that could have been used for tattooing have been discovered.

The discovery of the oldest known tattooing instrument in the world provides invaluable insights into the cultural practices of ancient Native American communities. Unearthed from a gravesite in Tennessee, the instrument is a sharpened turkey leg bone with radiocarbon dated to be over 3,600 years old. The design of the bone is particularly noteworthy for its functional aspects. It is tapered to a fine point, which would have been essential for puncturing the skin to insert the pigment. Additionally, the bone features a series of small grooves along its length. These grooves are hypothesised to serve a specific purpose: holding the pigment that would be used for the tattoo (Deter-Wolf et al., 2016). This design suggests a level of sophistication in the tattooing process, as the grooves would have allowed for a more controlled and perhaps even intricate application of the pigment into the skin.

The discovery of this ancient tattooing instrument not only expands our understanding of the technological capabilities of Native American communities at that time but also provides a glimpse into their cultural and perhaps even spiritual practices. Tattooing could have been used for various purposes, such as rites of passage, social status, or spiritual beliefs (Krutak, 2014). However, the exact significance of tattooing within this specific community remains a subject for further research.

The discovery of the oldest known tattooing tools has sparked interest in the broader history of body modification practices across different ancient civilisations. This finding has prompted researchers to consider the possibility that tattooing was more widespread and prevalent in early societies than previously thought. Studying these ancient tattooing tools and techniques has opened up new avenues for understanding human history's cultural and social aspects, shedding light on how people from various civilisations used tattoos to express themselves, their beliefs, and their values.

There is evidence to suggest that tattooing was also practised in ancient Egypt. Ancient Egyptian female mummies from 2000 BC have also been found with tattoos.

However, the first physical evidence of tattooing in ancient Egypt comes from a woman mummy, Amunet, a priestess of the goddess Hathor at Thebes, dating from around 2000 B.C. Most of the tattoos found on mummies from ancient Egypt are on women. The patterns often resemble net-like distributions of dots over the abdomen, on the thighs, and sometimes the arms or the chest. These tattoos might imply a connection to fertility or maternal protection, but their cultural significance remains somewhat elusive. The practice of tattooing in ancient Egypt has been a subject of scholarly interest, particularly since mummified remains were discovered with tattoos. These tattoos are not merely decorative but are thought to have had specific cultural and religious significance (Friedman et al., 2015).

However, it should be noted that the practice was not widespread or common in all social classes or throughout the whole of Egyptian history. From the evidence available, it has been largely confined to women, particularly those of high social status, and mainly occurred during the Middle Kingdom period.

It is also worth noting that, like many societies, the ancient Egyptians used other forms of body modification as well. These included the use of cosmetics, perfumes, wigs, and various types of jewellery and amulets. All these things were seen as important for personal adornment and also had religious and cultural significance.

The Scythians, a nomadic people who roamed the Eurasian steppe from the 9th century BC to the 4th century AD, have left an indelible mark on the history of body art through their intricate tattoos. These tattoos were discovered on mummified remains in the permafrost tombs of the Pazyryk culture, a Scythian tribe located in Siberia. The tattoos are elaborate and feature a variety of both real and mythological creatures, such as deer, wolves, and birds of prey, often depicted in dynamic, twisting forms. The Pazyryk burials, discovered in the 20th century by Ukrainian Soviet anthropologist and archaeologist Sergei Ivanovich Rudenko, provided remarkable insights into their customs and artefacts, including tattooed human remains. Rudenko's excavation in the 1940s uncovered several frozen burial mounds, known as kurgans, in the Pazyryk Valley. Within these kurgans, he found the remains of well-preserved individuals, including the famous "Ice Maiden" or "Altai Princess" and other male and female warriors. What made these findings significant were the intricate tattoos preserved on the mummified bodies. The Pazyryk tattoos were created by puncturing the skin with a needle and then rubbing ink or dye into the wounds. The intricate tattoo designs depicted various animals, mythical creatures, and geometric patterns (Rudenko, 1970).

The tattoos of the Pazyryk culture showcased advanced artistic skills and cultural significance. The imagery depicted on the bodies, such as animal motifs, likely carried

symbolic and protective meanings. The tattoos may have represented clan or tribal affiliations, as well as personal achievements or spiritual beliefs.

The artistry of these tattoos is not just in their design but also in their application. The Scythians employed a technique known as dotwork, a labour-intensive process where a needle punctures the skin and deposits ink into the dermis (Polosmak, 1994). The painstaking nature of this technique underscores the cultural and possibly spiritual significance of these tattoos to the Scythians.

Based on their complexity and sophistication, these tattoos were likely created by skilled artisans. They may have held spiritual or cultural significance, possibly reflecting the wearer's social status, personal achievements, or spiritual beliefs. However, our understanding of the exact meanings and functions of Scythian tattoos remains speculative due to the lack of written records from this culture.

The practice of tattooing in Libya is a nuanced subject that varies across different communities and historical periods. While tattooing has not been a widespread cultural phenomenon in Libya, it has held specific significance among certain indigenous Berber tribes like the Tuareg and Amazigh. In these communities, tattoos have often been imbued with deep cultural and symbolic meanings, serving as markers of identity, tribal affiliation, or significant life events (McDougall, 1990).

The designs and locations of these tattoos can vary, but they often include geometric shapes, lines, and sometimes even text. These tattoos were traditionally applied using natural pigments and were often part of rites of passage or other significant ceremonies (Rosenblum, 2000).

However, it's important to note that the practice has evolved over time. Modernisation, religious considerations, and changing social norms have contributed to these groups' decline in traditional tattooing (Chatty, 2010). The influence of Islam, which generally discourages the practice of tattooing, has also played a role in the diminishing prevalence of this art form in Libya and other North African countries.

It is worth mentioning that Islamic culture, which has a significant influence in Libya, generally discourages tattooing based on religious teachings. Many Muslims believe that the body is a gift from God and should be kept in its natural state without any alterations or markings. As a result, some individuals or communities in Libya may view tattooing as culturally and religiously inappropriate.

The discovery of tattooed mummies in various parts of South America has provided invaluable insight, emphasising tattooing practices of pre-Columbian societies, such as the

Chinchorro, Moche, and Inca civilisations. The Chinchorro culture, which existed along the northern coast of present-day Chile and southern Peru, is particularly noteworthy for its mummies, some of which date back to as early as 5,000 BCE. These mummies bear tattoos primarily consisting of geometric patterns and simple lines, often located on the face or limbs (Arriaza, 1995). The tattoos were likely created by making incisions in the skin and then rubbing pigments like charcoal or ochre into the wounds. While these tattoos' exact purpose and meaning remain speculative, they may have served various ritualistic, cultural, or social functions within the Chinchorro society.

In contrast, the Moche civilisation thrived between 200 and 700 CE, depicting tattooed individuals in their pottery and murals. These tattoos often indicated status or association with specific deities or social roles (Donnan, 1978). Similarly, the Inca civilisation, which existed from around 1400 to 1532 CE, also practised tattooing, particularly among high-ranking individuals and warriors. Tattoos in Inca society were used for both decorative and ceremonial purposes, and they often carried significant cultural meaning (D'Altroy, 2002).

These examples highlight the existence of tattooing traditions in ancient South American cultures, emphasising the significance of tattoos in their artistic, religious, and social contexts. The study of tattooed mummies provides valuable insights into these civilisations' cultural practices and beliefs, shedding light on the rich history of tattooing in South America.

Tattooing was practised among both the ancient Greeks and Romans, although their attitudes and practices surrounding tattoos differed to some extent.

In ancient Greece, tattooing was not as prevalent as in other ancient cultures and was often associated with foreign or so-called "barbarian" groups. The Greek term "stigma" originally referred to a physical mark or brand and later became associated with the practice of tattooing. In this societal context, tattoos were often used as a form of punishment or identification, particularly for slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war. In contrast, ancient Rome had a more nuanced approach to tattooing. While tattoos were commonly used to mark slaves, criminals, and gladiators, indicating their lower social status or ownership, the practice was not strictly confined to these marginalised groups. Historical accounts suggest that Roman soldiers and even some members of the aristocracy chose to get tattoos. These tattoos could be marks of military achievements, personal identification, or even symbols of social standing (Caplan, 2000).

While tattooing in ancient Greece was largely punitive and stigmatising, ancient Rome displayed a more complex relationship with the practice, extending it beyond marginalised groups to include soldiers and aristocrats.

Many indigenous cultures across the world have used tattoos for different reasons. The Maori of New Zealand have a traditional form of tattooing called "Ta Moko," which is deeply tied to their identity and social status. Here are some key aspects of Maori tattooing: Ta Moko is a traditional Maori tattooing technique that differs significantly from needle-based tattooing. Instead of using needles, specialised tools are used to chisel or carve the skin, creating deeply incised, permanent markings. One of the most unique aspects of ta moko is the focus on facial tattoos, which serve as a sacred and enduring expression of an individual's identity, lineage, and social standing. Each design is tailored to the individual, serving as a visual narrative of their genealogy and life journey. The intricate patterns in Maori tattoos, such as spirals, curves, and whakapapa lines, are rich with specific meanings. These designs symbolise the wearer's genealogy, personal history, and their connection to both their ancestors and the natural world. The placement of these tattoos is not arbitrary but is carefully planned to reflect an individual's social standing and tribal affiliations. Different facial and bodily regions have specific meanings in Maori culture; for example, the forehead is associated with wisdom, the chin symbolises determination, and the legs signify strength and agility (Te Awakotuku, 2007).

Ta Moko is deeply integrated into Maori cultural identity and serves as a means of both preserving and expressing their rich heritage. The process of receiving a ta moko is a significant event, often accompanied by ceremonies, rituals, and prayers, making it a sacred experience for the individual involved.

In modern times, the appeal of Maori-inspired tattoos has extended to a global audience. However, it's crucial to approach these designs with the respect and understanding they warrant. Authentic ta moko should ideally be obtained from tattoo artists who are knowledgeable about Maori culture and traditions.

In Japan, the history of tattooing is a complex narrative that has undergone significant transformations over time. Originally, tattoos in Japan were associated with criminality, particularly during the Edo period (1603-1868). Criminals were often tattooed as a form of punishment, marking them as outcasts and stigmatising the practice (Kitamura, 2005). This led to tattoos being largely associated with the lower social strata.

However, tattooing in Japan is not solely linked to criminality. Parallel to its punitive use, tattooing also evolved as a significant form of artistic expression, particularly in the form

of Irezumi. These traditional Japanese tattoos are elaborate, full-body artworks that often depict intricate designs inspired by Japanese mythology, folklore, and nature. Created by skilled artists, Irezumi became a symbol of bravery, strength, and loyalty and was often worn as a form of personal or even spiritual expression (Bratt, M & Poysden 2006).

The Meiji period (1868-1912) marked a significant shift in the perception of tattoos as Japan underwent a process of modernisation and Westernization. Tattooing was officially banned during this period, reinforcing its negative perception, which persisted throughout much of the 20th century.

Overall, tattooing in Japanese culture has a rich heritage, encompassing negative and positive associations. It remains an evolving and dynamic practice, influenced by societal changes, artistic expression, and the individual choices of those who choose to get tattoos in Japan.

Kalinga tattoos, also known as Batok, are traditional hand-tapped tattoos that have been a part of the Kalinga people's culture in the Philippines for centuries. The Kalinga are known for their distinctive body art, rich in symbolism and deep cultural significance. Historically, these tattoos were a rite of passage for Kalinga men. Warriors received tattoos as symbols of their bravery and strength. The designs and placements of these tattoos often reflected the individual's achievements and status within the community. Women also had tattoos, which were seen as symbols of beauty and fertility. Kalinga tattoos are made using a thorn from a citrus tree, which is attached to a bamboo stick and then tapped into the skin with a separate stick. The ink used is typically a mixture of soot and water (Salvador-Amores & Garcia, 2014).

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in the popularity of traditional Kalinga tattoos, both in the Philippines and worldwide. This is largely thanks to Whang-Od Oggay, a Kalinga woman who is often considered the last traditional Kalinga tattooist. She has dedicated her life to preserving this art form and has even been proposed for inclusion in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List (Salvador-Amores & Garcia, 2014).

The invention of the electric tattoo machine in the late 19th century led to a boom in tattoos in the United States and Europe. However, for much of the 20th century, tattoos were associated with counterculture movements. Not until the late 20th and early 21st centuries did tattoos begin to enter mainstream culture, losing much of their negative stigma and becoming a common form of self-expression.

Today, tattooing is a widely accepted form of body art and self-expression in many societies. New styles, techniques, and hygiene practices continue to evolve, with many tattoo designs available, from traditional to contemporary styles.

In many cultures, tattoos continue to carry significant cultural, religious, and social meanings. However, societal views on tattoos can vary widely, and in some societies or professions, tattoos can still carry a negative stigma. Nonetheless, the history of tattoos paints a picture of a fascinating and enduring form of body modification that has been part of human culture for millennia.

1.1.1 History of Tattooing in India

Tattooing practices in ancient India reflect the subcontinent's diverse cultural, social, and spiritual landscapes. According to Krutak (2022), the tradition of tattooing can be traced back to various ancient tribes and communities across India, each with unique techniques and symbolism. In places like Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, tattooing often signified rites of passage and social status, particularly among women. Here, it was more than mere decoration; it was a deeply embedded cultural norm. While the significance of tattoos varied regionally, some commonalities existed. The choice of tattoo motifs was often deeply ingrained in local folklore and religious beliefs. Designs might include animal figures, gods, or other spiritual symbols. These tattoos were believed to ward off evil spirits or bring good luck. The methodologies used in ancient tattooing were often rudimentary, utilising organic materials readily available in the environment. Soot-based inks and thorns or bone needles were common, which also meant that the tattooing process was both painful and risk-prone, especially with infection. However, these traditional techniques have been passed down through generations, representing a rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge and craftsmanship.

1.1.2 Northeast, India

Northeast India is a region comprising eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. This region is known for its diverse ethnic composition, rich cultural heritage, and stunning natural landscapes. Bordered by Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, Northeast India serves as a crossroads between South Asia and Southeast Asia, making it a melting pot of various cultures and traditions.

The region is characterised by its hilly terrain, lush forests, and numerous rivers, including the Brahmaputra and Barak. The biodiversity is remarkable, with several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries that are home to rare and endangered species.

Ethnically and culturally, Northeast India is incredibly diverse, with each state having its own unique traditions, languages, and customs. The region is predominantly inhabited by various indigenous communities, each with a distinct identity. This diversity is reflected in the region's festivals, music, dance, and other cultural expressions.

The Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh has a distinctive and culturally significant approach to tattooing. Traditionally, tattooing, known as "Tani Hulo," was an integral aspect of the tribe's identity. Specifically, Apatani women would receive elaborate facial tattoos and wear large nose plugs, also known as "yaping hullo." These practices were believed to serve multiple purposes, from rites of passage to symbols of beauty and even as deterrents against kidnapping from neighbouring tribes. The tattoos usually consisted of blue-black lines that ran from the forehead to the tip of the nose, with additional markings on the chin. Often carried out in adolescence, the procedure was laborious and painful, involving soot and thorns as primary materials. The nose plugs were generally made of bamboo or cane and inserted into the flesh of the nostrils. (Shrestha Bharadwaj & Uttam Boruah, 2020, pp. 1-6)

In Assam, tattooing is deeply ingrained in the cultural landscape, particularly within the Bodo and Mishing communities. For these groups, tattoos are far more than just body art; they serve important sociocultural roles as markers for rites of passage, signifying the transition into adulthood, or as a means of community identification. The practice helps embed traditional values and collective history into the very skin of community members, thereby constantly reminding them of their roots and social obligations.

1.2 Rise in the popularity of television shows on tattoos

Several popular television shows have centred around tattoos and the tattooing industry. These shows often feature talented tattoo artists, their clients, and the process of creating tattoos. Here are some notable examples:

1. "Miami Ink" (2005-2008): This reality TV series followed the daily operations of a tattoo shop called "Miami Ink" in Miami, Florida. It showcased the tattoo artists' skills, their interactions with clients, and the stories behind the tattoos.

2. "LA Ink" (2007-2011): A spin-off of "Miami Ink," "LA Ink" focused on Kat Von D and her tattoo shop, High Voltage Tattoo, in Los Angeles. The show delved into the world of celebrity clients, intricate tattoo designs, and the personal lives of the artists.
3. "Ink Master" (2012-2020): A tattoo competition series, "Ink Master", brought together skilled tattoo artists from around the United States to compete in various challenges. Each season, contestants showcased their talent and creativity to impress a panel of judges and win the title of "Ink Master."
4. "Black Ink Crew" (2013-present): Set in Harlem, New York, this reality series follows the lives of the staff at the tattoo shop "Black Ink" and their interactions with clients. It offers insights into the tattoo industry, along with personal drama and relationships among the cast members.
5. "Tattoo Nightmares" (2012-2015): This show focused on covering up or fixing regrettable or poorly executed tattoos. Tattoo artists helped clients transform their unwanted tattoos into new designs, providing them with a chance to move on from their tattoo nightmares.
6. "Ink Master: Redemption" (2015-2017): A spin-off of "Ink Master," this series allowed former contestants to return and redeem themselves by fixing or covering up their past tattoo mistakes.

These are just a few examples of tattoo-related television shows. The popularity of such shows demonstrates the widespread interest and fascination with tattoos, the artistry behind them, and the stories they represent.

1.3 Review of Literature

There has been a significant amount of research conducted on body modification from various academic perspectives, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. These studies often aim to understand the cultural, societal, and personal motivations behind these practices, as well as their impact on the individual's identity, self-image, and social interactions. A wide range of literature has also been published regarding tattoos, encompassing a diverse array of disciplines. This literature review aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the major themes and findings within this vibrant area of research.

Many anthropological and cultural studies focus on understanding the traditional significance and meanings of body modification practices in various cultures, as well as how

these practices evolve with societal changes. Tattooing, an ancient form of body modification, has garnered significant interest from diverse fields of study, from anthropology and psychology to art and popular culture.

Tattoos have been a part of human culture for thousands of years and carry varying significance across different societies. Research has delved into the cultural and symbolic meanings of tattoos across cultures, their use as rites of passage, and their role in identity expression. For instance, DeMello's "Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community" (2000) explores the evolution of tattoo culture in the West. DeMello treats tattooing as a form of popular art, examining the community and culture surrounding tattoo artists and enthusiasts. In this seminal work, DeMello provides a detailed examination of the modern tattoo culture from the early 20th century to the 1990s. She delves into the evolving perception and practice of tattooing as it transitioned from the fringes to the mainstream. Her work emphasises the role of tattooing in constructing identities, creating communities, and expressing individuality. DeMello also discusses the influence of popular media in changing the perception of tattooing and its role in propelling it into mainstream culture. DeMello's (2014) later work, "Inked," expands her examination of tattooing in popular culture on a global scale. She investigates how tattoos have become a form of personal expression and a medium for pop-cultural representations. The author explores the rising popularity of tattoos among celebrities and the impact this has had on societal acceptance and the destigmatisation of tattoos. Similarly, Irwin's (2001) work "Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction" discusses the role of tattooing as a rite of passage, tracing its shift from a counter-cultural to a mainstream phenomenon.

While Alekshun's book "Tattooing and Civilizing Processes: Body Modification as Self-control" (2008) primarily focuses on the historical aspect of tattooing, it does touch on the influence of ancient practices on modern popular culture. The author traces how tattoos, once a symbol of punishment or slavery, have evolved to become a form of self-expression and art, gaining popularity in the mainstream culture of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Robbins and Valenti's book "Pretty in Ink: North American Women Cartoonists 1896–2013" (2013) explores the depiction of tattoos in comic art and how this medium contributed to the visibility and acceptance of tattoos in popular culture. She analyses female characters with tattoos, arguing that these depictions empowered women and challenged conventional beauty norms. Her work highlights the interaction between tattooing and other forms of pop culture, such as comics, and their mutual influence.

Alfred Gell's seminal work, "Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia" (1993), provides a deep dive into the historical and cultural context of tattooing within Polynesian societies and worldwide. The author demonstrates the importance of tattooing as a form of social mapping and identity negotiation. Tattoos, Gell argues, function as a visual language that communicates personal and group histories and social status, also being used for spiritual and protective purposes. The work by Coe, "Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record" (2003), expands this view, outlining tattooing practices in diverse cultures and epochs highlighting its role in individual and community identity formation. Tattooing is described as a form of body modification that has been utilised throughout history to mark group membership, rites of passage, status, or punishment. Coe argues that tattoos provide a medium for individuals and societies to communicate complex cultural narratives and individual identities.

Thomas's work "Tattoo: The Exotic Art of Skin Decoration" (1995) explores tattooing and focuses on the aesthetics and cultural significance of the practice in indigenous societies. The author details the complex symbolism in tattoos, explaining their connection to religious beliefs, tribal affiliation, and individual accomplishments. The work demonstrates how tattooing practices intertwine with cultural cosmologies, offering a medium to convey and negotiate identities.

Caplan's work "Written on the body: The tattoo in European and American history" (2000) examines the cultural significance of tattooing in European and American history. Caplan highlights the evolution of societal attitudes towards tattoos from a mark of criminality and deviance to a symbol of rebellion, self-expression, and later mainstream acceptance. The author underscores the importance of tattoos in subcultures as a marker of belonging and as a vehicle to express individual and group identity.

In the psychological field, research has focused on understanding the motivations and implications of tattooing. A seminal study by Swami & Furnham, "Unattractive, promiscuous and heavy drinkers: Perceptions of women with tattoos" (2007), discusses societal perceptions and stigmas associated with tattooed individuals, focusing particularly on gender biases. Swami and Furnham's seminal study provides insight into the negative stereotypes associated with tattooed women. Their research suggests that women with tattoos are often perceived as less physically attractive, more sexually promiscuous, and more likely to consume alcohol excessively. The study outlines the sociocultural biases that tattooed women encounter, making it a significant contribution to understanding the stigma attached to tattooing. Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler's study (2007), "Modifying the Body: Motivations for

Getting Tattooed and Pierced," dives deeper into individual motivations, connecting tattoos with personal narratives, self-expression, and rebellion against normative societal expectations.

Atkinson's (2004) work "Tattooing and Civilizing Processes: Body Modification as Self-control" analyses the stigmatisation of tattooed individuals in Western societies. Through interviews, the study illustrates how people with tattoos are often seen as rebellious, unprofessional, and deviant. Atkinson's research underscores the importance of understanding the societal and cultural contexts within which tattoo-related stigma exists.

Laumann and Derick's work "Tattoos and body piercings in the United States: A national data set" (2006) investigates how existing attitudes towards tattoos influence the perception of tattooed individuals. Their findings suggest that those with negative attitudes towards tattoos are more likely to stigmatise those with tattoos, reaffirming the power of pre-existing biases and stereotypes.

In his study, "Visible tattoos in the service sector: a new challenge to recruitment and selection. Work, Employment and Society" Timming (2015) explores the implications of visible tattoos in the service industry. He finds that employers often view visible tattoos negatively, associating them with unprofessionalism and even unsuitability for customer-facing roles. This study provides insight into how stigma associated with tattooing can impact employability and career progression.

Thompson's "Visible tattoos and employment in the restaurant service industry" (2015) study is focused on the perception of police officers with tattoos. The results indicate that the public often perceives tattooed police officers as less competent and professional than their non-tattooed counterparts. This research points towards the lingering societal stigmatisation of tattoos, even in professions of authority and responsibility.

With the proliferation of tattooing, the medical literature has become increasingly concerned with the health implications of these procedures. Kluger's "Tattooing and Tattoos-Associated Complications" (2017) provides a comprehensive look at the medical complications that can arise from tattoos. Serup, Kluger, & Bäumlér's (2017) "Tattooed Skin and Health," discusses the potential long-term health consequences, touching on the important issue of tattoo removal.

Health risks associated with tattoos are extensively studied, primarily within the field of dermatology. Kluger's "Tattooing and psoriasis: demographics, motivations and attitudes, complications, and impact on body image in a series of 90 Finnish patients" (2017) discusses risks and complications related to tattoos in individuals with psoriasis.

1.4 Studies on the Nagas

The Nagas, a group of tribes located in the northeastern part of India and northwestern Myanmar, have a rich tradition of tattooing that has been subject to academic study. This tradition is deeply rooted in their culture, serving as a rite of passage, a sign of social status, and a way to express individual and collective identities.

J.P. Mills (2003 reprint) in his book “The Ao Nagas” gave a general overview of the Ao tattoo culture. Here, he clearly distinguishes the tattoo patterns between the Mongsen and Chongli women of the Ao Naga tribe. He also discussed the different stages of getting a tattoo by a girl throughout her life. He also highlights the similarities in tattoo patterns and practices of Ao tribe with other Southeast Asian tribes.

Kishore Jadau (2001) in his book “The Glory Hunt, A socio-cultural Spectrum of Konyak Nagas”, discussed about the various tattoo patterns of the Konyak Nagas. He mentioned that Konyaks are divided into two groups, Thendu, lower Konyak and the Thenko upper Konyak. Thendu tattooed their faces and bodies while Thenko decorated their bodies but not their faces. Kishore Jadau also discussed step-by-step procedure from the extraction of ink to making the tattoos. Tattooing as an art was kept secret and some rituals were involved before commencing the tattoo-making ceremony. He says, that tattoo artists are invariably expert women, though any and every woman would not be eligible for making tattoo.

Julian Jacobs in his book “The Nagas” (2012) mentions a very interesting thing about Tamlu a Konyak village, with a very obvious degree of Ao influence in its language and social structure. It follows Ao rather than Konyak marriage patterns. With this information we can make an assumption that there was an inter-relationship between these two tribes and one tribe might have influenced the other in the art of tattooing.

Milada Ganguli “Naga Art” (1993) mentions that female tattoos are geometric in patterns which signify membership of a social unit or attainment of a life-cycle stage. By contrast, men’s tattoos tend to be more representational and concerned with signifying achieved status (particularly head taking).

Anungla Aier ‘Cultural Change Among the Nagas: Festival and dress’ (2004) discusses that Naga dress and ornaments are more than a matter of aesthetic and decency because the symbolism plays a very significant role in their culture and social life. They make unspoken clear statements that define the identity of the wearer, their social status and the

group to which they belong. In Naga society the ornaments and the motifs of their dress serves as a symbolic vocabulary that makes unspoken statements with regard to the various identity, status and the valour of the wearer ranging from the tattoo marks on the body and the dress they wear.

One of the prominent researchers who has studied Naga tattooing is anthropologist Dr. Lars Krutak. Dr. Lars Krutak is a renowned anthropologist and photographer, best known for his extensive research on the cultural significance of tattooing and body modification. Often referred to as the "Tattoo Anthropologist," Krutak has spent years traveling the world, studying the tattooing traditions of diverse cultures. His work is focused on understanding how these practices contribute to a person's identity and social status, and how they connect individuals to their ancestors, spirituality, and community.

Krutak's fieldwork has led him to remote areas around the world, including the jungles of Borneo, the tundras of Arctic Alaska, and the deserts of North Africa. Throughout these travels, he's documented the traditional tattooing methods, symbolism, and rituals of various indigenous communities, many of which were on the brink of being forgotten.

Krutak has published numerous books and articles on the topic, including "Spiritual Skin: Magical Tattoos and Scarification," (2012), which explores the ancient spiritual traditions and rituals associated with tattoos and scarification, and "The Tattooing Arts of Tribal Women," (2007) which delves into the tattooing practices of indigenous women worldwide.

His other works provide detailed insights into the cultural significance of tattoos among the Nagas. He reported that different Naga tribes used tattoos to signify a variety of social and cultural milestones, such as adulthood, martial success, and participation in religious rites.

For example, in some Naga tribes, young men would receive facial tattoos after they had taken an enemy's head, an action that was viewed as a demonstration of bravery. On the other hand, among certain tribes, women would receive tattoos as a mark of beauty, and sometimes as a sign of their transition into adulthood.

His photographic work presents a powerful visual account of these tattooing traditions, offering insight into their rich cultural significance while highlighting the importance of their preservation. Through his research and advocacy, Lars Krutak continues to illuminate the global narrative of tattooing, underscoring its profound cultural and historical importance.

Mo Naga, an Indian tattoo artist and researcher, is at the forefront of the movement to preserve the ancient tattoo art of the Naga tribes. Having realised the rapid disappearance of

traditional Naga tattooing practices due to modern influences and Christian conversion, he embarked on a mission to document, revive, and promote these centuries-old art forms.

As the founder of Headhunters' Ink, the first professional tattoo training school in northeast India, Mo Naga has established a platform to teach and promote Naga tattoo art. He has also formed the project "Godna Gram" which aims to build a rural tattoo art village in the heart of India where the art of tattooing can be preserved, practiced, and taught.

Mo Naga's research has involved in-depth fieldwork among the various Naga tribes. He's spent time with the remaining Naga tattoo artists and elders, documenting their designs and the associated meanings. He has successfully archived thousands of traditional designs and the historical narratives, rites, and rituals attached to them.

His work also extends to the practical application of these designs in contemporary tattoo art. By incorporating these traditional Naga patterns and motifs into his tattoo work, Mo Naga not only celebrates the rich history of Naga tattooing but also brings it to a modern audience, keeping the tradition alive.

Through his dedicated efforts, Mo Naga continues to play a significant role in the study, preservation, and promotion of Naga tattoo art, bridging the gap between the past and the present, and creating a future where this ancient art form continues to thrive.

Phejin Konyak, a direct descendant of the tattooed headhunters of Nagaland, India, has spent years documenting the rich tradition of tattooing among the Konyak Naga people. In collaboration with Dutch tattoo artist and researcher Peter van der Helm (known professionally as Peter Bos), Phejin and Peter Bos have authored a book titled "The Last of the Tattooed Headhunters." (2017).

In this comprehensive study, Phejin and Bos have meticulously documented the dying art of traditional Konyak tattooing. The book contains an array of photographs, stories, and detailed illustrations that capture the diverse aspects of Konyak tattoo art, as well as the underlying rituals, customs, and traditions associated with it.

"The Last of the Tattooed Headhunters" provides insight into the tattoos as symbols of achievement, status, life transitions, and societal roles within the Konyak tribe. For instance, different tattoos were given to warriors who had taken an enemy's head, to women who had reached maturity, and to men and women who had attained specific roles within the society.

The book also discusses the impact of modernisation and religious conversion on Konyak tattooing, underlining the urgency of documenting and preserving this cultural heritage. Phejin's work is particularly personal given her ancestry, and through her ongoing efforts, she aims to maintain the link to her tribe's unique history and identity.

The collaboration between Phejin Konyak and Peter Bos brings together two distinct perspectives: an insider with personal ties to the culture and a foreign researcher with expertise in tattoo anthropology. Their joint efforts have significantly contributed to the study of Naga tattoos and are an invaluable resource for future research.

The above-mentioned studies reveal that tattoos among the Nagas are more than mere body decoration; they are an integral part of their cultural identity, carrying deep historical, societal, and personal meanings. However, there has been no intensive academic work done on tattooing specifically on the Naga tribes. Tattoo practices were a significant part of the Naga society, and this study will help to find the missing puzzle pieces to reconstruct the society.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Tattoos played a significant role in Naga culture. The tattoo was not just an art or for beautification, but it was also a badge of honour for warriors and a mark of social status in society. Tattoo practices of the Nagas are complex and diverse, but till now, it has not got their rightful place.

Tattooing practices and their meanings can vary significantly between different cultures and societies. By studying tattoos, we can better understand Naga cultures, their values, beliefs, and traditions. It can also reveal how certain rites of passage, societal roles, and accomplishments are marked and celebrated within these societies.

Tattoos serve as a form of personal expression and can play a significant role in shaping individual identities. Studying tattoos can help us understand the motivations behind why people get tattooed, what they choose to tattoo on their bodies, and how tattoos contribute to their sense of self. This study aims to better understand the tattoo patterns, their meaning and the rituals involved in them. The study will also emphasise the raw materials and how the inks were extracted. What kind of needles were used? What kind of natural herbs were used to prevent infection?

Tattoo studies can also shed light on societal perceptions of tattoos and the people who have them. It can uncover prejudices and stigmas associated with tattoos and explore how these attitudes vary across different cultures and societies.

The study of tattoos also holds significant value as many Naga traditional tattooing practices are in danger of being lost due to the new religion, modernisation and cultural assimilation. How the Nagas accepted the new idea of modernity, the art of tattooing became

a taboo and why it was abandoned. Research on these practices can help document and preserve them for future generations and foster a greater appreciation for these cultural heritage traditions.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the symbolic approach of Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep's concept of Rites of passage and Charles Darwin's theory. Victor Turner was a British cultural anthropologist known for his work on symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. He considered symbols to be the smallest units of ritual, which act as the "storage units" of cultural knowledge. For Turner, the power of symbols comes from their ability to represent a multitude of meanings and ideas, while still being rooted in the experiential world.

Turner proposed a dual nature of symbols, distinguishing between their "exegetical meaning" (the explanation given by the members of the culture themselves) and their "operational meaning" (how they function in social action, often unspoken and unconscious). He further divided symbols into "dominant symbols" that encapsulate the core values of a society, and "instrumental symbols" that relate more to specific actions or rituals.

One of his most notable concepts is the idea of "multivocality" in symbolism, which refers to the capacity of a symbol to represent multiple meanings simultaneously. Turner argued that symbols are condensed ways of conveying complex ideas, feelings, and values, and can therefore have different interpretations depending on the context or the individual.

In his study of Ndembu rituals in Zambia, Turner introduced the concept of "social drama," a public, dynamic, and condensed enactment of conflicts within society. Here, symbols play a crucial role, carrying and transmitting cultural messages and societal norms.

Applying Turner's concepts to the study of tattoos, one could argue that tattoos act as dominant symbols that carry societal and personal meanings, while also being instrumental symbols that are used in the ritual of tattooing itself. Tattoos can be multivocal, representing a variety of meanings depending on the cultural, societal, and personal context. Understanding tattoos in this way allows for a deeper exploration of their roles and significance in different cultures and societies.

Arnold van Gennep was a French ethnographer and folklorist known for his work on rites of passage in various cultures. In his book, "The Rites of Passage" (1961), he outlined a general structure for these rituals, arguing that they consist of three main phases:

Separation (or Preliminal Phase): This is the stage where individuals are separated from their previous status within the community. This separation can be physical (moving to a new location), social (ceasing to perform certain activities), or symbolic (changing one's attire or behaviour).

Transition (or Liminal Phase): During this stage, individuals exist in a sort of limbo, no longer belonging to their previous status but not yet integrated into their new one. They often undergo certain rituals or tests that prepare them for their new role. This phase is characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty, and potential for transformation.

Incorporation (or Postliminal Phase): Finally, individuals are reintegrated into society with their new status. This often involves celebratory rituals that publicly acknowledge and validate their new status.

Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage has been hugely influential in the field of anthropology and beyond. It provides a framework for understanding how societies navigate and ritualise changes in social status, whether that's puberty, marriage, childbirth, or death. Applying this concept to the study of tattooing, one could argue that getting a tattoo can be seen as a rite of passage in certain cultures or contexts. The act of getting a tattoo can represent the separation phase, the healing process might represent the liminal phase, and the presentation of the healed tattoo might represent the reintegration phase. The tattoo itself signifies the individual's new status or role within their society or subculture.

Charles Darwin, a renowned naturalist and biologist, was best known for his work on the theory of evolution by natural selection. Although he did not specifically concentrate on body modification, he addressed the broader topic of human physical traits, cultural variations, and the perception of beauty across diverse societies. In his seminal work, "The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex," published in 1871, Darwin explored the role of sexual selection in the development of human characteristics and the ways in which distinct cultures valued beauty and attractiveness.

Darwin's observations revealed that various cultural practices related to body modification, such as tattooing, scarification, and cranial deformation, frequently served as markers of beauty or social status within specific communities. He acknowledged that these practices were not universally adopted and exhibited considerable variation across different cultures. Darwin posited that the predilection for particular body modifications might arise due to sexual selection. Individuals with these modifications were perceived as more attractive and thus more likely to reproduce successfully.

By examining the phenomenon of body modification through the lens of sexual selection, Darwin underscored the significance of cultural context and the evolutionary forces that shape human preferences for physical appearance. Although he did not exhaustively investigate body modification, his groundbreaking work laid the foundation for future research into these practices' cultural, social, and evolutionary dimensions. Consequently, Darwin's insights have contributed to a deeper understanding of the myriad factors that influence human perceptions of beauty and the diverse ways societies worldwide engage in body modification.

1.7 Statement of the Problem

While tattoo culture has a significant presence in Naga society, it remains under-researched. Early studies by colonial scholars, British officials, and European anthropologists have only provided a cursory look at this intricate cultural practice. The diversity in Naga tattoo designs is remarkable, varying not only between tribes but also within the same tribe, as evidenced by the differing patterns and meanings among the Thenkoh and Thendu of the Konyak tribe, as well as the Mongsen and Chungli of the Ao tribe. The methods for ink extraction also differ across various Naga communities.

The absence of written records poses a challenge for research, making oral sources the primary means of information gathering. Another obstacle is the decline in indigenous tattooing knowledge, as fewer people are familiar with traditional techniques. With the cessation of headhunting customs, tattoos, which once symbolised a warrior's accomplishments in traditional Naga society, have lost their cultural significance. This makes it imperative to conduct in-depth research to preserve the understanding of tattoo art, its cultural meanings, and the values it represents for future generations.

1.8 Objectives of the Study

Tattoo study is a rich and multifaceted field that encompasses a broad range of objectives, varying according to the specific discipline or angle of investigation. Here are the objectives of the study

- 1) Tattoos have been used by cultures around the world to signify everything from societal rank to personal accomplishment or rites of passage. One key objective of the study is to decode these symbols and understand their significance in Naga Culture and to have a deeper understanding as to what role tattoo played in the Naga society.

- To study the materials used for tattooing and how they were obtained.
 - To study the meaning behind the complex tattoo patterns.
 - What inspired the Nagas to create the tattoo patterns
 - What kind of rituals did they perform during tattoo ceremony?
- 2) Tattoos often serve as a medium for personal expression and identity formation. The aim is to explore the role tattoos play in shaping individual and community identities and how they can convey narratives, beliefs, or values. The study also aims to compare the similarities and differences of the tattoo patterns and their meanings among the different Naga tribes.
- 3) To examine the art form in the context of specific tribal groups and its social ramifications.
- Why almost all the tribe's tattoo artists were women.?
 - Why the men did not learn the art of tattooing? Was it a Taboo?
 - Why the art of tattooing was kept a secret and passed on from mother to daughter (hereditary)?
 - Were the tattoo artist paid?
- 4) To connect the past history of the Naga society through the study of tattoos.
- 5) Many traditional tattooing practices are at risk of being lost due to the rapid pace of modernisation and cultural assimilation. The aim is to document these practices and the associated knowledge, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage.

1.9 Hypothesis

- Tattoo was not simply for body adornment and beautification, but it was symbolic.
- The role of tattoos in defining social structure as a marker of identity in Naga society.
- Tattooing culture is specifically prevalent among tribes residing in the northeastern region of Nagaland.

1.10 Area of Study

For the purpose of this study, eight specific districts within Nagaland have been selected: Mon, Mokokchung, Phek, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Noklak, and Shamator. The rationale behind focusing on these particular districts lies in their demographic composition; they are predominantly inhabited by Naga tribes who have a rich history of tattooing

practices. These districts are considered cultural hubs where the art of tattooing has been traditionally embraced, making them ideal locations for an in-depth investigation into the subject matter. By concentrating on these areas, the study aims to capture a comprehensive view of tattooing within Naga society, thereby providing valuable insights into regional variations, techniques, and the cultural significance of the practice.

The primary method of data collection was interviews. Individuals engaged in tattoo practices from the chosen villages were selected for interviews. Participants were categorised into two groups: those who have tattoos and those who have observed the tattooing process but are not tattooed themselves. This dual perspective aided in examining the research problem more comprehensively. Given that the information will be gleaned mainly from participants' memories, questionnaires will be an appropriate data collection technique.

1.11 Research Methodology

The field of tattoo studies is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing upon various methodologies to explore its multifaceted dimensions. Researchers from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, art history, psychology, and cultural studies contribute to the growing body of knowledge on tattooing. Each discipline brings its unique lens and methodological approach to the study, enriching our understanding of tattooing as a cultural, psychological, and historical phenomenon.

This study was based on both primary and secondary sources of information.

(1) Primary source:

Ethnographic fieldwork served as the cornerstone of this research, requiring the researcher to immerse in the culture or community under study for an extended duration. This immersive approach included participant observation, where the researcher actively engaged in the community's activities to gain firsthand insights.

Data collection was multifaceted, employing various techniques such as interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to gather primary information. The first step in the research process involved understanding the tribal dynamics, particularly given the linguistic diversity within the tribe. Villages were categorised based on language groups, followed by identifying the oldest villages within these groups, as they often serve as the origin points for many other villages.

Language barriers presented a significant challenge, especially since many villagers did not speak Nagamese, the most commonly used dialect in the region. To overcome this,

translators were employed for each tribe, and in some instances, multiple translators were needed depending on the region's linguistic diversity.

Both interview and observation methods were utilised for data collection. The research covered several hundred villages, including some of the most remote areas in Nagaland, to ensure a comprehensive data set. This rigorous approach aimed to capture the rich complexity of tattooing practices across different Naga tribes, providing a nuanced understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

(2) Secondary source:

In addition to ethnographic fieldwork, archival research was another key component of this study. This involved examining various historical materials, including documents, photographs, and artefacts, to gain a deeper understanding of the historical context surrounding tattooing practices. These archival sources served as a valuable supplement to the primary data collected from the field, offering a longitudinal perspective on the cultural phenomenon under investigation.

Secondary information was also gathered from diverse sources to enrich the study's data pool. This included both published and unpublished materials, such as books, academic journals, and magazines. Seminar papers and presentations related to the subject matter were also reviewed, as were articles and write-ups published in newspapers.

(3) Strategies for collecting data:

Stage – I:

The initial stage entailed an extensive review of available records, including books, both published and unpublished materials, academic journals, seminar papers, presentations, and magazines. Museum visits were also incorporated to gather additional historical context. A comprehensive literature review was prepared, summarising existing academic research on the subject. Within the scope of tattoo studies, this literature review aimed to encapsulate prior research on tattoos' meanings, functions, and cultural significance across various societies. This stage contextualised the primary and secondary data, providing a broader academic framework within which the study's findings could be interpreted.

Stage – II

The second step involved visiting living survivors who had engaged in tattooing practices in the districts of Noklak, Phek, Mon, Tuensang, Mokokchung, Kiphire, Longleng, and Shamator. After these visits, interviews were conducted with local residents using various techniques to collect pertinent information related to the research problem. Tools such as interviews, surveys, and questionnaires were employed to capture personal narratives and

viewpoints from individuals. Surveys facilitated data collection from a broader sample, while in-depth interviews offered more nuanced insights into the personal experiences and meanings tied to tattoos. Any extant objects related to the study were documented and integrated into the research.

Stage – III

The third phase of the research focused on identifying the tattoo patterns and their significance across different Naga tribes. A comparative study analysed variations in designs, meanings, and techniques. Case studies were employed for more in-depth investigations, targeting specific individuals, groups, or contexts. Within the realm of tattoo studies, these case studies enhanced in on the tattooing practices of particular cultures or subcultures, individual tattoo artists with notable expertise, or individuals who had significant or unique tattoos. This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the intricate details and cultural implications of tattooing within Naga society.

These methodologies were employed in tandem to offer a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of tattoos and tattooing practices. The combination of literature review, ethnographic fieldwork, archival research and case studies allowed for a more robust analysis, capturing the complexity of the subject matter from historical, cultural, and individual perspectives.

1.12 Chapterisation

1. Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes essential components of the research framework, such as the conceptual definition, problem statement, methodological approach, study area, and research objectives. Data collection strategies were also delineated. The approach was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

2. Chapter II: ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STATE

This chapter includes an ethnographic examination of the Nagas, focusing on their social, cultural, and geographical contexts. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of these aspects related to the research objectives.

3. Chapter III: METHODS OF TATTOOING

This chapter includes a detailed overview of the tools and implements used in tattooing, the collection of raw materials, and the various methods and techniques employed in the tattooing process. The aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practical aspects involved in the art of tattooing.

4. Chapter IV: IMPORTANCE OF TATTOO IN NAGA CULTURE

This chapter explores the diverse tattoo patterns found among different Naga tribes, exploring their symbolic meanings and the ritual ceremonies associated with them. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of these tattoo practices within Naga society.

5. Chapter V: INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON TATTOO CULTURE

This chapter examines the reasons why the Nagas abandoned the practice of tattooing, specifically focusing on the impact that new religious influences had on Naga society. The aim was to understand the cultural and social shifts that contributed to the decline of this traditional art form.

6. Chapter VI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

This chapter explores the similarities and differences in tattooing practices between the Nagas and tribes from Borneo, Myanmar, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines, all of whom have a history of tattooing. The aim was to provide a comparative perspective on this art form's cultural significance and techniques across different societies.

7. Chapter VII: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the findings discussed in the preceding chapters and drew conclusions based on the analyses presented. The aim was to synthesise the research and offer a comprehensive understanding of the study's overall implications

CHAPTER-2

ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STATE

2.1 State of Nagaland

Situated in the far northeastern corner of India, Nagaland is a mountainous state characterised by its verdant valleys. Myanmar borders it to the east, Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh and a section of Assam to the north, and Manipur to the south. Nagaland became the 16th state of the Indian Union when it achieved statehood on December 1st, 1963. The state is divided into sixteen administrative districts, including Kohima, Dimapur, Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Zunheboto, Mon, Phek, Peren, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak, Tseminyu, Shamator, Niuland, and Chumoukedima (Nagaland State Portal). These districts are further subdivided into numerous towns and villages, with each district predominantly inhabited by one major tribe, each having its own designated area. Some Nagas also reside in the neighbouring states of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and the adjacent country of Myanmar.

Kohima serves as the state capital, while Dimapur is the largest city and commercial centre. Christianity is the primary religion of the Nagas, with Christians making up 90.02% of the population. About 80% of the population identify as Baptists, leading to Nagaland being referred to as "the most Baptist state in the world" (The Indian Express 2018). Nagaland, along with Meghalaya and Mizoram, has a high percentage of Christians, making them Christian majority states in India. According to the 2011 census, Nagaland has a literacy rate of 80.11%, with a male literacy rate of 83.3% and a female literacy rate of 76.7%. Mokokchung, Wokha, and Zunheboto are the most literate districts, boasting literacy rates of 91.6%, 87.7%, and 85.3%, respectively. Nagaland is well connected to other states and districts through road, rail, and air transportation, with Dimapur being the only district in the state with an airport and railway station (Census of India, 2011).

2.1.1 People

Nagaland is home to the diverse ethnic group known as the Nagas, comprised of seventeen primary tribes and numerous sub-tribes. Each of these tribes maintains its distinct traditions, customs, and practices, contributing to the region's rich cultural tapestry. The primary tribes include the Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Rengma, Chakhesang, Chang, Khamniungan, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Tikhir, Yimkhiung, Zeliang, Pochury, Garo, Kuki, and Kachari.

The Nagas are of Mongoloid origin, with their ancestry tracing back to regions in Mongolia and China. Although no historical documents or written records can confirm this claim, the vibrant cultural heritage of the Naga people has been carefully preserved through the generations by means of oral tradition. This rich cultural history is passed down through myths, stories, and legends, ensuring that the knowledge of their ancestry endures.

The Naga people are known for their warmth and hospitality, creating a welcoming atmosphere for visitors and fellow community members. In addition to their amicable nature, the Nagas also display a strong sense of unity and pride in their tribal identities. This is evidenced by their colourful attire, intricate jewellery, and unique tribal tattoos, which serve as markers of tribal affiliation and personal accomplishments.

The various Naga tribes each have their own festivals and celebrations that showcase their cultural identity and strengthen community bonds. One notable example is the Hornbill Festival, an annual event that unites the tribes in a vibrant display of their cultural heritage, including traditional dance, music, and cuisine.

2.1.2 Language

Nagaland's linguistic landscape is diverse and fascinating, with each Naga tribe exhibiting its own unique dialect within the Tibeto-Burman language family. This diversity is reflective of the rich cultural heritage and distinct identities of the various tribes. Despite these linguistic differences, the Naga people have managed to establish a sense of unity and understanding through the development of the Nagamese language.

The Nagamese language has evolved as a lingua franca among the Nagas, enabling effective communication and fostering a sense of camaraderie across the different tribes. This common language has not only bridged the communication gap but has also facilitated trade, cultural exchange, and inter-tribal interactions within the region.

The widespread use of Hindi and English among the Naga people showcases their adaptability and openness to embracing languages beyond their own dialects. Proficiency in Hindi, the official language of India, allows them to engage with the broader Indian population, while the use of English as the official language of Nagaland and as the medium of instruction in educational institutions further enhances their integration with the global community.

2.1.3 Geographical Features

Nagaland, a state in north-eastern India, is situated between latitudes 25°6' N and 27°4' N and longitudes 93°20' E and 95°15' E. Spanning an area of 16,579 square kilometres, Nagaland ranks among India's smallest states. According to the 2011 census, the state has a population of 1,980,602, resulting in a population density of 119 individuals per square kilometre. The same census data indicates a sex ratio of 931 females for every 1,000 males within the state (Nagaland Population Census 2011).

Nagaland's diverse terrain comprises a mix of mountains, valleys, and rivers, creating a unique and picturesque landscape. The Naga Hills, an extension of the Indian Himalayas, dominate the state's topography, with the Patkai Range forming a natural barrier between India and Myanmar. This rugged terrain, coupled with the region's dense forests and abundant greenery, contributes to Nagaland's distinct and breathtaking scenery. Nagaland's topography features notable peaks, with Mount Saramati in Kiphire district being the highest at an elevation of 3,841 meters above sea level. The second-highest peak, Japfü, is located approximately 15 kilometres south of Kohima and rises to an altitude of 3,048 meters above sea level. The state is also characterised by its numerous rivers, which contribute to the region's abundant natural resources and diverse ecosystems. The main rivers flowing through Nagaland include the Dhansiri, Doyang, Milak, Tizu, Dikhu, Tsurang, Zungki, Likimro, and Lanye. These waterways play a vital role in the state's agricultural practices, providing essential sustenance for the region's flora and fauna. Nagaland experiences a subtropical climate, with hot summers, cool winters, and abundant rainfall. The state's annual average rainfall ranges between 1,800 and 2,500 millimetres, with the majority falling during the monsoon season, which typically lasts from June to September. This plentiful rainfall nourishes the region's lush forests, which include a mix of tropical evergreen, subtropical, and temperate broadleaf species. These forests are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna, further enriching the state's natural beauty and ecological diversity (Nagaland State Portal).

The numerous rivers coursing through Nagaland provide essential water resources for the state's agriculture and rural livelihoods. The fertile river valleys support the cultivation of rice, which is the staple food crop for the Naga people. Other important crops grown in the region include maize, millets, pulses, oilseeds, and a variety of vegetables and fruits.

Nagaland's unique geographical setting, characterised by its rugged mountains, verdant valleys, and meandering rivers, has shaped the cultural and economic development of the region. The state's rich natural resources and distinct landscape have influenced the Naga

people's agricultural practices, traditional lifestyles, and their deep connection to the land. Additionally, Nagaland's scenic beauty and diverse ecosystems have made it an increasingly popular destination for tourists seeking to explore India's lesser-known gems and experience the state's vibrant culture and traditions.

2.1.4 Climate Variations

Nagaland's distinctive mountainous terrain significantly impacts its climate, resulting in variations across different altitudes and regions. The state's climate can be broadly classified into two primary seasons: the wet monsoon season and the relatively dry winter season.

During the wet monsoon season, which usually spans from May to September, Nagaland experiences substantial rainfall due to the influence of the southwest monsoon. This abundant precipitation is vital for the region's agriculture and sustains its lush forests and diverse ecosystems. The monsoon season is characterized by high humidity levels and moderate temperatures, creating a predominantly damp and cloudy atmosphere. Occasional landslides and flash floods may also occur in certain areas due to the heavy rainfall, especially in regions with steep slopes and fragile soil.

In contrast, the winter season, which extends from November to February, is marked by cooler temperatures and relatively dry conditions. The lower temperatures during this period result from cold air masses originating from the north and the higher altitudes of the Himalayas. As previously mentioned, some regions of Nagaland, particularly those situated at higher elevations, may experience snowfall during the winter months. The winter season also witnesses occasional fog and frost, especially in the early mornings and late evenings.

The transitional periods between the monsoon and winter seasons, which occur in October and March to April, are characterized by moderate temperatures and reduced rainfall. These months often provide the most pleasant conditions for outdoor activities and tourism.

2.1.5 Nagaland's Biodiversity

Nagaland boasts a rich array of flora and fauna, with its landscape characterized by tropical and subtropical evergreen forests. These forests host numerous valuable plant and animal species, contributing to the state's ecological diversity. Bamboo, a versatile and economically significant plant, thrives across Nagaland. The Naga people utilize bamboo for various purposes, including fuel, housing, handicrafts, agricultural tools, and traditional culinary dishes.

The state tree of Nagaland, alder, is another prominent plant species found in the region. The area is also abundant in various flowering plants, including orchids and anthurium. Nagaland serves as a vital habitat for a diverse range of animal species, such as bears, elephants, tigers, leopards, deer, monkeys, hoolock gibbons, langurs, snakes, wagtails, pheasants, monitor lizards, porcupines, bison, and pangolins. The state also hosts various bird, insect, and bee species. The Great Indian Hornbill, a revered symbol in Naga culture, is native to Nagaland. Hornbill feathers are often used for ornamentation. The Tragopan, Nagaland's state bird, is another beautiful avian species found in the region.

Several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in Nagaland provide essential habitats for numerous flora and fauna. These protected areas include Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary, Pulie-Badze Wildlife Sanctuary, Intangki National Park, Rangapahar Reserve Forest, and Ghosu Bird Sanctuary. These natural reserves contribute to the conservation of Nagaland's diverse ecosystems and serve as popular destinations for wildlife enthusiasts and tourists alike.

2.2 Ethnographic Account of the Nagas

The Naga society presents a complex and multifaceted entity, comprising various distinct tribes with unique cultural characteristics and traditions. Consequently, attaining a comprehensive understanding of the Naga society in its entirety is a formidable task. Each tribe possesses its own rendition of its historical origins, often relayed through folklore and oral traditions that detail their migration to their present homelands. This feature engenders a rich tapestry of diverse narratives that contribute to the overall Naga identity.

Despite significant variations in their individual interpretations and customs, these tribes remain unified by a shared cultural foundation that is reflective of their collective Naga identity. This cultural cohesion is manifested in different aspects of their lives, such as social structure, religious beliefs, traditional attire, and customary practices.

A more profound appreciation of the complexity and nuances of Naga society necessitates a deeper exploration of the cultural traditions and customary practices that define each tribe.

2.2.1 Family

The Naga society's family structure is predominantly nuclear, composed of parents and their offspring. The patriarchal social system in place identifies the father as the head of the household, and offspring typically reside with their parents until they marry, at which point

they establish their own homes. Nonetheless, some children may continue to reside with their parents after marriage. Following marriage, women relocate to their husband's household, and polygamous family arrangements, consisting of a man, his wives, and their children, were historically present.

Respect for parents and elders constitutes an integral component of the Naga society's cultural ethos. Addressing elders by name is deemed impolite, with specific kinship terms assigned based on the relationship with a particular relative. In the Naga society, descent follows a patrilineal rule, whereby children are more closely affiliated with the consanguineal kin group of their father.

It is noteworthy that the Naga society's familial structure is intricately interwoven into its larger societal framework, highlighting the cultural significance of family values in Naga society. The Naga society's social system's patriarchal nature implies that men have dominant roles in family and community affairs, while women's roles are primarily relegated to household management and domestic responsibilities. This overarching social structure, influenced by cultural and traditional factors, has profound implications for family relationships and societal development in Naga society.

2.2.2 Marriage

The Nagas practice monogamous marriage, characterized by the union of one man and one woman. Nonetheless, other forms of marriage, such as polygamy, were also prevalent in the past. Polygamy was practiced by wealthy Lotha Naga men, where the ability to support multiple wives was considered a symbol of higher status in society. Both sororal and non-sororal polygyny were practiced. The Sumi Nagas customarily married their fathers' widows, excluding the mother, to retain property within the family. Presently, polygamy is strictly prohibited in Naga society, with polyandrous marriages being uncommon.

The Nagas are endogamous, meaning individuals are required to marry within their particular tribe, but strictly follow clan exogamy. The Konyak tribes' hereditary chiefs, known as '*anghs*,' could have multiple wives and retain their pure blood by marrying women within their own *angh* clan. Only the male heir and son of the queen could inherit the anghship. Cross-cousin marriages are permitted in some Naga tribes, but parallel cousin marriages are frowned upon as it equates to sibling relationships. The rule of residence among the Nagas is typically patrilocal and sometimes neolocal.

Strict rules and regulations govern the selection of mates in Naga society. Traditionally, the boy's family requested the girl's hand in marriage, and parental consent was necessary for marriage. The bride price was a customary practice among the Nagas, where the groom provided cash or in-kind marriage payments to the bride's family. Clothes, ornaments, animals, ceremonial baskets were also given to the bride by her parents. The Lotha Nagas '*Hanlam*' tradition involved the bride's family demanding unblemished pig from the groom's family, with the prestige of the groom increasing with the number of pigs provided. A few days before the wedding, the pigs were slaughtered, and the meat was distributed to all the bride's consanguineous kins extending to her clan and lineage members, symbolizing the bond shared between kin groups. Among some Naga tribes, it was customary for the groom to render his service for his future father-in-law for a specified period before marriage.

To evaluate a potential groom's worth, the Sumi customarily gave him big strips of cooked pork fat to eat. A man who could consume a large quantity was considered desirable due to his strength and vigor. Eating meat was also perceived as a sign of wealth, equated with opulence, indicating that the individual belonged to a wealthy family.

The evolution of Naga marriage customs over time has resulted in greater freedom and choice for individuals to select their spouses. Inter-tribe, inter-religious, and inter-racial marriages are becoming increasingly popular. Love marriages are more popular than arranged marriages as people have become more aware of their choices. Child marriages, once prevalent in Naga society, have been eradicated and are no longer practised. Monogamous marriage remains the prescribed form of marriage in Naga society.

2.2.3 Divorce

In Naga society, divorce is perceived as an undesirable outcome and is generally avoided wherever possible. Marriages are viewed as permanent unions and are expected to be sustained through any challenges that arise. Therefore, the occurrence of divorce is usually indicative of significant issues, such as infertility, a lack of male offspring, adultery, or interpersonal conflicts. In such cases, customary laws and traditions provide for compensation to the parties involved, which may include fines or other forms of settlement. For example, among the Lotha tribe, a fine of ten rupees is imposed on the responsible party for terminating the marriage.

When divorce takes place, Naga society does not prescribe alimony for support or maintenance, and custody of the children is typically awarded to the father, in accordance with customary laws. Joint property is divided in a manner that is often considered to be inequitable, with men retaining the lion's share of shared assets. Women are allowed to take only their personal belongings, with their share of joint property being restricted to a nominal amount. Among the Angami tribe, women are entitled to only one-third of the shared property. Furthermore, in certain Naga tribes, women are expected to return the bride price paid to them during their marriage if they are divorced due to committing adultery.

Naga society permits individuals who have been divorced or widowed to enter into second marriages. In recent times, there has been a trend towards an increased acceptance of divorce within the society, and it is viewed with less social stigma. However, the process of divorce and the distribution of shared assets are still influenced by customary laws and traditional cultural practices.

Despite the changes that have taken place, Naga society's deeply ingrained cultural norms and practices continue to play a significant role in the consequences of divorce. While the trend towards divorce may be increasing, the social and cultural implications of marital dissolution in Naga society are likely to persist.

2.2.4 Economic activity

Agriculture constitutes the primary occupation and mainstay of the Nagas, with over 70% of the population dependent on it. The population is distributed such that approximately 71.14% of the population resides in rural areas and sustains an agrarian lifestyle, while the remaining 28.86 % resides in urban areas (Nagaland Population Census 2011). While some have migrated to urban areas seeking better opportunities, agriculture remains the main economic activity.

Jhum or shifting cultivation is the predominant agricultural practice among the Nagas. It involves the cutting and burning of a patch of forest land to create fields for growing crops. The land is cultivated for a few years, and when the soil fertility is depleted, it is abandoned for a new plot of land. The land is then left to lie fallow for seven to ten years, allowing it to regain its nutrients before cultivation is resumed. Terraced wet-rice cultivation is another form of cultivation practiced among certain tribes, such as the Angamis and Chakhesangs, and is known for its effectiveness.

The agricultural tools and implements used by the Nagas are primitive, and manual labor is the primary means of cultivation. The tools include hoes, machetes, sickles, spades, axes, rakes, scrapers, grain beaters, winnowing fans, stone and wooden grain grinders, and rain coverings made of thatch, cane, and palm leaves. The terrain does not permit the use of ploughs drawn by animals or mechanical means of ploughing.

The domestication of animals, for food and fiber, is also an important part of Naga culture and economy. Cattle, buffalo, mithun, goats, dogs, pigs, and poultry are reared for their meat and other products. Pork is considered a delicacy, and dogs are believed to have medicinal properties. Mithun is held in high esteem and is reared as an indication of a person's social status and wealth. Hunting, gathering, fishing, and trapping wild animals are still important means of subsistence in rural areas.

The division of labor and responsibilities in Naga society is gender-based, with men engaged in hunting, fishing, and war, while women tend to children, take care of the home, cook, weave, and fetch water and firewood. Traditionally, women fetched water using bamboo barrels from distant locations.

The Nagas lived in isolation for centuries, with little contact with the outside world. They were economically self-sufficient and relied on barter as the mode of exchange between tribes and people in neighboring states. Goods and services were exchanged for salt, dried fish, beads and ornaments, agricultural implements, cotton, ginger, and chilli. The Ao Nagas developed the use of currency known as *chabili* made from the edge of obsolete machetes known as *rongnok*. Cowries, conch shells, beads, animals, and salt were also used as currency and medium of exchange in trade. This system of exchange was long prevalent before money was introduced to the state.

2.2.5 Food Habits

The staple food of the Nagas is rice, which is consumed twice a day. Traditional Naga food preparation does not use oil, and instead relies on boiling and steaming. Popular ingredients in Naga cuisine include bamboo shoots, dried fish, and fermented soya beans, which are used to add flavor to a variety of dishes. Fresh and dried herbs are also commonly used for their medicinal properties and aromatic qualities, and garlic and ginger are integral ingredients in Naga cooking. Spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, cumin, and nutmeg are used sparingly. Meat is a significant part of the Naga diet, with pork being the predominant meat consumed. Other meats commonly consumed include beef, chicken, fish,

mithun meat, venison, dog meat, bird meat, crab, shrimps, snails, grasshoppers, frogs, bee larvae, and silkworm.

Seasonal vegetables grown and consumed in Nagaland include pumpkin, cucumber, squash, gourds, mustard, sesame, brinjal, beans, peas, lentils, chillies, tomatoes, spinach, cabbage, carrot, radish, spring onions, broccoli, ginger, and garlic. Crops such as rice, millet, maize, Job's tears, and root vegetables such as potatoes, yams, taro, and cassava are also grown. Fruits available in the area include peaches, plums, guavas, pears, oranges, passion fruits, pineapple, kiwi, pomegranate, gooseberry, blackberry, papaya, and bananas. Nagaland is also known for the cultivation of the King Chilli, also known as "*Raja Mircha*" or "*Bhot Jolokia*," which has been certified as the world's hottest chili pepper in the Guinness World Records since 2007.

Rice beer was the staple drink of the Nagas, and they brewed their own indigenous liquor. The Naga community participated in ceremonial drinking during feasts, rituals, and other ceremonies. However, due to the state's Christian influence, the consumption of alcohol has been made illegal in Nagaland. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council and other social reformers and organizations have been advocating for the prohibition of alcohol, and drunkenness is viewed as a social disgrace. Despite these efforts, alcohol consumption remains a persistent social issue in Naga society.

In recent years, cultural interactions with other societies, modernization, globalization, and urbanization have led to changes in Naga food habits. The younger generation's food preferences and lifestyles have evolved, resulting in an increase in the consumption of junk food, fast food, and processed food available in the market. Additionally, domestic consumption of beverages such as tea and coffee has increased, which was introduced to the Nagas by the British.

2.2.6 Morung

The Morung, or bachelor's dormitory, represents one of the most ancient institutions among the Naga people. It serves as a communal space where adolescent males reside from the onset of puberty until they enter into matrimony. Known by various names, such as *Chumpo* in Lotha, *Kichuki* in Angami, *Apuki* in Sema, and *Rensi* in Rengma, the *Morung* exists within the Ao Naga community as separate dormitories for both genders, referred to as *Ariju* for males and *Tsüki* for females.

Historically, villages were divided into wards called *khels*, determined by clan affiliations, and each *khel* contained its own *Morung*. These dormitories functioned as social institutions, governing individual behaviour and preserving as well as transmitting the community's cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices. Initially established to protect villages from enemy incursions, *Morung* residents vigilantly guarded their communities, taking turns to ensure their safety.

Before the British period, the *Morung* also served as an educational institution in the absence of formal schools in Nagaland. Here, young males acquired knowledge pertaining to social, cultural, educational, and religious matters. They were organized into distinct age-based groups, each with specific duties and responsibilities. Older *Morung* residents maintained discipline among younger members, who were expected to strictly adhere to their seniors' instructions. Violations incurred severe penalties.

Within the *Morung*, youths were educated in various arts and crafts, discipline, folk songs, and dances, under the guidance of their elders. They also received combat training, learning about weaponry, defence strategies, and tactics in preparation for war. In a society that greatly values masculinity, *Morung* residents had to undergo tests to demonstrate their manliness and maturity. Failure to fulfil expected duties and obligations resulted in ridicule and accusations of inadequacy. Women were forbidden to enter *Morungs*, as it was considered an ill omen, and married men were not permitted to sleep within the dormitories.

Additionally, *Morungs* functioned as recreational centers where young males engaged in leisurely pursuits such as singing and dancing. They would gather in the evenings to share folktales and stories. However, with the advent of Christianity, the *Morung's* societal significance diminished, eventually leading to its complete abandonment as a social institution.

2.2.7 Property and inheritance

In Naga society, a patriarchal structure prevails, with the father serving as the head of the household. Inheritance follows a patrilineal system, with both movable and immovable assets passed down through the male lineage. Land, a significant immovable property, is typically divided among sons according to specific customs.

The majority of Naga tribes adhere to the practice of ultimogeniture, in which the youngest son receives the largest portion of his father's estate, including the family home, granaries, and his share of the divided land. In contrast, some tribes follow the custom of

primogeniture, wherein the eldest son inherits the most substantial share of family assets. In the absence of a male heir, the next male relative in the line of succession assumes the inheritance rights.

Daughters in Naga society do not possess the same rights as their male counterparts, particularly concerning land inheritance. However, upon marriage, they customarily receive gifts from their parents, such as clothing, ornaments, weaving looms, baskets, and paddy. Beyond these gifts, daughters typically have no claim to their family's estate.

Notwithstanding these limitations, a widow gains the right to maintenance and may retain her deceased husband's property and inheritance. This right, however, is revoked if she chooses to remarry or upon her death. It is important to note that clan land, as a communal resource, is collectively owned by clan members, allowing them to utilize the land as a group. However, individual families cannot inherit this shared land.

2.2.8 Status of Women

The Naga people traditionally maintain a patriarchal society, in which women were often perceived as subordinate to men, considered the weaker sex, and deemed inferior. Preference was given to male children over female children, and women were customarily tasked with caring for the young and managing household duties. Historically, education was not a priority, particularly for females, as girls were discouraged from attending school. Instead, women were viewed as a liability, with their contributions to the household considered more valuable than educational pursuits. Consequently, female literacy was low, and parents deemed it essential for girls to learn domestic tasks rather than receive a formal education. In addition, child marriages were once prevalent in Naga society, with many girls marrying at a young age. Patrilineal customs also excluded women from inheritance rights, leading to a disparity in privileges between men and women.

In contemporary Naga society, women's status has significantly improved. They now enjoy respect and equal standing with men, and the present generation of Naga women experiences greater freedom and access to opportunities. Improved education has empowered Naga women, fostering gender equality and narrowing the literacy gap between males and females. As a result, female literacy rates have risen substantially, and women's economic participation has expanded beyond traditional family roles.

Many Naga women today are highly educated and financially independent. Social norms have evolved, altering women's status and roles within the community. No longer

confined to traditional gender roles, Naga women have made remarkable progress in various fields, with numerous individuals achieving economic independence and even becoming family breadwinners. Additionally, women now contribute significantly to household decision-making.

While considerable progress has been made in achieving gender equality, and Naga women have made great strides, some patriarchal elements persist, as is the case in many societies. Men still possess greater decision-making power, particularly in the public sphere, where women may be underrepresented. However, the evolving landscape of Naga society continues to bring about positive change and a movement toward greater equality between men and women.

2.2.9 Religion

The Nagas, historically, adhered to an animistic faith, which posited that souls exist and can be found within both living and non-living entities. This belief system prompted them to revere a wide array of spirits, which they sought to appease through rituals, ceremonies, and festivals aimed at securing good health, bountiful harvests, and general prosperity. The Nagas attributed illnesses and misfortunes to these spirits; thus, they performed prayers, rituals, and animal sacrifices in an effort to placate them and maintain balance and harmony in their lives.

In Naga religious beliefs, transgressing taboos or violating societal norms was considered sinful. The soul was thought to have the ability to leave the body and travel to different locations. Furthermore, the Nagas paid homage to their deceased ancestors, whom they believed continued to exist in the afterlife and wielded influence over the lives of the living. Ancestors were considered guardians of crops, livestock, and sources of good fortune. These beliefs were often reflected in the cultural narratives of the Nagas, which took the form of myths, legends, and folk songs.

Naga customs dictated that individuals who experienced unnatural deaths—such as those resulting from accidents, suicides, falls, drownings, childbirth complications, or natural disasters—were not granted proper burials. Such deaths were believed to be the work of malevolent spirits, and thus, were greatly feared. Numerous taboos and restrictions surrounded unnatural deaths; for example, the bodies of the deceased were disposed of in remote locations, such as forests, and were not permitted to be buried within the village boundaries.

In some Naga tribes, the bereaved family was required to vacate their homes and reside in a designated taboo hut for a specified period. The animistic beliefs of the Nagas significantly influenced their societal norms, values, and overall structure.

2.2.10 Death

The Nagas held a belief in the persistence of the soul beyond the physical demise of an individual. Upon a person's death, it was thought that the soul would leave the body and journey to the Land of the Dead. During the burial process, various items, such as clothing, ornaments, weapons, tools, food, drink, utensils, and the deceased's personal belongings, were placed in the coffin. These items were believed to be necessary for the individual's afterlife.

For instance, when an Angami woman passes away, her grave would be adorned with baskets, yarn, spinning and weaving looms following the burial. In some Naga tribes, dogs were sacrificed to accompany a warrior on his voyage to the afterlife. Umbrellas were traditionally placed above graves to shield the deceased from rain or sunlight.

The Nagas believed that souls could return to their homes and communicate with their loved ones through dreams. In the past, relatives would seek the assistance of shamans, who were thought to possess the ability to access the spirit world, in order to communicate with the deceased. These shamans would act as intermediaries between the living and the dead.

The Nagas also believed that one's actions and behaviours during their earthly life would dictate the nature of their existence in the Land of the Dead. Consequently, performing good deeds throughout one's life was considered essential in order to secure a pleasant and fulfilling afterlife experience.

The Lotha Nagas refer to the Land of the Dead as "*echü likvü*," while the Ao Nagas call it "*tipu tenem*." The Konyak Nagas hold a belief in the existence of two separate souls. Upon a person's death, one soul is believed to journey to the Land of the Dead, while the other remains in the skull. The Konyak Nagas use the term "*Yimbu*" to describe the Land of the Dead.

In Konyak Naga tradition, deceased bodies are placed on an elevated platform at the center of the village, where they are left to decompose. Once decomposition has occurred, the head is detached from the body. Within the Konyak Naga community, the head is considered a valuable asset to the village.

The Ao Nagas believe that, on their journey to the Land of the Dead, departed souls pause to bathe in a river called *Longritzu Lenden*. It is at this point that they become aware of their death and continue their journey to the Land of the Dead. According to Ao tradition, the souls arrive at the dwelling of *Meyutsungba*, the God of Justice and the Land of the Dead. *Meyutsungba* is responsible for determining each individual's fate after death, based on their deeds during life. A spear is thrown at the tree of judgment in his courtyard, and if it hits the target, it signifies that the person lived a righteous life on Earth. If it misses, it reflects the individual's negative actions and deeds.

The Angami Nagas believe that, upon death, a soul must engage in a battle with *Metsimo*, the custodian of the gateway to the Land of the Dead. A defeat against *Metsimo* results in the denial of entry, and the soul is left to wander indefinitely.

Within Naga society, the burial site of a deceased individual often indicates their social status. Feast-givers and warriors are believed to maintain their status even in the afterlife. Memorial stones or wooden posts are erected by the Nagas to commemorate the deceased. When a wealthy individual or warrior passes away, a post or stone is established in their honor, symbolizing their social standing. For a deceased warrior, gourds representing the human heads taken during their lifetime are displayed, with the number of gourds corresponding to the number of heads collected. Hunting trophies, animal skulls from sacrifices, and personal possessions such as daos, spears, and shields are also placed on the grave as symbols of the individual's social status and to assist them in the afterlife. In some tribes, objects signifying the deceased's romantic prowess are also displayed.

The Konyak Nagas place a wooden effigy symbolizing the deceased person near the burial site. Among the Sangtam Nagas, a richly adorned bamboo pole is erected close to the grave of a warrior, featuring decorations such as mithun horns, birds, carved human heads, and the deceased's weapons, which are believed to assist them in the afterlife and signify their accomplishments as a distinguished warrior. For the Lotha Nagas, a totem post is raised at the grave of a *pvüti* (priest), engraved with motifs representing mithun heads, celestial bodies, female breasts, human heads, and hornbills, all indicating the status and honoring the memory of the deceased individual.

With the introduction of Christianity, many of these traditional beliefs and customs have become obsolete. Deceased individuals now receive Christian burials. Funeral services are conducted at the home of the deceased, presided over by a pastor. The pastor reads passages from the Bible, while mourners in attendance participate in singing hymns and offering prayers for the departed soul and the grieving family members. The remains of the

deceased are interred in a cemetery, and gravestones are typically placed on the graves as markers.

2.2.11 Political organisation

In the past, Naga society consisted of self-sufficient and autonomous villages, with each village functioning as an independent republic. Every village adhered to its unique leadership structure, typically governed by councils of elders or village chiefs. These councils were responsible for overseeing the administration and the welfare of the villagers.

Among the Ao Nagas, the village council, known as *putu menden*, was comprised of elders representing each clan. The council was tasked with maintaining order and making decisions on behalf of the village community. Decisions were made collectively, ensuring that the interests of all clans were taken into account. The council also served as a mediator in the event of conflicts or disputes between villagers, ensuring that harmony was maintained within the community.

The Konyak Nagas were led by hereditary chiefs called *anghs*, who exercised considerable authority over their subjects. The term '*Angh*' signifies 'the beginning of everything,' highlighting the importance of their role in Konyak society. Each Konyak village was governed by an *angh*, who had the right to exercise power over the masses. These *anghs* were responsible for making decisions on behalf of their communities, ensuring the welfare of the villagers and maintaining order.

Even amongst the *anghs*, there was a hierarchy, with chief *anghs* holding higher ranks and exercising centralized control over various villages within the Konyak region. The chief *anghs* played a crucial role in managing inter-village relations and maintaining the overall stability of the Konyak area.

The Sumi Nagas also had a hereditary leadership system, with chiefs responsible for administrative duties and ensuring the smooth functioning of their villages. These chiefs enjoyed various privileges and played a vital role in the development and progress of their communities.

In Lotha Naga society, the village priest, known as *pvüti*, held supreme power and occupied a very high status in traditional Lotha society. The *pvüti* was responsible for providing religious guidance to the villagers and overseeing the administration of the village. Assisted by the *yingae*, *chüchang*, and *dungti*, the *pvüti* also played an essential role in the performance of rituals and ceremonies that were central to Lotha culture.

Following the British invasion of Naga territory, the traditional institutions and leadership structures began to change. Villages came under the control of *gaon buras* and *dobashis*, who were appointed by government officials. The *gaon buras* managed the collection of house taxes, while the *dobashis* served as interpreters for the British. Together, they maintained and controlled village administration, ensuring that the interests of the colonial government were upheld.

In contemporary times, village councils comprising members such as a Chairman, Vice Chairman, and other executive members administer the villages. These councils have authority over village administration and work to develop their communities using funds provided by the state government. They are responsible for making decisions on a wide range of issues, including infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and sanitation.

The village councils also play a critical role in conflict resolution, mediating disputes between villagers and maintaining harmony within the community. Furthermore, they work to preserve the unique cultural heritage of their respective tribes, ensuring that traditional customs and practices are passed down through generations.

2.2.12 Festivals

Nagaland is often referred to as the Land of Festivals due to the numerous celebrations that take place throughout the year. A majority of these festivals are intricately connected to agricultural activities, primarily serving as harvest festivals. They are deeply rooted in religious traditions, providing an opportunity for the people to express gratitude to the Gods for the blessings bestowed upon their harvests.

Festivals also serve as occasions for social gatherings, marked by grandeur and exuberance. These events provide an opportunity for enjoyment, merriment, and the strengthening of familial bonds, as well as fostering reconciliation between friends and adversaries. Festivals and ceremonies provide an essential platform for social interaction and cultural exchange within the community.

During these events, the meat from slaughtered animals is distributed among various members of the community, including elders, village dignitaries, family members, and friends. This distribution is guided by specific customs that dictate the allocation of particular portions of the meat, symbolizing respect towards elders, the reinforcement of family ties, and the establishment of friendships. For example, the heads of slaughtered pigs are traditionally presented to village dignitaries or elders as a mark of honor and reverence.

Some of the major festivals of the Nagas are:

1. **Sekrenyi:** Sekrenyi, a ten-day purification festival, is celebrated annually in February by the Angami Nagas, one of the major tribes in Nagaland. This festival is also referred to as "*Phousanyi*." During this time, purification rituals are performed for the entire village community. On the first day, individuals of all ages partake in a communal bathing experience at the village well. At night, two young men undertake the responsibility of purifying the village well through a ritualistic cleaning. Once the purification ritual is completed, villagers are prohibited from collecting water from the well. To ensure compliance, youths are assigned to guard the well. Women, in particular, are forbidden from drawing water and must collect and store water for household use prior to the ritual.

On the following morning, the village's young men participate in a sanctification and purification ritual. They cleanse their bodies, clothing, and weapons at the village well, symbolizing the removal of impurities and misfortunes and seeking good health for the upcoming year. After the ceremony, they don two new shawls, *Mhoushü* and *Lohe*, and sprinkle water on their chests, right arms, and knees. This ritually significant ceremony performed by Angami men is called *Dzüseva*, meaning "touching the sleeping water." Upon returning home, a rooster is sacrificed as a means of examining omens and predicting the future. It is considered an auspicious sign if the rooster's right leg falls over its left leg. The rooster's entrails are then displayed on the exterior of the house for the priest to examine.

From the fourth day onwards, the festival is marked by singing, dancing, and feasting. Another significant aspect of the festival is *Thekra Hie*, during which young men and women gather to participate in festivities by feasting and singing traditional songs throughout the day. On the seventh day, all young men embark on a hunting expedition. Subsequently, on the eighth day, the entire village participates in gate pulling, an integral feature of the ceremony.

2. **Tokhu Emong:** Tokhu Emong is a post-harvest festival celebrated by the Lothas, one of the major tribes in Nagaland. This festival signifies the conclusion of the agricultural season and is observed annually on November 7th. Historically, the festival spanned nine days during the first week of November. Tokhu Emong serves as an occasion to express gratitude for divine favour and the blessings of a bountiful harvest.

During the festival, specific rituals are performed, and engaging in hunting, fishing, or traveling is considered inauspicious. Tokhu Emong is a time for communal gatherings, merry-making, and feasting. Exchanging food and drinks as gifts is a customary practice, symbolizing love and close connections between family members and friends. In the past, events such as marriages and house constructions were conducted only after the celebration of Tokhu Emong, as the festival represented a new beginning. Additionally, Tokhu Emong provided an opportunity to liberate the souls of those who had passed away during that particular year.

3. **Moatsü:** Moatsü is a harvest festival celebrated by the Ao Nagas, a prominent tribe of Nagaland. This annual event occurs in the first week of May, following the sowing season. The festival serves as an opportunity to invoke divine blessings and seek a prosperous harvest from the deities. Moatsü is a period when people take a respite and unwind after completing laborious tasks such as sowing seeds, cleaning wells (*tsubü*), and repairing houses.

A central feature of the festival is the lighting of a bonfire called *sangpangtu*. Participants, dressed in their finest traditional attire, gather around the bonfire to celebrate, with women offering food and drinks. During this time, individuals also consult a seer who possesses the knowledge and skill to predict the future. Additionally, the Ao Nagas celebrate another festival called Tsungremong in August. This pre-harvest festival similarly seeks divine blessings for an abundant harvest.

4. **Tuluni:** Tuluni is a festival celebrated by the Sumi tribe, often referred to as the 'warrior tribe' among the Nagas. This event takes place in July, signifying the completion of seed sowing. Tuluni coincides with the season of abundance, when the harvest is plentiful. During the festival, prayers and offerings are made to *Litsaba*, the deity responsible for bestowing life and protection upon crops.

Tuluni serves as a time for engaged couples to strengthen their bonds, with the future groom and his family being invited to the future bride's home for dinner and an exchange of food gifts. The event also marks the occasion for many betrothed couples to marry, symbolizing a fresh start. Furthermore, the festival offers an opportunity for individuals to renew and reinforce family ties and friendships.

The festival promotes forgiveness and reconciliation between adversaries through exchanging food and drinks or hosting feasts. Additionally, people express compassion towards the impoverished and needy by providing them with food and

drinks during Tuluni. The Sumi Nagas also celebrate a post-harvest festival called Ahuna in November, marking the end of the agricultural season.

5. **Sukrunye:** The Chakhesang tribe, one of the prominent tribes of Nagaland, commemorates the Sukrunye festival in the month of January. This festival is deeply intertwined with the agricultural cycle and holds significant cultural importance as it serves to ensure the good health and prosperity of the community.

During Sukrunye, the men of the Chakhesang tribe engage in communal bird watching and trapping activities, which strengthen their bond and foster a spirit of cooperation. These events also serve to deepen their connection with nature and the environment. The captured birds are then carefully hung on the decorated tip of a tall bamboo, which symbolizes the harmony between the community and the natural world.

In addition to celebrating the agricultural cycle, the Sukrunye festival holds a spiritual aspect as well. The captured birds are used for divination purposes, allowing the community to seek guidance and insights into the future. This practice reflects the tribe's belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings and their reliance on nature's wisdom for navigating life's challenges and uncertainties.

Moreover, the Sukrunye festival also provides an opportunity for the Chakhesang tribe to come together and celebrate their shared heritage, traditions, and values. Various events and activities take place during the festival, including traditional dances, songs, and feasts, which allow the community to reinforce their cultural identity and pass on their knowledge and customs to future generations.

6. **Monyu:** The Monyu festival is an important celebration of the Phom tribe, a major tribe in Nagaland. This six-day long festival is held in the month of April and marks the end of sowing season, as well as invoking God's blessings for a fruitful harvest. The onset of the festival is announced by the beating of the log drum before and during the festival to neighbouring villages.

Apart from being a celebration of the agricultural cycle, the Monyu festival is also a time to strengthen family ties and celebrate love. Married daughters and sisters are invited to their parents' or brothers' house for the festival. This is an important aspect of the festival, as it reinforces the bond between family members.

During the festival, certain portions of meat and food items are offered as gifts to married daughters and sisters, as a way of upholding their family ties and celebrating the love between them. In return, the married daughters and sisters provide the elderly

clan members with gifts of specially prepared food items, symbolizing their love and respect, and accepting blessings from the elders.

The Monyu festival is an occasion of joy and merrymaking for the Phom tribe. It is an opportunity for the community to come together and celebrate their culture and tradition, as well as pray for a bountiful harvest. The festival is an integral part of the Phom tribe's cultural heritage and has been celebrated for generations.

7. **Ngada:** The Ngada festival is an important post-harvest festival of the Rengma tribe which takes place annually for eight days during the month of November. This festival signifies the end of the agricultural season, and like many other Naga tribes, the Rengma Nagas believe in the concept of afterlife. As a part of their tradition, the women of the tribe offer rice beer to their deceased relatives by placing it on their graves, as it is believed that the souls of their loved ones visit their families during this time. The Ngada festival is also an occasion for the Rengma Nagas to come together and celebrate the blessings of a successful harvest, and to give thanks to the deities for their bountiful crops. The festival is marked by feasting, singing, dancing, and merry-making, which fosters a sense of community and strengthens social bonds among the Rengma people. The Ngada festival is an important cultural event for the Rengma tribe, and it reflects their deep-rooted belief in their cultural heritage and tradition.

8. **Naknyulem:** The festival of Naknyulem is celebrated annually by the Chang tribe in the month of July, and is considered as the main festival of the community. The festival finds its origin in a legend that describes a period of total darkness that lasted for six days, during which the normal life of people was disrupted. As a result, they were forced to remain indoors for the entire period. On the seventh day, light returned, bringing much joy to the people who decided to commemorate the occasion by celebrating the Naknyulem festival.

During the festival, the people of the Chang tribe use the leaves of *ngounaam*, which are placed along the pathways of the village, hung outside houses, and worn around the ears of children as a protective shield against evil spirits. People are encouraged to remain indoors after sunset due to the belief that a spirit called *Shambuli Muhgha* roams the village, and can cause harm to those who venture outside.

The festival holds great significance for the Chang tribe, and is an occasion for strengthening social bonds and promoting a sense of community among its members. It is a time when people come together, share food, and participate in various

traditional activities, including singing, dancing, and feasting. The festival also serves as a platform for passing on cultural traditions and values to younger generations, helping to preserve the tribe's unique identity and heritage.

Overall, the Naknyulem festival remains an important cultural event for the Chang tribe, and continues to be celebrated with much enthusiasm and fervour to this day.

- 9. Aoleang:** The Aoleang festival is a time for the Konyak people to seek blessings from the Almighty for a bountiful harvest, good health, and prosperity. The festival is a celebration of new life, growth, and renewal of relationships. The festival lasts for six days, and each day is marked by various rituals, dance performances, and feasting.

The first day of the Aoleang festival is called *Langa Mang* and is marked by the sacrifice of an animal, usually a mithun, to seek blessings from the Almighty. The second day is called *Yin Mok Pho*, during which people visit their relatives and friends to exchange greetings and gifts. On the third day, called *Lingnyu*, people perform a purification ritual, where they take a bath in the nearby river and cleanse themselves of all impurities.

The fourth day of the festival is called *Chaotomong*, which is considered the most important day of the festival. The highlight of this day is the grand feast, where people prepare traditional dishes and share them with their family and friends. The day is also marked by various cultural performances and competitions, such as wrestling, archery, and traditional games.

The fifth day is called *Tamlu*, during which people visit the graves of their ancestors and offer prayers and food offerings. The last day of the festival is called *Lemnyu*, which is marked by the ceremonial burning of a wooden post called *tso*, which symbolizes the destruction of all evil and the start of a new life.

The Aoleang festival is a time for the Konyak people to celebrate their rich cultural heritage and traditions. The festival is also an occasion for the Konyaks to showcase their traditional dance forms and dress, which are characterized by intricate designs and vibrant colors. The Aoleang festival is an important event in the Nagaland calendar and attracts tourists from all over the world who are interested in learning more about the unique culture and traditions of the Konyak tribe.

- 10. Mongmong:** The Sangtam community celebrates around twelve festivals throughout the year, featuring communal feasts, dances, and music. With the exception of certain gennas, the majority of these festivals revolve around food production, blessings, and prosperity. Among these festivals, the Mongmong festival holds significant

importance for the Sangtam community. The festival, observed during the first week of September every year, spans over six days and has the central objective of obtaining a good harvest of food grains that the villagers worked hard for throughout the year. The festival includes religious and spiritual rituals offered to the Supreme Being, and it emphasizes themes of togetherness, good health, and prosperity.

During the festival, the oldest man of the village leads the way to the village well, followed by the rest of the community. The six days of the festival include various activities such as the collection and storage of firewood, worship of cooking stones, clearing of weeds, and paying visits to relatives and friends in other villages. The festival concludes with the start of harvesting, as the Sangtam Naga people believed that their god was pleased and would bless them with a rich harvest and good health for their families.

Despite the festivals' animist practices and superstitious elements involving animal sacrifices, they have played a vital role in promoting national unity and spiritual motivation among the Sangtam people.

- 11. Metümnyo:** Metümnyo is a five-day traditional harvest festival celebrated by the Yimkhiung Naga community, usually in the second week of August. The festival is regarded as a solemn festival, but it is marked by various activities that emphasise communal unity, gratitude towards the gods, and socialisation.

The ceremonies of the festival are presided over by the village elder *khiungpu*, who inaugurates the festival. Each festival day has specific activities dedicated to repairing the village and inter-village roads, cleaning and worshipping agricultural tools, cleaning water points and springs, and clearing up intrusive landslides. The festival is marked with special activities, such as *Shito*, the communal cleaning of the village; *Zhihdo*, the repair of paths leading to the fields and clearing up intrusive landslides; *Zumdo*, the repair of inter-village roads; *Khihresuk*, the cleaning of water points and springs; and *Shiresuk*, the cleaning and worship of agricultural tools.

During the Metümnyo festival, the Yimkhiung Naga pray for the souls of those who may die in the coming year. They believe that males have six souls, while females have five souls. The festival is marked by the exchange of gifts and the consumption of rice beer, a beloved beverage among the Yimkhiung Naga. The festival is also marked by engagements between young boys and girls, indicating the start of a new life stage.

The Metümnyo festival is a significant part of the Yimkhiung Naga cultural heritage. The festival not only emphasises communal unity and gratitude towards the gods but also serves as a means of socialisation and bonding between the Yimkhiung Naga people. The festival's significance is further underscored by the fact that it serves as a rite of passage, with young people transitioning into new life stages during the festival.

- 12. Miu:** This festival is celebrated by the Khiamniungans and is observed annually during the first week of May; it holds significant cultural and familial importance. One of its main objectives is to foster cordial relations and establish close-knit familial ties between maternal uncles and their sister's offspring, specifically their nephews and nieces. During this festival, the maternal uncle offers a special prayer to the supernatural deity, seeking blessings of good health, prosperity, and power over enemies for his nephews and nieces.

On this occasion, nieces and nephews visit their maternal uncle bearing gifts such as clothes, Dao's, food items like fermented brews, sticky rice, and cooked or uncooked meat. This festival also marks a significant opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation between the maternal uncle and their nieces or nephews. In rare cases where the dispute is irreparable, the maternal uncle may refuse to bless their nieces and nephews, with the belief that it may lead to an unfortunate future for them. However, such incidents of refusal are uncommon.

Additionally, this festival serves to mark the beginning of the new agricultural season. The village's families gather in the field to perform rituals and prayers, offering animal blood and flesh, along with other foodstuffs, to their deity. The prayers seek blessings for strong, handsome, and beautiful children, increased animal and grain production, and prevention of crop damage and disease outbreaks.

- 13. Tsokum:** Khiamniungan also celebrates this festival during the first week of October, holding significant cultural and religious importance in its observance. Its primary purpose is to express gratitude to the Almighty Deity for safeguarding lives and granting bountiful harvests. Traditional practices during this festival include sacrificing animals such as mithuns, buffaloes, cows, and pigs to appease the deity. A portion of the animal's neck and limbs is then collected and donated to the 'Morung' as a compulsory offering. The day following the sacrifice, all male members of the village participate in road and bridge repairs between villages and leading to their

fields. After their communal labour, the villagers gather together to share food and brews made from the meat donated by the animal sacrifice.

This festival also serves as a rite of passage and a display of one's hunting prowess. Each warrior of the village marks their hunted trophies on sharpened wood to showcase their success in battle and hunting.

Overall, this festival serves as a reminder of the importance of communal labor, gratitude towards the gods, and the cultural significance of hunting and agricultural practices

2.3 Headhunting

The practice of headhunting among the Naga tribes is a significant part of their cultural heritage. The origins of headhunting in the Naga culture are not well documented, but it is widely believed that the practice was used to establish social dominance and to preserve the tribe's cultural identity. Headhunting was viewed as a rite of passage for young Naga warriors, symbolizing their bravery and skill in battle.

The process of headhunting was meticulous and dangerous, requiring the tracking and ambush of enemy warriors. The victorious warrior would take the enemy's head as a trophy and return to their village to be celebrated as a hero. The practice of headhunting was an essential part of Naga warfare, with the belief that the head of an enemy warrior possessed mystical abilities that could be harnessed by the victor.

Headhunting was not only a physical act but also a spiritual one. The Naga people believed that the head of a defeated enemy possessed supernatural powers, which could be used to protect their own village and bring prosperity to their people. The heads were considered to be a symbol of spiritual power, and their possession brought great honor to the warrior and their family.

However, the practice of headhunting has declined in modern times. The advent of Christianity and the influence of Western culture have played a significant role in the decline of headhunting practices, with many Naga tribes abandoning the tradition in favour of more modern ways of life. While headhunting is no longer a part of Naga warfare, it remains an essential aspect of Naga cultural heritage. The practice continues to serve as a symbol of bravery and spiritual power among the Naga people, preserving the traditions and beliefs of their forefathers.

It is worth noting that the practice of headhunting is not without controversy. Many see it as a barbaric and violent practice which has no place in modern society. However, the Naga people view headhunting as an integral part of their cultural identity and heritage, and they continue to honour the practice, albeit in a more symbolic way.

2.4 Feast of Merit

The Feast of Merit is an enduring cultural tradition among the Naga tribes, an ethnic group inhabiting the hilly frontier along the borders of India and Myanmar. Predominantly residing in the northeastern Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as parts of Myanmar, the Nagas are an assemblage of multiple tribes, each with its distinct dialects and customs. Among these diverse tribes, the Feast of Merit is a common thread, a socio-cultural phenomenon that intricately weaves together aspects of wealth redistribution, social status recognition, and communal bonding.

In the traditional Naga society, wealth is not measured merely by the accumulation of resources but by the ability to distribute one's wealth for the benefit of the community. The Feast of Merit is the grandest manifestation of this principle. It is a feast given by a wealthy benefactor, typically a man, who has managed to accumulate enough resources to host a feast for the entire village or even a group of villages. The feast is a lavish affair, with copious amounts of food, drink, and entertainment provided by the benefactor. Notably, the feast does not elevate the benefactor's wealth; rather, it depletes it, as he essentially gives away a significant portion of his resources. Yet, this act of generosity elevates his social status, earning him respect and prestige in the community.

Taking a closer look at the Eastern Naga tribes, such as the Konyak tribe, the Feast of Merit holds a similar place of importance. A wealthy Konyak individual, having acquired enough resources, would host the feast, inviting all members of his community. The preparation for the feast is a massive undertaking, requiring meticulous planning and coordination. The benefactor provides not only the food and drink but also the means for entertainment, which typically includes singing, dancing, and other forms of communal enjoyment.

The feast is more than just a show of wealth; it is a grand social event that strengthens the communal bonds. As the community comes together to partake in the feast, the event serves as a platform for interaction, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity among the

participants. The feast is also a conduit for the transmission of cultural values and traditions, as the younger generation observes and participates in the event.

The Konyak tribe erects monoliths to commemorate the Feast of Merit. These monoliths, crafted from locally sourced stones, serve as lasting reminders of the benefactor's generosity and the feast that was held. They stand as testaments to the tribe's rich cultural heritage, marking the landscape with the echoes of past feasts and the community's shared history.

Despite the onslaught of modernity and the changes it has brought to Naga society, the Feast of Merit continues to retain its significance. It remains a cherished tradition, a symbol of the Nagas' unique cultural identity, and an integral part of their social fabric. The feast is a window into the Naga way of life, highlighting their values of generosity, community solidarity, and social recognition. It is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Naga tribes and their enduring commitment to maintaining their traditions in the face of a rapidly changing world.

2.5 Naga Art and Craft

The Naga people are renowned for their visually compelling artistry and craftsmanship. Historically, in addition to farming, they have partaken in various other activities, including weaving, carpentry, blacksmithing, handicrafts, and pottery. The latter was primarily a female-led pursuit, although in certain tribes, men were the principal potters. The art of pottery, which was confined to a limited number of individuals in their communities, was practiced without the use of a potter's wheel. Instead, clay was shaped manually into diverse forms, sizes, and designs using tools such as a paddle.

Basket weaving was another common activity among the Nagas, primarily undertaken by men. Given the ready availability of bamboo and cane, these materials were widely used in the production of baskets. The majority of Naga men possess the skills required for this craft. The resultant baskets, which varied in shape, size, design, and pattern, were used for a range of purposes: from carrying firewood and water to storing grain, vegetables, and dried foodstuffs. In addition, they were used for storing rice beer, as decorative items, and even as symbols of victory in warfare. The Nagas also crafted sophisticated ornaments from fine strips of cane and bamboo, such as armlets, necklaces, gauntlets, and bangles.

The Konyak Nagas, noted for their blacksmithing skills, fashioned a variety of products from brass. These included human figurines, guns, daos (machete), weapons, utility

objects, and ornaments. They utilized tools such as bellows, stone hammers, and anvils in their craft.

Wood carving is another traditional art form prevalent among the Naga men. Their work often depicts various animals and figures, including tigers, mithuns (*Bos frontalis*), human heads and figures, warriors in traditional attire, female breasts, hornbills and their feathers, various birds, and traditional weapons. Their village gates, carved from large blocks of wood, are typically adorned with these motifs. The symbols employed in their art and artifacts reflect the Nagas' deep connection with nature and their symbolic association with these elements in their daily lives. For instance, the mithun represents wealth and fertility, the hornbill symbolizes beauty, the tiger symbolizes fierceness, strength, courage, power, and protection, and the monkey, due to its close association with humans, often symbolizes intelligence.

The Konyaks are particularly known for their exquisite wood carvings and metal ornaments. A common feature of Konyak *morungs* (youth dormitories) is the prevalence of erotic carvings, as fertility symbols such as phallic symbols and female breasts are prominently displayed. Thus, the recurrent symbols in Naga arts and crafts, such as the mithun head and the human head, provide a meaningful glimpse into their cultural heritage and worldview.

2.5.1 Log Drum

The log drum, a resonant artifact with deep cultural and religious implications, holds a significant position within Naga society. This powerful symbol is exclusively associated with specific Naga tribes, namely the Ao, Yimchungrü, Khamniungan, Phom, Chang, Konyak, and Sangtam. Among the Ao Nagas, the log drum is referred to as the "*tongten*."

A log drum's percussive reverberation is produced by a group of men, evenly distributed on either side of the drum, who strike it with sturdy wooden batons. The distinctive rhythmic patterns generated by the drum serve various purposes, including the announcement of the onset of festivals, signalling the success of a headhunting raid, broadcasting the death of a distinguished person, or alerting the village to potential dangers. Each specific rhythm is imbued with a particular meaning, comprehensible only to the members of the village, which serves as a method of maintaining secrecy from rival tribes.

The selection and preparation of the tree that would become a log drum was a process steeped in ritual. Trees were gendered as either male or female, and certain taboos and

restrictions were observed during their felling. A specific day was set aside for the ceremony of pulling the log drum, during which all the men, attired in their finest garments, would journey to the forest, retrieve the drum, and install it in the *morung*, or communal house. This event was a festive occasion for the entire community and was celebrated with ritual feasting and drinking.

The log drum was not only a musical instrument but also a revered village deity. In the past, the installation of a new log drum in the *morung* was accompanied by a sacred ritual that involved the sacrifice of human blood. However, this practice has evolved over time, with the blood of a sacrificial animal now being used instead. The best warrior in the village was entrusted with the task of venerating the spirit of the log drum by smearing it with blood. In addition to the log drum, the Konyak Nagas also utilized brass gongs as musical instruments. These gongs were used to signal the beginning of ceremonies and festivals and were also displayed as decorative items in affluent households.

2.5.2 Traditional Naga Houses

In Naga society, architectural elements, motifs, and roofing materials of a residence reflect the owner's social standing. There is a clear distinction between the dwellings of the affluent and the less fortunate. The dwellings of wealthy individuals are discernible through their structural designs. For example, the gable of a home belonging to an individual who has hosted a feast of merit is traditionally decorated with a mithun horn, signifying his elevated social status.

Further, the facades of these houses are often adorned with motifs and symbols such as animal figures, human heads, hornbill feathers, and warriors, indicating the homeowner's social rank. The display of hunting trophies such as bones, tusks, horns, and carcasses is also common.

In the case of the Angami Nagas, progress through stages of feast giving is represented through additions to the house. This starts with thatching the front part of the house, followed by attaching bargeboards to the gable, and subsequently adding a horn-shaped wooden structure known as a '*kika*'. Upon completion of the full feast series, the host replaces the roofing material with wooden shingles, further symbolizing his status.

Similar practices are observed among the Rengma Nagas and Sumi Nagas, where architectural modifications and additions are made to the house upon completion of feast-

giving stages. This includes the installation of wooden mithun horn motifs at the gable, or erecting a decorated bamboo pole known as an '*aghuz*' outside the house.

Among the Sangtam tribe, the house of a warrior, or '*morung*', is embellished with cane balls hung from the gable, representing the number of heads taken by the warrior. Upon the warrior's death, these insignia are placed on the grave as an acknowledgment of his status. For the *anghs*, or chiefs of the Konyak tribe, their homes are decorated with symbolic displays of human and mithun skulls, animal horns and tusks, wood carvings, and more, representing their power, wealth, and achievements. The number of skulls displayed further reinforces the social position of the possessor.

In the past, most Naga houses used thatched roofing materials, and the roof of the *morung* was often adorned with grass tassels signifying wealth. The construction of a *morung* required rituals and ceremonies, and it was one of the most ornately decorated dwellings in the village. Pillars, posts, and beams were chosen with care, and they had to be straight and free of blemishes. These were often intricately carved with depictions of animals and humans, symbolizing wealth, beauty, heroism, strength, and ferocity.

2.6 Profile of the Tattooing Naga Tribes

(i) Ao

The Ao tribe is one of the major ethnic groups in Nagaland, India, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditions. Primarily concentrated in the Mokokchung district, the Ao people have significantly contributed to the socio-cultural landscape of Nagaland. AOs are divided into three language groups, namely, Mongsen, Chongli and Changki and are part of the Tibeto-Burman language family and serve as an important marker of their identity. The Moatsu and Tsungremmong festivals are noteworthy cultural events that showcase their agrarian lifestyle, folklore, and spirituality. The AOs have also been early adopters of Christianity, subsequently influencing their way of life and community structures. Through the establishment of educational institutions and participation in politics, the Ao tribe has been instrumental in shaping the modern history of Nagaland.

(ii) Pochury

The Pochury identity serves as an intriguing example of ethnic consolidation in the complex tapestry of Naga society. Emerging as a composite ethnic group, Pochury is formed from the amalgamation of three distinct Naga communities: Kupo, Kuchu, and Khuri. The term

'Pochury' itself serves as an acronym, derived from the names of the native villages of these communities: Sapo, Kuchu, and Kwiry. The unity was achieved through diplomatic negotiations led by community elders, ultimately forming a cohesive ethnic group. At present, they inhabit the eastern part of Phek district.

(iii) Sangtam

The Sangtam tribe is one of the prominent Naga tribes predominantly found in the Tuensang and Kiphire districts of Nagaland, India. Known for their distinctive cultural practices, the Sangtams play a vital role in the complex ethnic mosaic of the region. Their language, Sangtam, falls under the Tibeto-Burman language family and serves as a critical marker of their cultural identity. The tribe observes various festivals that revolve around agricultural cycles, Mongmong being the most significant. These festivals not only celebrate nature's bounty but also serve as platforms for community bonding and the preservation of traditional folklore and customs. In recent years, the Sangtam community has increasingly engaged in educational and political spheres, further contributing to Nagaland's socio-cultural and economic development.

(iv) Yimkhiung

The Yimkhiung tribe is one of the indigenous Naga tribes primarily located in the Shamator district of Nagaland, India. This tribe has its own distinct language, YimKhiung, which is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Yimkhiung are traditionally agrarian, relying largely on slash-and-burn agriculture for subsistence. Metümnyo is their major festival, celebrated annually with rituals that promote communal harmony and give thanks for agricultural abundance. The festival is an embodiment of the tribe's cultural richness, featuring traditional dances, songs, and rituals that have been passed down through generations. With the advent of modernisation and educational advancements, the Yimkhiung tribe is gradually diversifying into various occupational sectors yet continues to hold its traditions in high regard.

(v) Tikhir

The Tikhir tribe, previously considered a sub-tribe within the Yimchunger community, achieved official recognition as a distinct Naga tribe on April 2, 2022, during a 'Tikhir tribe recognition celebration day' held in Kiusam town. Primarily residing in the Shamator district of Nagaland, India, the Tikhir people belong to the Tibeto-Burman language group. The Tikhir people have their significant festival, Tsonglaknyi, which is a cornerstone of their

unique cultural identity. The festival is deeply embedded in their agrarian lifestyle, encompassing rituals, dances, and songs that strengthen community bonds.

(vi) Khamniungan

The Khamniungan tribe is one of the major tribes among the Nagas, predominantly found in the Noklak district of Nagaland, India. They also inhabit certain regions of Myanmar, underscoring the transnational nature of many Naga tribes. The Khamniungan language is part of the broader Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and is a strong marker of their unique identity. Miu, their major festival, is deeply rooted in their agrarian lifestyle and is celebrated to give thanks for bountiful harvests. The festival features traditional rituals, dances, and songs that are essential to the community's cultural preservation.

(vii) Chang

The Chang tribe is one of the major Naga tribes primarily inhabiting the Tuensang district of Nagaland, India. Their language, Chang, is part of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and is an essential aspect of their cultural identity. Traditionally an agrarian society, the Chang tribe engages in shifting cultivation, known locally as jhum farming. Naknyulum is one of their principal festivals, celebrated to offer gratitude for a good harvest and seek blessings for the upcoming agricultural season. The festival is marked by an array of cultural performances including traditional dances, songs, and rituals, and it serves as a vibrant platform for community bonding.

(viii) Phom

The Phom tribe is an indigenous Naga community primarily residing in the Longleng district of Nagaland, India. Linguistically, the Phom people speak the Phom language, a member of the Tibeto-Burman language family, which serves as a significant identifier of their cultural heritage. The tribe has traditionally relied on agriculture, particularly jhum or slash-and-burn cultivation, for their livelihood. One of their major festivals, Monyu, is celebrated after the sowing of seeds and is a significant event featuring traditional songs, dances, and rituals that express gratitude for the harvest and invoke blessings for the coming year. In recent years, the Phom tribe has been actively involved in educational initiatives and local governance, substantially impacting their social and economic development. Their unique cultural practices and increasing role in contemporary Naga society make the Phom tribe a significant component in the diverse ethnic landscape of Nagaland.

(ix) Konyak

The Konyak tribe's complex history and cultural richness extend beyond their traditional festivals and agrarian practices. The Konyak tribe, one of the major tribes among the Nagas, inhabits the Mon district of Nagaland. The tribe's history as headhunters has notably shaped their social structure and rituals, although these practices have ceased largely due to the influence of Christianity. Their unique form of governance, known as the "*Angh* system," where the *Angh* (chief) serves as the administrative and spiritual leader, remains a subject of academic interest. The Konyaks are also renowned for their craftsmanship, particularly their intricate beadwork, weaponry, and bamboo artistry.

The tribe has been the focus of several ethnographic studies to understand their complex social hierarchies, customary laws, and rapidly evolving cultural practices in the face of modernisation. The younger generation, increasingly exposed to contemporary education and technology, is navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. In this context, the Konyak community serves as a compelling case study for scholars exploring the dynamics of cultural preservation and transformation in indigenous communities.

CHAPTER-3

METHODS OF TATTOOING

Getting a tattoo is not merely superficial; it involves a deep understanding of the complex interplay between art and biology. To understand the intricate mechanics and biological precision required for a tattoo to maintain its vibrancy, one must first understand the skin's nuanced layers and functionalities. The skin, our body's largest organ, plays a vital role in tattooing, determining where the ink will reside and how it will age over time.

At the forefront of our skin's architecture is the epidermis. This protective layer is the body's primary defence against environmental factors such as pathogens, ultraviolet radiation, and physical abrasions. Being the skin's outermost layer, the epidermis is continuously in a state of renewal. Its cells, originating from the basal layers, migrate upwards, maturing as they go until they reach the skin's surface. Once there, they are naturally exfoliated, making way for newer cells below them. This rapid growth cycle, migration, and exfoliation underscores why the epidermis isn't the ideal layer for tattoo ink. Any ink placed here would swiftly vanish, carried away by the shedding epidermal cells. Thus, for tattoos, this dynamic layer is more of a transient canvas than a permanent one.

The more settled and resilient dermis lies below the bustling world of the epidermis. This layer gives the skin strength and elasticity thanks to its rich collagen and elastin fibre content. It's also a hub of activity, housing an array of structures such as blood vessels, which nourish the skin; sweat glands, which aid in temperature regulation; hair follicles, which are associated with sensory perception; and nerve endings, which provide tactile feedback.

The dermis' structural integrity and relatively stable environment offer an ideal sanctuary for tattoo ink. Unlike the epidermis, cells in the dermis do not undergo rapid turnover. Therefore, once the tattoo ink settles here, it remains relatively undisturbed. The ink particles, though considered foreign bodies by our immune system, are too large to be fully engulfed and removed by the body's defence cells, called macrophages. As a result, these ink particles remain trapped, showcased through the transparent epidermis, allowing tattoos to remain a lasting mark on the skin (Proksch et al., 2008).

Over the years, the skin undergoes a myriad of changes, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic factors, like ageing, profoundly affect the skin's structure and function. As we age, the dermis, which once held tattoo ink particles firmly in place, begins to lose density. The collagen and elastin fibres, which give the skin strength and elasticity, start to degrade. This

natural decline can result in the dispersal of ink particles, making the tattoo appear less defined.

However, despite these forces of time and nature working against it, the essence of a tattoo remains largely intact. The shifts and fades in design are more like the patina on a cherished antique, speaking volumes of its history and the tales it has witnessed. The primary design and intent, borne from the precision and artistry of the tattooist, remain discernible, showcasing the lasting impact of a well-crafted tattoo.

Tattooing is a practice as old as human civilisation itself. Throughout history, myriad cultures have used it for various purposes, from denoting status and marking achievements to simple self-expression. Art has undergone numerous transformations in terms of techniques and tools, all to arrive at the highly refined form we see today. However, by turning back the clock, we glimpse the rudimentary instruments our ancestors utilised for this art form. One such discovery, acclaimed to be the oldest tattooing tool ever found, offers a fascinating peek into the ancient world of tattooing. Archaeologists, always on the quest to unearth stories from the past, made a groundbreaking discovery in a remote area on the Western edge of North America. Hidden amongst the remnants of an old settlement was a tattooing tool that dates back nearly 2,000 years, making it the oldest known artefact of its kind. Despite the passage of such a long time, its preservation has provided researchers with invaluable insights into the techniques and significance of tattooing in ancient times. At first glance, the tool may seem somewhat unremarkable. However, upon closer inspection, one realises the sophistication and innovation behind its construction. Crafted from a wooden handle roughly the size of a pencil, it had a series of small, sharp-tipped needles protruding from one end. These needles were made of cactus spines, a testament to ancient people's ingenious use of available materials (Johnson, 2022).

In this chapter, the objective is to conduct an in-depth exploration of the rich and varied tattooing traditions that exist among the different Naga tribes. By focusing on the diverse array of tools and techniques employed by tattoo artists, it aims to shed light on the intricate designs that are aesthetically pleasing and deeply meaningful. The chapter will examine the specific materials used in the tattooing process, such as the types of ink, the choice of needles, and the particular application methods. This will provide a technical understanding of how these masterful designs are crafted. Additionally, look at the settings in which these tattooing rituals take place, as they are often chosen for both practical and symbolic reasons, further adding layers of meaning to the act of tattooing.

Naga tattooing is a practice deeply intertwined with nature, both in its materials and techniques. This unique approach to tattooing not only highlights their cultural identity but also underscores their resourcefulness in utilizing the environment around them.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Naga tattooing is the collection of raw materials from the surrounding environment. Unlike modern tattoo machines that rely on sterile needles and pigments, Naga tattoo artists venture into the forest to procure essential tools. Thorns, gathered from the wild, serve as the primary instruments for puncturing the skin. These thorns, when skilfully wielded, create intricate and meaningful designs on the recipient's body. It's a striking departure from the mass-produced precision of contemporary tattooing machines.

The mallet used in Naga tattooing is another testament to their resourcefulness. Crafted from soft plants readily available in their own region, these mallets are designed to be both effective and gentle, ensuring the precision and artistry of the tattooing process. The choice of materials and the careful craftsmanship involved in creating these tools exemplify the Nagas' commitment to tradition and their profound understanding of the environment they inhabit.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Naga tattooing is the absence of specific names for these tools. Instead, they are referred to by the name of the particular plant from which they are derived, emphasizing the close relationship between their dialect and the natural world.

3.1 Pochury tribe

3.1.1 Tattoo Artist

Not every village has a resident tattoo artist, given the specialized skills and knowledge the art demands. However, the importance of the practice necessitates that an artist be present. If the village lacks its own tattoo artist, one is summoned from a neighbouring village. This in itself is an indication of the interconnectedness of communities, where resources, including skills, are shared and valued.

The responsibility of ensuring the tattoo artist's safety falls upon the village's men. Their role underscores the communal approach to tattooing, where it's not just an individual's or a family's endeavour but a village-wide event. Once the tattooing sessions are completed,

the men ensure the artist's safe journey back to her village, exemplifying the community's appreciation and respect for the artist's skills.

The Pochury way stands out for its simplicity. Unlike other tribes or communities, where getting a tattoo might be accompanied by specific rituals, prayers, or ceremonies, the Pochury approach is direct. No rituals precede or follow the tattooing process. Similarly, there aren't any food restrictions post tattooing, contrary to many cultures that prescribe dietary or behavioural restrictions to ensure proper healing or uphold spiritual sanctity.

3.1.2 Preparation

In Pochury tribal tattooing practices, pine wood, especially from the tree locally referred to as *Tei*, plays a crucial role in pigment preparation. The selection of the pine variety isn't arbitrary; the trees with a higher oil content are preferred, indicative of the meticulous attention to detail and the community's knowledge about the flora's properties (*Plate 1*).

The act of preparing the pigment showcases a beautiful blend of science and tradition. After burning the selected pine pieces in a shallow pit, an earthen jar crafted into a basin-like shape covers the pit. Adding a small air hole in the jar ensures controlled burning, reflecting an understanding of the basic principles of combustion.

Post the burning process, the soot accumulated on the earthen jar's base becomes the primary ingredient for the pigment. This soot, rich in the pine's essence, is delicately wrapped in banana leaves. The sun-drying process, which the soot undergoes, is pivotal. Sunlight, a purifying force in many cultures, ensures that the pigment retains its vividness and potency. However, the preparation does not stop here. The dried soot is crushed and mixed with the fluids from winter bean leaves (*Dolichos lablab*), transforming it into a rich, deep pigment.

The veil of secrecy surrounding the pigment preparation process isn't just about maintaining the exclusivity of the method. It is rooted in a deeper belief system. The community holds that if someone with negative energies witnesses the preparation, the pigment gets contaminated, impacting its vividness. This belief underscores the sanctity of the process and the interplay of energies in their worldview.

3.1.3 Tools

The idea of using thorns as needles might sound rudimentary, but it showcases the tribe's ingenious adaptation to their environment. The thorns of plants such as *Yotsülüzhü* (*Phor*) and *Lantilüzü* (*Laruri*) are nature's answer to the modern tattoo needle. They are sharp, durable,

and can puncture the skin with precision. Their natural toughness ensures they don't break easily, and their tapered shape allows for efficient ink depositing into the skin. These thorns are typically bound together, often in groups of three or four, using plant fibres or cotton strings, creating a tool. This binding provides stability and strength and offers the tattoo artist better grip and control over the depth of puncture.

The mallet, made from the plant known as *Laphülak*, provides the gentle force needed to push the thorns into the skin. In essence, the mallet is an extension of the tattoo artist's hand, allowing them to control the puncture's depth and ensure the consistent application of the design. The choice of material again reflects the community's sustainable approach, using readily available resources.

Before the actual tattooing begins, it's crucial to mark out the desired design. For this, thin bamboo sticks are prepared. Being straight and slender, bamboo offers the precision required for this task. The choice of bamboo, a versatile and sustainable resource, reinforces the tribe's deep-rooted connection to their environment.

3.1.4 Tattooing process

Opting to tattoo during the winter is a practice rooted in practicality and wisdom. The choice of venue the *Machang* or balcony—for the tattooing process is symbolic and strategic. Being an outdoor space, it provides the necessary ventilation and light, crucial for a procedure that demands precision (*Plate 2*).

The prohibition of male members from witnessing the tattooing process can be perceived in various ways. It could be a mark of respect for the women undergoing the painful procedure, ensuring their comfort and privacy. Alternatively, it could signify the deeply intimate nature of the process, meant only for the eyes of those directly involved. The act of family members and friends holding and comforting the girl being tattooed is profound. It signifies unity, empathy, and shared experience. This act is not just about physical restraint but serves as emotional support, reminding the girl of her community's collective strength. It underscores the idea that while the pain is individual, the experience and the resulting transformation are communal.

The meticulous process begins with the tattoo artist sketching the design onto the skin using a thin bamboo stick dipped in soot. This stage is pivotal, setting the blueprint for the entire artwork. Following this, the rhythmic dance between the needle (crafted from thorns)

and the mallet commences. Each strike is a blend of precision and artistry, ensuring the ink's appropriate depth and the design's clarity (*Plate 3*).

The rubbing of soot into the fresh wound serves dual purposes. It ensures that the pigment is deeply embedded into the skin and might also possess antiseptic properties that benefit the healing process.

The inclusion of an apprentice in the process is significant. It signifies the continuation of tradition, the passing down of skills and the community's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage. This hands-on learning under the watchful eyes of an expert ensures that the art form remains alive and vibrant for generations to come.

The fact that multiple girls can be tattooed in a single session, even in a house that is not theirs, emphasises trust within the community. The absence of men and the choice of location speak of safety, respect, and a shared responsibility towards upholding traditions.

For a young girl in many tribes, reaching adolescence isn't just marked by physiological changes but the beginning of a symbolic journey. The commencement of her tattooing process externally represents this journey. Starting with the chin and forehead, these marks underscore her transition from a child to a young woman, ready to embrace the responsibilities and roles of adulthood. However, this journey is not quick or easy. The arm tattoos, often intricate, might take a year or more to ink, depending on various factors such as the availability of a skilled tattoo artist and the girl's health. This intermittent waiting period serves a dual purpose. Physiologically, it allows the body adequate time to heal. Symbolically, it mirrors the gradual journey of growing up, suggesting that maturation is not an overnight process but a series of experiences over time.

The leg tattoos, typically completed several years after the initial chin and forehead marks, might be perceived as the final chapter of this young woman's rite of passage. Notably, the tattoo artist might change over time, adding layers of meaning and artistry to the final tattoo composition.

For men, the process and symbolism behind tattoos differ markedly. The *Akhewago* chest tattoo, a distinct and bold marking, usually spans a day or two. Unlike the prolonged tattooing process for women, men's tattoos are swift, possibly symbolising the abrupt and intense challenges they are expected to face and overcome in their roles as protectors and providers.

The *Machang*, the traditional tattooing arena, becomes a theatre of masculinity during this process. Young men are expected to endure the pain stoically. Any show of distress, especially before the watchful eyes of the opposite gender, might be perceived as a sign of

weakness. The presence of young women, who might tease a man for showing pain, adds a societal dimension to the process. Beyond being a test of physical endurance, the tattooing ritual becomes a rite of masculine pride. This stoic endurance can elevate a man's status, making him more appealing as a prospective mate, underlining the intertwined nature of culture, societal norms, and personal identity.

3.1.5 Fees

When a tribal member receives a tattoo, the compensation to the artist is often not in cash but in kind. Typical compensations include staple foods like rice, special items like smoked pork, and communal drinks like rice beer. These items, intrinsic to the community's way of life, symbolise respect and gratitude. For those who might not afford these, an alternative exists in the form of labour, usually working in the artist's field. Such practices ensure that everyone, regardless of economic standing, can partake in the revered ritual of tattooing.

In essence, the act of tattooing and its associated compensations in these communities epitomise values of respect, gratitude, and inclusivity. They highlight how, in some cultures, traditions and economy are beautifully and meaningfully interwoven.

3.2 Sangtam tribe

3.2.1. Tattoo Artist

A tattoo artist, traditionally, is often an older woman who has honed and refined her craft over many years. This profession is not necessarily a lifelong commitment. If someone possesses the requisite skills and patience, she can become a tattoo artist. Contrary to some beliefs, no designated clan or group is dedicated to this art. If a village does not have its own tattoo artist, residents might need to seek out an artist from neighbouring villages.

3.2.2 Preparation

Pine tree fragments are set aflame, and an earthen pot is placed atop the burning pieces to capture the soot produced. Once the fire is out, the soot accumulated on the pot is carefully scraped off. This soot is then mixed with either water, rice beer or, as is the custom in Samphur village, with cactus juice. After combining, the artist divides the soot mixture into smaller portions, allowing them to dry by the fireside. When needed, these dried soot portions are broken down and combined with a touch of water to produce a tattoo ink called "*Khato*."

It's essential to note that, traditionally, men are not permitted to witness or participate in the creation of this tattoo ink (*Plate 4*).

3.2.3 Tools

In the Phelungre community, tattooing is deeply entrenched in their traditions and emblematic of their profound connection with nature. Drawing upon the resources readily available in their environment, they have incorporated the use of specific plant derivatives in their tattooing rituals.

The primary instrument, akin to a needle in conventional tattooing, is fashioned from the creeper plant *Retshyang*. For those not using the *Retshyang*, there is an alternative: the *Khedusiyang* thorn. Originating from a citrus plant, this thorn has the necessary rigidity and sharpness to carry out the task effectively (*Plate 5*).

However, in the Kiphire village, they diverge slightly in their choice of tools. The *Ngasing* is the instrument of choice, indicating subtle variations in preferences and perhaps even tattooing techniques across different segments of the Phelungre community.

In addition to the needle-like instrument, a mallet plays a crucial role in the process. Known locally as the *Khuntasang*, this tool aids in driving the needle into the skin, allowing the artist to achieve the desired depth and precision. The collaboration between the two tools reflects the meticulous nature of the art and the significance it holds within the community.

3.2.4 Tattooing process

Tattoos are applied during the colder winter months to minimise the risk of infection. While the act of tattooing is void of any particular rituals or sacrifices, it's essential for both the tattoo artist and her apprentice to be well-nourished throughout the process. Exclusively a female affair, men, even male family members, are expressly prohibited from participating.

When a girl comes of age during her adolescence, she receives her inaugural tattoo. This momentous event unfolds in a *Machang*, an elevated platform or structure situated outside the house. During the procedure, she is encircled by her kin and friends. They physically hold and comfort her, offering emotional and moral support and bolstering her resilience against the pain of the tattooing process, which employs a hammering technique.

The tattoo journey is gradual and sequenced. Initially, tattoos are etched onto her forehead and chin. The subsequent year sees the adornment of her legs with intricate designs. Depending on various factors, such as the girl's health and the availability of the tattoo artist,

her shoulders and hands are tattooed after a year or so. A unique practice in the Samphur village involves an additional tattoo called *Mükoyak*. Stretching from the thigh down to the knee, this design is a rite of passage that signifies her engagement to a man. Altogether, the entire tattooing journey might span four to five years, though this can vary based on individual circumstances.

For the men of this culture, tattoos are a rite of passage that they usually undergo at 18 or older. The occasion becomes a village spectacle. As the young man gets tattooed, the village's womenfolk gather to observe. The tattooing process is not just a physical transformation but a test of his mettle. In a society that once celebrated head-hunters, men are expected to showcase their bravery and fortitude. Any show of weakness, like shedding tears or screaming in pain, could tarnish his reputation. If he were to falter during the tattooing, it's believed that no woman in the village would find him a suitable marriage prospect, as strength and courage are highly valued traits.

3.2.5 Fees

In this community, compensating the tattoo artist is deeply rooted in tradition and respect. Typically, the artist is remunerated with slices of pork, a basket of rice, and rice beer - offerings that signify gratitude and the value of her skills. However, if someone cannot provide these customary payments, an alternative form of compensation is employed. Instead of goods, the individual seeking the tattoo would offer their labour, dedicating a full day's work at the tattoo artist's place. This arrangement ensures that everyone, regardless of their financial situation, has access to this culturally significant art and ritual while still honouring and compensating the artist for her expertise.

3.3 Yimkhiung tribe

3.3.1 Tattoo artist

Within the Yimkhiung tribe, much like other Naga tribes, the revered role of the tattoo artist is exclusively reserved for women. Unlike some societies where specific clans or professions might dominate a particular craft, tattooing in the Yimkhiung tribe is democratic and inclusive. The doors to this craft are open to any woman in the village, granted she dedicates herself to acquiring the intricate skills over time.

In instances where a village lacks its own resident tattoo artist, solutions remain rooted in community and camaraderie. Typically, an artist from a neighbouring village who shares friendly ties is invited to fill this vital role.

This vocation is not just about individual expertise; it's about passing down the torch and nurturing the next generation. Thus, when a tattoo artist practices her craft, several young apprentices often accompany her. These girls from the village are eager to learn the nuances of this ancient art form, ensuring its continuity and relevance for future generations.

3.3.2 Preparation

In the realm of traditional tattooing, the preparation of the ink is as significant as the art itself. The ink-making process begins with the burning of pine wood. This burning process is covered with an earthen pot to capture the resulting soot effectively. Once enough soot is collected, it's blended with either water or rice beer to create the desired consistency for the tattoo ink.

However, in Shalomi village, the technique differs slightly, adding another layer of complexity. They incorporate the ashes derived from burning dry orange peels, merging them with the pine wood soot to enhance the ink's texture or colour. The final product, a rich and organic ink, is reverently called *Yiktomo*.

The instrument used for tattooing is a harmonious blend of simplicity and efficacy. Thorns, typically numbering three or four, are aligned and bound together with either cotton thread or natural plant-based fibre. This assemblage is then affixed to a stick, traditionally sourced from the *Mantsütong* plant, transforming it into a rudimentary but effective tattoo needle.

Such is the sanctity and secrecy of this craft that no onlookers are permitted during the preparation of the ink and tools. Only the apprentice, under the tutelage of the master artist, is allowed to witness and learn from this sacred process.

3.3.3 Tools

In Phuvkiu village, the tattoo needle is called "*Yangsang*". On the other hand, in Shalomi village, the needle bears the name "*Yiktalezo*".

Regarding the mallet used in tattooing, the nomenclature becomes even more specific among the Phuvkiu villagers. They identify it as "*Mantsütong*" and also use an alternative name, "*Pensuphiüsang*". These varying terminologies underscore the rich tapestry of

traditions and localised practices that make each village's tattooing culture distinct and noteworthy.

3.3.4 Tattooing Process

For the Yimkhiungs, like many Naga tribes, tattooing predominantly occurs during the winter. The Yimkhiung tribe, while valuing the art of tattooing, does not intertwine the process with elaborate rituals. Yet, there are distinctive practices in specific villages. In Phuvkiu, for instance, a girl freshly tattooed is subjected to dietary restrictions, refraining from consuming garlic, ginger, and fermented foods until her wounds heal. This is believed to promote better healing. In contrast, in Zanger, a grand feast is held, celebrating the girl who is on the cusp of receiving her tattoos.

The initiation of a girl into this age-old tradition begins at puberty. The tattooing session often takes place in a "*Machang*" - an elevated platform outside the house, preserving the sanctity and privacy of the process. Only female relatives and friends can be present, offering physical support by holding the girl's limbs and emotionally comforting and encouraging her. Beginning with the chin and forehead, the girl's tattoo journey spans over the years. Their shoulders and arms are adorned next, typically after a year, and finally, after an interval of 2-3 years, her legs. The exact timing can vary based on the tattoo artist's availability and the girl's health, but on average, the entire process unfolds over a span of about five years.

Men, in contrast, have a less intricate tattooing tradition. Approaching the age of 20, a young man receives his tattoos, also in a *machang* during winter. Unlike the women's sessions, female onlookers can witness a man's tattooing, placing him under subtle scrutiny. He's expected to exhibit stoicism, as any display of pain might be perceived as a sign of weakness.

However, a unique and profoundly revered tattoo stands apart in Yimkhiung culture: the headhunter's tattoo. This is not just a mark of art but a badge of honour and valour. Awarded to those warriors who have successfully participated in a raid, retrieving not just the enemy's head but also severing limbs, it's a symbol of prowess in battle. After engaging in a week-long ritual commemorating the headhunt, the culmination is receiving this sacred tattoo. Given its esteemed status, only the most seasoned and skilled artists are entrusted with crafting this design. Apprentices, despite their training, are excluded from this significant

task. Due to the intricacy and importance of this tattoo, the process can extend beyond a single day, demanding exceptional precision and patience from both the artist and the warrior.

3.3.5 Fees

The tattooing tradition is not just an artistic endeavour and a cultural exchange of respect and gratitude. The customary form of compensation for a tattoo artist in these tribes is a thoughtful combination of essential and celebratory items: a basket of rice, rice beer, and portions of pork. These offerings not only signify a token of appreciation but also echo the deep-rooted customs of these communities (*Plate 6*).

However, understanding that not all can provide these customary offerings due to financial or other constraints, the system is flexible and rooted in community values. If someone cannot meet the traditional payment terms, the individual seeking the tattoo offers their labour as compensation. In such cases, they would dedicate a day to work in the tattoo artist's field, ensuring that the artist is still remunerated for her skills and services. This arrangement emphasises the community's commitment to ensuring everyone has access to the rich traditions, irrespective of their economic status.

3.4 Tikhir tribe

3.4.1 Tattoo Artist

In the Tikhir tribe, just as in the other Naga tribes, the esteemed position of a tattoo artist is exclusively held by women. This tradition emphasises women's central role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, showcasing their skill, precision, and the profound respect they command within the community for this sacred craft.

3.4.2 Preparation

In the intricate art of tattooing among the Tikhir tribe, every element carries significance, from the process to the very materials used. The ink, fondly referred to as "*Nakp*," is derived through a meticulous and traditional method.

To prepare this ink, pine wood pieces are set aflame. Above this flame, an earthen pot is placed, its purpose being to capture the black, fine soot produced by the burning wood. Once a substantial amount of soot accumulates, it is carefully scraped off. This collected soot is known as "*Laknio*" in their native language.

However, the process doesn't end there. The *Laknio* is then mixed with the juice extracted from the "*Munye*" leaves. The combination of these two elements results in the creation of the *Nakp*, a rich and organic tattoo ink that not only serves as a medium for the art but also as a symbol of the tribe's deep connection to nature and tradition.

3.4.3 Tools

In the traditional tattooing practices of the Tikhir tribe, the tools used are derived from the natural resources available to them, further emphasising their profound connection with the environment.

The needle, a pivotal tool in tattooing, is not sourced from metal or any manufactured material. Instead, it is gathered from the "*Leye*" plant, showcasing the tribe's ingenuity in utilising local flora to suit their needs.

Equally significant is the mallet known as "*Hingbang*" within the community. This isn't just any instrument, but one made from a locally found soft plant. This choice ensures precision and minimal harm during the tattooing process. Both these tools, rooted in nature, are a testament to the tribe's sustainable practices and deep environmental respect.

3.4.4 Tattooing process

Tattooing among the Tikhir tribe is a significant cultural practice, with every step and element deeply steeped in tradition. For Tikhir women, the initiation into the world of tattoos begins in adolescence. The "*machang*" – an outdoor elevated platform outside the house is chosen for tattooing. A young girl receives her inaugural tattoos here, surrounded by the reassuring presence of female family members and friends. These markings, starting at the chin and forehead, are aesthetic adornments and markers of transition, denoting her journey into womanhood.

This ritualistic tattooing aligns with the natural cycles conducted during the winter season. A particularly auspicious time for this ceremony is during the tribe's "*Khuyangnye*" festival in late January, celebrating the tribe's cultural heritage. In the subsequent years, the girl's legs bear the next set of tattoos, followed finally by her shoulders and arms.

For Tikhir men, the process and significance of tattooing are vastly different. Their tattoo, known as the headhunter tattoo, is a badge of honour and cannot be adorned frivolously. It symbolises bravery, awarded only when a man brings an enemy's head back to

the village. Once the intense rituals associated with headhunting are complete, the final rite is receiving the tattoo. This process is more public in stark contrast to the women. Taking place in the *machang*, even women from the community gather to witness this symbolic transformation. And although the pain is intense, it's considered dishonourable for the headhunter to flinch or show weakness, reinforcing the tattoo's symbolism of strength, bravery, and valour.

3.4.5 Fees

In the Tikhir tribe, as with many Naga tribes, compensation for services such as tattooing revolves around a gesture of gratitude, respect, and the deep cultural significance of the items being exchanged. While individuals can offer anything they deem fit as compensation, certain items are particularly esteemed. Rice, a staple and symbol of sustenance, is one such offering. Pork, indicative of celebration and community feasting, is another treasured gift. Additionally, rice beer, often associated with hospitality, festivity, and shared moments of joy, completes this trio of preferred payments.

Together, these offerings represent a deeper, more profound acknowledgement of the skill and tradition imparted by the tattoo artist, weaving together elements of nourishment, celebration, and shared cultural experience.

3.5 Khamniungan tribe

3.5.1 Tattoo artist

Within the Khamniungan tribe, the art of tattooing is a revered tradition steeped in cultural significance. Women exclusively take up the mantle of tattoo artist in this community. However, it is noteworthy that being a tattoo artist is not seen as a formal profession nor restricted to specific clans within the tribe. Instead, the practice is democratic in nature. Any woman, regardless of her lineage or background, has the potential to rise to this esteemed position. It's about passion, skill, and dedication. If she shows an aptitude and interest, she can embark on the journey to master the art, thereby ensuring that the tradition is continuously rejuvenated and passed down through generations.

3.5.2 Preparation

In the Khamniungan tribe, the creation of tattoo ink is a blend of natural resources and time-honoured techniques. The primary ingredient is soot, derived from burning pine wood pieces. This process involves placing an earthen pot over the burning wood, ensuring that the soot deposits on the pot's interior. Once enough soot is collected, it is mixed with either water or rice beer, both of which serve as diluents. This mixture forms a dark, rich ink essential for the tattooing process.

An interesting aspect of this tradition is its timing. The ink is typically prepared just a few days before the tattooing ceremony. This ensures its freshness and potency, ensuring the resulting tattoo is vivid and long-lasting.

Contrastingly, while in some tribes like the Pochury, the ink preparation is shrouded in secrecy and often involves exclusive rituals, the Khamniungans adopt a more open approach. The making of the ink is not enigmatic but rather a transparent process, accessible and visible to all members of the tribe. This reflects the tribe's unique cultural nuances and their distinct approach to shared traditions.

3.5.3 Tools

Within the Khamniungan tribe, the instruments used in tattooing have not only functional importance but also carry cultural significance, as is evident from their distinct nomenclature that varies across different regions.

In Pangsha, the needle, a vital tool for inking the skin, is called "*Neplaotao*." Complementing the needle is the mallet, used to tap and drive the needle into the skin, known as "*Simpai*" in this region (*Plate 7*).

However, in Noklak village, the mallet takes on a different name: "*Cho-een pai*." This variation in terminology showcases the rich tapestry of local dialects and nuances within the broader Khamniungan community. Each village retains its distinct linguistic and traditional identity while sharing common cultural threads.

3.5.4 Tattooing process

Within the Khamniungan tribe, tattooing is not merely a decorative practice but a rite of passage, deeply embedded in the community's cultural fabric. The timing, symbolism, and procedure all have profound meanings.

The winter season is chosen as the optimal time for tattooing. Young girls' journey of inking begins during their transition to womanhood. The chin and forehead are the initial canvases, symbolising her entry into adulthood. As time progresses, over the next year or so, her legs are adorned with intricate patterns, followed by her shoulders and arms. This staggered timeline, which spans over 4 to 5 years, signifies the gradual transition and growth within the community.

For men, particularly headhunters, tattoos are not just skin-deep imprints but are badges of valour. In a society that deeply respects bravery and skill, the act of bringing an enemy's head to the village is an unparalleled feat. After accomplishing this, the headhunter must observe an eight-day ritual of purification and reflection. Only after this can he adorn the prestigious headhunter tattoo.

However, acquiring this prestigious mark is not immediate. The headhunter must patiently search for an artist skilled enough to etch this symbol of honour onto his skin. The process is neither swift nor easy. Depending on the artist's intricacy and expertise, the tattooing may require multiple sittings, sometimes spanning days. During this period, the artist is highly regarded and treated with utmost respect and hospitality, acknowledging her pivotal role in commemorating the headhunter's valour.

3.5.5 Fees

In the Khamniungan tribe, compensation to the tattoo artist is flexible and rooted in the traditional barter system. While there's no strict monetary value attached to the artistry, customary offerings are both a sign of respect and an acknowledgement of the artist's skills.

A basket of rice represents sustenance and gratitude, reflecting the tribe's agricultural foundation. Pork slices, a delicacy and an important part of many tribal feasts, signify honour and appreciation. The rice beer, a traditional beverage, not only symbolizes celebration but also the intimate bond shared between the community members. Offering these items pays homage to the artist's significant role within the Khamniungan community and ensures that the ancient art of tattooing remains alive and valued for generations to come.

3.6 Chang tribe

3.6.1 Tattoo Artist

In the Chang tribe, the tradition of tattooing is deeply entrenched in their cultural tapestry, and a unique feature of this practice is that the tattoo artist is invariably a woman. This position of a tattoo artist, reserved solely for women, underlines the crucial roles they play within the community. By wielding the needle and ink, these women become custodians of the tribe's history, identity, and rites of passage. Their hands inscribe stories, symbols, and milestones onto the skin, acting as a bridge between the past and the present, ensuring that the tribe's traditions are carried forward through time.

3.6.2 Preparation

In the Chang tribe, the creation of tattoo ink is a meticulous process that melds natural elements with tradition. Pinewood, chosen for its rich burn properties, is set aflame, and its emanating smoke is captured by placing an earthen pot over the burning wood. This pot acts as a reservoir, collecting the thick black soot that rises from the smouldering wood.

Once a sufficient amount of soot accumulates, it is carefully scraped off. This soot, imbued with the essence of pine, becomes the primary pigment for the tattoo ink. To transform this pigment into a usable ink, it is then mixed with a liquid. The choice of liquid, whether water or rice beer, can vary based on traditions or the artist's preference. Rice beer, a staple in many tribal cultures, might add a ceremonial significance to the mixture.

The timing of ink preparation is also crucial. Instead of stockpiling, the Changs typically prepare the ink a few days before the actual tattooing session, ensuring its freshness and potency. This practice underscores the importance of the tattooing ritual and the reverence towards using natural and freshly prepared materials.

3.6.3 Tools

In the Chang tribe, even the tools employed for tattooing are deeply rooted in nature and the environment around them. The use of plant-based materials highlights the tribe's intimate connection with the earth and their resourcefulness.

The thorns of the "*Jen*" plant are selected for their sturdiness and sharpness, ideal for piercing the skin with accuracy. When bundled together, these thorns provide the tattoo artist with a tool that ensures clean, precise lines, allowing intricate patterns and symbols to be etched

onto the skin. The act of binding these thorns together exemplifies the tribe's ingenuity, transforming a simple thorn into a reliable and effective instrument (Chingmak, 2020).

The mallet, made from a soft plant stem, complements the needle. Its softness ensures that the force applied is controlled and consistent, minimizing the risk of deep, unintended punctures. This mallet assists the artist in driving the thorn-needle into the skin with rhythmic taps, facilitating the transfer of ink into the skin's deeper layers (*Plate 8*).

3.6.4 Tattooing process

In the Chang tribe, the transition from girlhood to womanhood is marked significantly by the art of tattooing. This tradition, deeply rooted in their culture, is a rite of passage, signalling the girl's journey into adulthood.

The onset of adolescence is a pivotal time in a Chang girl's life, and getting tattooed at this stage is emblematic of her maturity and the community's recognition of her growing responsibilities as a woman.

The pre-tattooing rituals emphasise cleanliness and hygiene. Before the thorns of the *Jen* plant touch the skin, the area intended for tattooing is meticulously cleaned. This ensures that no foreign particles interfere with the process, reducing the risk of complications during healing.

Using *Jen* thorns bound together allows the artist to puncture the skin precisely. Once the skin is punctured, the ink, made from the soot of burned pine wood, is carefully applied to the incisions. This method, though time-consuming, ensures that the design is detailed and lasts a lifetime.

After the tattooing process is completed, utmost care is taken to allow it to heal properly. The freshly tattooed area is left untouched and undisturbed for a week. This ensures that the design remains intact, without any distortions, and also aids in preventing infections. Overall, the tattooing ritual among the Chang tribe is not just about adorning the body with intricate designs but is a profound cultural practice symbolising growth, identity, and belonging.

3.6.5 Fees

The rituals accompanying the tattooing process showcase the reverence and importance accorded to it in the Chang society. It is not just about getting inked; it is a profound experience, both for the recipient and the community. The act of offering a cock to the tattoo

artist is symbolic, representing sacrifice, respect, and gratitude. The cock, often seen as a vital link between the earthly realm and the divine, is a powerful token of appreciation. This offering is a testament to the artist's esteemed position within the tribe, acknowledging their expertise and the spiritual role they play.

While those getting tattooed bring their own materials, emphasising personal commitment and preparation, the responsibility of preparing these materials lies squarely on the tattoo artist. This duty highlights their trusted position in the community. They're not just artists; they're custodians of an age-old tradition.

3.7 Phom tribe

3.7.1 Tattoo Artist

Within the Phom tribe of the Nagas, the art of tattooing adopts a distinct approach that sets it apart from most Naga tribes. This bifurcation based on gender is rooted in tradition and cultural significance.

The Phom tribe's practice of having separate tattoo artists based on the recipient's gender is a tangible representation of the tribe's beliefs in gender roles, rites of passage, and the unique life journeys of men and women. By having women tattoo the females and men tattoo the males, a profound connection is established between the artist and the recipient. This bond is rooted in shared life experiences, cultural expectations, and the spiritual journey accompanying each tattoo.

Furthermore, this unique tradition can be seen as a reflection of the Phom tribe's understanding and respect for gender-specific experiences. For instance, the challenges, rites of passage, and even spiritual journeys that women and men undergo can differ in various aspects, and having an artist of the same gender can ensure a deeper connection and understanding during the tattooing process.

The differentiation also speaks volumes about the flexibility and adaptiveness of the Phom tribe's cultural practices. While many other Naga tribes adhere strictly to the convention of only women becoming tattoo artists, the Phom tribe showcases adaptability, emphasising the importance of individual experiences.

3.7.2 Preparation

In the Phom tribe, the *Nyiamlak* plant serves a unique and essential role in their tattooing practices. This plant, when pounded, exudes a deep green sap. This rich colour is utilized as a natural ink for tattoos, epitomizing a beautiful blend of tradition, nature, and artistry.

The natural properties of *Nyiamlak* likely provide a lasting and vibrant hue to the tattoos, ensuring that they remain pronounced over time. Using natural sources for tattoo ink is a testament to the tribe's deep-rooted connection with their environment and their ability to harness the bounty of nature for cultural and artistic purposes (Rev Among Phom, 2018).

Such practices also underscore the importance of sustainable and holistic approaches in indigenous traditions, where every element of the environment can have a purpose and is used respectfully.

3.7.3 Tools

In the Phom tribe's tattooing practices, an ingenious approach to creating tattoo needles is observed. Instead of relying on a single point of puncture, they bundle multiple thorns from cane together. These are then securely fastened to a wooden holder, creating a rudimentary but effective tattoo needle.

This method, while seemingly simple, serves several purposes. Firstly, the cane thorns are sharp and durable, making them suitable for piercing the skin. When bundled together, they allow for consistent; multiple punctures, enabling the artist to embed the ink more uniformly. Secondly, the wooden holder offers a comfortable grip for the artist, ensuring precision and control during the tattooing process.

Such resourceful and traditional methods highlight the tribe's deep connection with their environment and their ingenuity in crafting tools from readily available natural resources.

3.7.4 Tattooing Process

For the women of the Phom tribe, the act of tattooing is intricately linked with the rites of passage. Reaching a certain age, a crucial phase in life, is marked with distinct tattoos. In the upper Phom area, women make their transition into adulthood by cutting their hair short and getting tattoos on their chin and legs. This might serve as a visual representation of their new status within the community. Meanwhile, tattoos around the navel and on the legs in the lower areas serve a similar purpose.

It's interesting to note the spatial variance within the same tribe, indicating micro-cultural differences or potentially influences from neighbouring tribes or traditions. The exclusion of men from the process might be based on the desire to maintain the sanctity and intimacy of the ritual. This restriction might also stem from age-old beliefs, rooted in preserving the purity of the process or simply respecting the privacy of the women undergoing it.

For Phom men, the act of tattooing holds a different kind of significance. Unlike the women, whose tattoos mark a natural transition, the men earn their tattoos through acts of bravery and valour. Bringing an enemy's head, an age-old tradition found in various tribal cultures around the world entitles a Phom man to the esteemed headhunter's tattoo. Such tattoos stand as badges of honour, symbolising their courage, prowess, and successful ventures into enemy territories.

Both these traditions underline the importance of tattoos as more than mere adornments in the Phom culture. They serve as markers of identity, maturity, and status, echoing stories of personal journeys and communal values.

3.7.5 Fees

In the case of the Phom tribe and perhaps other Naga tribes, the tattoo artist's compensation, in the form of pork, emphasizes the cultural and symbolic importance of the act. Pork, being a delicacy in many cultures, is often reserved for feasts, ceremonies, and special occasions. By offering twelve pieces of pork for lunch and a leg portion of a pig to take home, the tribe ensures the artist is well-fed and shows respect, gratitude, and acknowledges the artist's essential role in the community.

This practice of compensating with food, especially meat, is a testament to the community's values – where skill and tradition are held in high esteem and their preservation is intertwined with mutual respect and honour.

3.8 Ao tribe

3.8.1 Tattoo Artist

In the Ao tribe, the intricate and revered art of tattooing is traditionally the domain of women. While many professions or roles within societies are often designated to specific clans or groups, tattooing among the Ao people is distinctive in its democratic nature. It isn't a

formalized profession nor is it bound by clan-based obligations. Instead, entering the world of tattoo artistry is a matter of individual choice, anchored by unwavering commitment and honed by years of practice and dedication.

Men, intriguingly, are restricted from this realm. It's not merely that they don't participate; it's a cultural taboo for them to even learn the art. This prohibition underscores the significant gender roles and cultural values within the tribe, emphasizing the distinct spaces occupied by men and women.

Although tattooing is widespread, only a select few elderly women attain the esteemed title of expert tattoo artists, reflecting the depth of skill and experience required. Their hands have marked countless individuals over the decades, becoming keepers of traditions and stories told through inked designs.

In scenarios where a village lacks its own resident tattoo artist, the interconnectedness of the Ao community shines through. Villages lean on each other, inviting revered artists from neighbouring areas to ensure that their young girls aren't deprived of this significant rite of passage. Notably, Ungma and Chuchuyimlang villages are often spoken of as hubs of excellence in this art, suggesting that they might have had particularly skilled practitioners or perhaps methods and designs unique to them.

The importance of tattooing in the Ao culture, therefore, is multifaceted. It is not just about the aesthetic or coming-of-age significance but is also a testament to the roles, values, and connections that bind the community together.

3.8.2 Preparation

In the heart of the Ao culture, as the chilly embrace of winter blankets the landscape, an ancient tradition finds its most favourable moment: the art of tattooing. With its cool, dry environment, winter provides the optimal conditions for tattooing.

To create the ink, a meticulous and traditional process is involved. The sap, derived from the bark of the *Ngüpsen* tree, is a vital ingredient. This sap is then carefully burned, and the resulting soot is captured using an earthen pot. Once collected, the soot is then delicately combined with either rice beer or water, producing a thick, dark ink, perfect for the intricate designs of Ao tattoos. Furthermore, in certain villages, another element is introduced to this mix: *Osak* (indigo). Known for its rich blue hue, indigo offers another dimension of colour to the tattoo, allowing for a deeper representation of Ao heritage and symbolism. Whether utilizing the blackness of the soot or the deep blue of indigo, each tattoo becomes not just a

mark on the skin but a story, a legacy, a piece of Ao history carried forward by each individual.

3.8.3 Tools

In the Ao tradition, the instruments used for tattooing are not just tools but are interwoven deeply with nature, underscoring the bond between the tribe and the environment around them. The delicate act of tattooing requires precision, and for this, the Ao people have looked towards nature to supply them with the perfect needles. Thorns, either from the resilient cane or the robust lemon tree, are chosen for their sharpness and durability. Depending on the intricacy and design of the tattoo, several of these thorns are bundled together. The number is meticulously chosen to achieve the desired pattern, ensuring that each tattoo is both a work of art and a testament to the tattooist's skill (*Plate 9*).

These thorns are then securely fastened into the stalk of a plant known as '*kamri*'. The *kamri*, a native plant, is revered not just for its sturdy structure but also for its symbolism in the community. Sometimes, alternatives like *pangsalabi* are opted for, showcasing the flexibility and resourcefulness of the Ao people. The thick stem of the *kamri* also plays another crucial role: it is wielded as a mallet, driving the thorns into the skin with rhythmic precision (*Plate 10*) (*Plate 11 & 12*).

The tattooing technique is a blend of both hammering and pricking methods. With every beat of the mallet, stories of generations, tales of valour, love, and tradition are imprinted onto the skin, ensuring that the Ao legacy lives on, one tattoo at a

3.8.4 Tattooing process

In the Ao tribe, the initiation into the world of tattoos for a girl was a significant rite of passage, signifying her transition from childhood into womanhood. This transformative journey was marked by an elaborate series of ceremonies and rituals that spanned over different stages of her adolescence.

The journey would usually commence when a girl stepped into puberty. It wasn't a hasty process; rather, it unfolded slowly, mirroring the slow blossoming of a flower. The initial step was to select an auspicious location, usually on the village's periphery. Here, a makeshift tattooing station known as '*sunglang*' was constructed. Made primarily from bamboo, it offered a flat platform, ensuring the tattooist had a stable space to work. The roof

was thatched with 'jeo' leaves, providing shade and protection from the elements (*Plate13 &14*).

Ensuring the sanctity and safety of this sacred space was paramount. Before any inking could begin, a ritualistic cleansing of the site was done. This involved the sacrifice of a rooster, a symbol of purity and vitality in many cultures. The bird had to be in perfect health, without any blemishes, symbolizing perfection and the warding off of any negativity or ill omen.

Once the ground was purified, the tattooing would begin. The girl's legs were the canvas for the initial artwork. A testament to her strength and foundation, her legs bore the brunt of the first inking session. Following this, the chest became the focal point, adorned with a beautiful chain of lozenges that cascaded gracefully from her throat down to her breastbone. This pattern, enhancing the beauty of her neckline, also added a touch of elegance. Additionally, her chin was marked with four distinct vertical lines, signifying her tribal identity. Her shoulders weren't left untouched; they bore an inverted 'V', perhaps representing wings or the mountains of her homeland.

As she matured, more intricate designs were added. An arrow pattern, symbolizing direction, purpose, or even protection, was etched onto her calf. Later on, a similar pattern adorned her knees, the joints that helped her kneel, run, and dance. And finally, as the culmination of her tattoo journey, her wrists and stomach were embellished, completing her transformation from a young girl to a woman adorned with the tales, traditions, and symbols of her people.

When the girl was escorted to the *sunglang* or while returning after her tattooing and if she happened to see a rich man (who had performed feast of merit) coming their way, she had to divert her path as it was believed that a rich man would normally consume meat and if she met him, her tattoo would not come out properly (Senka, 2013).

In the Ao tribe, the ritual of tattooing was as much about the art itself as it was about the holistic process of healing and spiritual belief. The tradition dictated that girls, freshly inked with tribal designs, would sleep in the '*sunglang*', a specific type of *machang* located at the rear of a house. This wasn't merely a customary practice but had a profound reason behind it. The location was carefully chosen to expose these young women to the morning dew, a natural element that the Ao's believed was pure and had healing properties. As the morning's soft dew descended upon the tattoos, it was believed to foster a quicker healing of the fresh wounds, making this seemingly simple act a crucial part of the post-tattooing regimen.

The healing journey wasn't only skin deep. Dietary practices played an essential role in ensuring that the internal environment of the body supported the external healing. This period saw girls adhering to strict dietary restrictions, including refraining from fresh meat which could inflame the body, and certain berries like *kamri* and *yaribi*. The avoidance of monkey meat and frogs might also be tied to the tribe's deeper beliefs about these animals or their possible effects on the body during the healing process.

The tribe's profound beliefs were evident not just in life but also in the face of death. The art of tattooing, deeply interwoven with a person's journey and identity, meant that if a girl departed from this world before her tattoos were completed, measures were taken to ensure her transition was still whole. The Ao's belief in the afterlife dictated that the state in which one leaves the physical realm impacts their journey in the hereafter. Therefore, any unfinished tattoo patterns would be symbolically completed using charcoal. This gesture ensured that even in death, the girl's identity and the tribe's traditions were respected and preserved, highlighting the profound significance of tattoos in the Ao community.

3.8.5 Fees

The transition of a girl to womanhood was a significant event, marked by tattoos, and parents would often start preparing for this pivotal moment as their daughter neared puberty. Recognising the tattoo artist's skill and importance, they would save up resources over time, ensuring they could adequately compensate the artist for her invaluable services. It wasn't merely about the act of tattooing but everything that the art represented – tradition, identity, bravery, and maturity.

While there was no rigid or standardized fee for the tattoo artists, families often tried to offer what was valuable and significant in their context. A common form of compensation included 2 to 3 basket of rice – a staple and primary sustenance source, accompanied by rice beer and sumptuous edibles like cooked fish and dry meat.

However, as with many indigenous practices globally, the advent of the British and the permeation of their influence brought about change. The age-old barter system and the traditional modes of payment began to see the introduction of cash as a means of compensation. This payment was not just monetary or material but also a gesture of gratitude and respect for the artist's pivotal role in the community.

3.9 Konyak tribe

3.9.1 Tattoo Artist

In the diverse tapestry of Naga tribes, the Konyaks possess a distinct and intriguing tradition regarding tattoo artistry. Here, the exclusive right to be a tattoo artist is reserved solely for the wife of the *Angh*, or the Queen. This isn't just a mere designation but a testament to the profound respect and reverence the society holds for the Queen. Her esteemed position as the *Angh's* wife brings with it not only ceremonial responsibilities but also the esteemed duty of preserving the tribe's ancient tattooing traditions.

What's more captivating is the mentoring dynamic between the Queen and her daughters. Instead of opening the art to everyone, the Konyaks believe in preserving the sanctity and exclusivity of the craft. The Queen's daughters, under her watchful eye and meticulous guidance, are introduced to the profound intricacies of tattooing. They aren't merely learning a skill but are also imbibing the cultural, spiritual, and historical significances that each tattoo symbolizes.

This apprenticeship ensures that the legacy is passed down through bloodlines, keeping the artistry within the royal fold. The daughters, while learning, also understand the weight of the responsibility they will one day hold, ensuring that the tribe's tattooing traditions are not just preserved but also flourish under their care in the future.

3.9.2 Preparation

Within the Konyak tribe, the process of preparing tattoo ink is a meticulous one, deeply embedded in age-old traditions. The sap from the *Kong* tree plays a pivotal role in this procedure. It's not just about extracting the sap, but how it's treated thereafter that matters. To transform this sap into the rich black pigment crucial for tattooing, it is burned. As it emits soot during combustion, an earthen pot is positioned over the burning sap to capture this residue.

Once sufficient soot has accumulated, it is carefully scraped off the inner surface of the pot. This collected soot is then combined with another essential component to produce the tattoo ink. Depending on regional practices, this could be rice beer, water, or in places like Jaboka village, the juice of *Okhazoazam* leaves. The resulting mixture, known as '*Soa*', is not just a mere concoction but a blend of nature and tradition, ready to etch stories, beliefs, and histories onto the skin of the tribe members.

3.9.3 Tools

The art of tattooing takes on subtle variations influenced by the materials readily available in the vicinity. One such variation is observed in the choice of thorns used as tattooing needles. While in many villages, thorns from the cane plant are the primary choice, the Jaboka village distinguishes itself by opting for the *Sechu* thorn. These thorns, owing to their sharpness and durability, serve as ideal tools to puncture the skin and deposit the ink, ensuring the tattoo's longevity and clarity.

Yet, it's not just the needle that's critical to the tattooing process. The mallet used to drive the needle plays an equally vital role. Locally known as '*Paukua Seahu*', the mallet is crafted from the stem of the *Paukua* plant. This particular stem is chosen for its combination of sturdiness and flexibility, allowing the tattoo artist to exert just the right amount of pressure without causing undue harm. Together, the needle and mallet form an essential duo in the Konyak tattooing tradition, a testament to the tribe's deep connection with nature and its ingenious ways of integrating natural resources into cultural practices.

3.9.4 Tattooing process

The ancient art of tattooing is not just a rite of passage but a deeply rooted tradition steeped in cultural significance and ritualistic practices. While winter cloaks the region, inside the *Angh's* house – the residence of the tribal chief – a profound ceremony unfolds.

For the Konyak women, the onset of adolescence marks their readiness to embrace their community's traditions. A grand feast is organised by her family, a testament to the occasion's significance. As the aroma of roasted pigs and cows' wafts through the air, the girl's kinfolk, extended family, and neighbours gather, creating an atmosphere of collective celebration. However, only the women, those most closely bonded by blood and friendship, are allowed near her during the actual tattooing process. They surround her, offering solace and comfort as she braves the piercing pain of the needle. This inaugural tattoo, known as '*Chithumhu*', graces her legs, serving as an indelible mark of her transition to womanhood. Unlike other tribes, the Konyaks don't impose dietary restrictions on the tattooed, emphasizing their distinct cultural nuances.

The Konyak men, on the other hand, earn their tattoos on the battleground. A successful headhunt is their ticket to this revered rite. In an affirmation of their bravery, they return to the *Angh's* house, where the *Angh's* wife, a prestigious tattoo artist in her own right, awaits them. She inks their tales of valour on their faces and chests, crafting intricate designs

that might span several days to complete. There's no gender-based barrier during the men's tattooing; however, the onus is on the warrior. He must bear the pain with stoicism, as a display of his mettle and prowess.

In both ceremonies, pain is not just physical but symbolic – a poignant reminder of their resilience, strength, and the deep-seated traditions of the Konyak people.

3.9.5 Fees

In the Konyak community, the art of tattooing is as much about honouring tradition as it is about ensuring inclusivity. While the tattoo artist, often working within the esteemed premises of the *Angh's* house, plays a pivotal role in these ceremonies, their compensation is rooted in community values rather than materialistic gain.

For their skilled craftsmanship, the artist receives a leg of either a pig or cow, a symbol of gratitude and respect. This gesture resonates deeply within the community, considering the cultural importance of livestock. Along with this, a basket filled with rice and an assortment of fresh vegetables is presented, reflecting the region's agricultural backbone and the sustenance it provides.

However, the Konyaks understand that not everyone can afford such offerings, given the diverse economic realities within the tribe. To ensure that every individual, regardless of their economic standing, can partake in this cherished ritual, a unique barter system is in place. Those unable to provide the traditional compensation can instead offer their labour. By dedicating a day to work in the artist's fields, they repay the artist's services, forging a bond that transcends monetary transactions. This arrangement reinforces the community spirit, emphasizing mutual respect and collective growth.

CHAPTER-4

IMPORTANCE OF TATTOOS IN NAGA CULTURE

4.1 Ao Tattoo

The practice of tattooing has been an important part of Ao culture. Tattoos often hold significant cultural, spiritual, or social meanings in various societies, and in the case of the Ao people, it was a prevalent custom. Many indigenous cultures worldwide, including the Naga tribes, have a rich oral tradition but might not have a corresponding written history. This means that much of their history, customs, and traditions have been passed down through generations orally rather than recorded in written form. Because there are no written records, historians, anthropologists, and other researchers find it challenging to pinpoint the exact origin of certain practices like tattooing among the Ao people. Oral traditions can change over time, and without concrete evidence like historical texts, artefacts, or other tangible proof, it's difficult to create a definitive theory about when and how tattooing began in Ao culture.

However, among the Ao people, the origin of tattooing is not left to mere conjecture; rather, it finds expression in not one, but four distinct folk stories, encapsulating the cultural essence and historical legacy of this practice. These narratives, entrenched in the oral tradition, recount a time when tattooing was not yet a part of Ao women's lives. It was during the era of Yarila, regarded as the semi-mythical chieftains of Kabza village, that this cultural shift occurred. The accounts tell of a masterful lady, a key figure within the community, who embarked upon an audacious act. One day, seizing an opportunity when the village's inhabitants had descended to the fields, she restrained her sister and administered a tattoo. This act was far from an arbitrary whim but marked the inception of a profound cultural change. Initially causing sores, the tattoo eventually healed, revealing an aesthetic that was met with universal admiration within the community. Far from being a mere adornment, the tattoo became emblematic of a deeper cultural resonance. The masterful lady's pioneering act transcended individual novelty, forging a new communal identity (Mills, 2003: 32).

Another narrative about the origin of tattooing within the Ao tribe points to the village of Chingen, located in Chin hill of Myanmar, where the tribe resided for a significant duration during their migration from the east. In this location, two sisters named Rotola and Ronsangla were notably hospitable to Lachaba, a Godly figure, offering him shelter when others had rejected him. An incident occurred where Chingen's girls were participating in a

dance with their legs marked only with charcoal. Observing this, Rotola provided her younger sister, Ronsangla, with elegant clothes for the dance and skilfully tattooed her legs. The beauty of the tattoo aroused envy, and many traded their finest ornaments and garments to obtain similar tattoos.

Yet another cultural narrative furnishes a different perspective on the origin of tattooing among the Ao tribe. While living in Burma (Myanmar), the Burmese would frequently raid the villages, abducting attractive girls. The regularity of these raids led the village elders to convene and deliberate on preventing further abductions. An elder suggested marking the girls' faces to render them less attractive to the raiders. It's believed that this was the beginning of the practice of tattooing the faces of the girls in the tribe.

In the distant past, in a village, unmarried girls used to sleep in a special house called a '*zuki*' at night. Both rich and poor girls would gather there, tell stories, and spend time together. Among them was a poor girl who was beautiful and kind but was always made fun of by the rich girls because she was from a poor family. Her father had died, and her mother raised her alone. The poor girl would tell her mother how the rich girls teased her every morning. Her mother would comfort her and promise to make things better. One day, the mother told her daughter to stay inside for a week. Then, she began to tattoo her daughter's legs with a black substance. The process was very painful, and the girl cried, asking her mother to stop. But her mother told her to bear the pain and that the rich girls would never bully her again. After the tattooing was finished, the girl had to stay inside until her wounds healed. One night, after healing, she returned to the spinster's house. All the other girls saw the tattoos on her legs and admired them a lot. Soon, everyone in the village heard about it and came to see her tattoos. They liked them so much that they offered gifts to have their own daughters tattooed. The mother couldn't say no, so she began tattooing others too. That's how the practice of tattooing started in the village (Naga Journal 2022).

4.1.1 Ao women

Tattoos in the Ao culture held an eminent and profound symbolism, especially for the women of the tribe. Far from mere embellishments, these marks were emblematic of the virtues they held dear, encompassing dedication, devotion, and determination towards familial and communal responsibilities. The tattoo was more than skin deep; it bore the narrative of a woman's life, her social standing, and her identity within the community.

Integral to this tradition was the rite of passage that these markings represented. It signified not only a woman's social status but also her moral fortitude. The process of acquiring a

tattoo was characterized by intense and agonizing pain. This ordeal was seen as a test of resilience; enduring this torment was perceived as a sign that a woman could surmount any challenge life might present.

Upon reaching puberty, a significant change in a girl's life within the Ao community took place. A departure from her parents' dwelling, she would begin to inhabit the '*zuki*', a communal residence shared with other girls of her age. In this haven, a unique and nurturing environment was fostered, where girls revelled in their newfound liberty, exchanging stories and absorbing the rich tapestry of customs and traditions handed down through generations. The '*zuki*' was more than a mere shelter; it was a crucible for personal growth and societal assimilation. However, within its welcoming confines lay a stern regulation. Young girls, devoid of tattoos, were accorded a lesser status, a subtle yet clear differentiation that manifested in their sleeping arrangements. The absence of tattoos relegated them to the floor, away from the comfort of the beds that awaited their tattooed counterparts.

(I). Chungli Ao Women

In the Chungli community, a girl's tattoos are a vivid and meaningful embodiment of tradition and identity. These tattoos are meticulously crafted, and each mark holds significance, serving as a visual representation of cultural heritage and personal narrative.

Upon her chin, four vertical lines are tattooed with precision. These lines are clean and bold, creating a striking and distinctive feature on her face. They are a declaration of her maturation and her connection to the community (*Plate 19, 20, 21, 22 & 23*).

Descending elegantly from her throat to her breast is a chain of lozenges. This pattern is designed with great care and symmetry, forming a beautiful and prominent motif. It graces her upper body like a necklace of ink, drawing the eye and emphasising her poise and status within her community (*Plate 24, 25, 26 & 27*).

Each shoulder is adorned with an inverted V, elegantly positioned. These markings, placed on the part of the body associated with strength and support, represent her role as a protector and a bearer of her family's heritage (*Plate 28*).

Her left arm is marked with two small vertical lines and a larger, assertive horizontal line. On either side of this line, Xs are etched, adding complexity and depth to the design. These marks are balanced and deliberate, creating an intricate and harmonious composition on her arm (*Plate 29*).

Her right arm presents a captivating pattern: bold, square or rectangular shapes are set in a line, with four circles punctuating the spaces between each square or rectangle. These shapes are rendered with a strong, confident hand, and the small gaps between each square or

rectangle are maintained with meticulous consistency. This pattern wraps around her arm like a band, bold and unbroken (Plate 30).

On her legs, the artistry continues. Her shins are graced with a chain of X's, which seamlessly transition into a chain of lozenges, mirroring the pattern on her upper body. This design is applied with symmetry and rhythm, creating a visual echo between her legs and her torso.

The calf of her leg is marked with five lines, each rendered with careful, steady strokes. The first line features a very elongated, bold triangle tattoo, its tip culminating in an arrow-like pattern. This design is striking and assertive, drawing the eye downward and emphasising the length and grace of her leg. In the second, third, and fourth lines, a small triangle is placed right in the middle and is shaded with finesse, adding depth and richness to the design.

The fifth and final line on her calf remains adorned, a simple and elegant stroke. In its simplicity, this line serves as a grounding element in the overall composition, bringing balance to the intricate patterns that precede it (*Plate 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 & 36*).

(2). Mongsen Ao Women

A Mongsen girl bears a rich tapestry of ink on her skin, a vivid tableau that narrates her cultural identity. Each design is meticulously crafted, showcasing the intricate artistry deeply rooted in her community's traditions.

On her chin, she wears four vertical lines with grace. These lines are marked clearly and boldly, defining her face with a distinct pattern that is immediately recognisable as a signature of her heritage. This facial tattooing practice, traditional and ceremonial, aligns her visually and symbolically with her people (*Plate 37, 38, 39 & 40*).

A chain of lozenges starts from her throat and cascades gracefully towards her breast. This series is elegantly rendered, creating a flowing, interconnected pattern that resembles a crafted necklace of ink. This prominent and continuous design accentuates her neckline and creates a harmonious transition as one follows the path of the ink downwards (*Plate 41 & 42*).

On each side of her shoulders are three inverted Vs. Poised and symmetrical markings are akin to epaulets in their placement. They are uniform and create a balanced, mirror-like effect on either side of her body, emphasising her shoulders' natural contour. (*Plate 43 & 44*) Her left arm is adorned with a striking design: a large horizontal line, with Xs positioned on either side and one precisely in the middle. This design is bold and prominent, drawing

attention to her arm with its clean lines and symmetrically placed Xs, which add complexity to the simplicity of the horizontal base.

On her right arm, a large X pattern takes center stage, intersected with a straight line right through its middle. This dramatic and bold pattern makes her right arm a focal point. The straight line cutting through the X adds depth, creating a striking contrast within the pattern.

Moving downwards, her legs are canvases for further artistry. Both the shin and the calf are marked with a pattern of Xs that seamlessly transition into a chain of lozenges. This design, rhythmic and repetitive, wraps around her legs like an inked tapestry, unifying her upper and lower body patterns. A very elongated and bold triangle tattoo pattern is displayed on her knees and the back of her knees. These tattoos are assertive and eye-catching, with their points sharply defined, resembling the pattern of arrows. They accentuate the natural bends of her legs, creating a sense of motion and direction that guides the observer's eye along the lines of her body (*Plate 45, 46, 47, 48, 49 & 50*).

(3). Changki Ao Women

In the Changki community, tattooing is a poignant and vivid reflection of cultural identity, meticulously documented through the detailed sketches of Dr. Hutton, as found in the book "The Ao Nagas" by J. P. Mills. Although no survivors from the Changki community remain to inform us directly, these sketches provide a valuable and evocative window into the past, illustrating the unique and intricate tattoo patterns worn by the Changki women (*Plate 51*).

Beginning with the face, the Changki girls, similar to their Mongsen and Chungli counterparts, mark their chins with four distinct vertical lines. These bold and symmetrical lines serve as a unifying element among these communities while setting the stage for the unique patterns that distinguish each group.

A chain of lozenge patterns is prominently displayed from the throat down to the breast. These lozenges are notably smaller and more numerous in the Changki designs compared to the Mongsen and Chungli groups. This dense and intricate patterning creates a visually rich and textured effect, emphasizing the body's central line and strikingly contrasting the skin.

On the shoulders, three large inverted V's are etched, significantly larger in scale than those found in the other two groups. These expansive, bold markings lend an assertive and regal quality to the bearer's posture, framing the shoulders as a site of particular importance and drawing attention to the upper body.

A unique and distinguishing feature of the Changki tattoos is a pattern resembling the English alphabet letter 'W'. A total of three of these 'W' patterns are arrayed vertically, beginning below the breasts and extending down to the navel. This intriguing addition is exclusive to the Changki group and adds a layer of complexity and distinctiveness to their tattooing tradition.

Mirroring symmetry is a defining aspect of the Changki tattoos. The patterns are identical on both the right and left arms: a chain of Xs encircles the arms and wrists. This chain is punctuated by three horizontal lines – one at the top, one in the middle, and one at the bottom – creating a balanced, harmonious design that encases the limbs.

The tattoo pattern on the legs of the Changki girls echoes that of the Mongsen community, featuring chains of X's that encircle the legs, wrapping the shins and calves in a continuous, rhythmic design. This shared element forms a visual and cultural link between the two groups, suggesting a common thread in their tattooing traditions.

However, the tattoo pattern on the knees of the Changki girls diverges notably from the Mongsen style. Instead of the elongated triangle seen in Mongsen tattoos, the Changki girls receive a distinct pattern: three vertical lines are tattooed on both knees, framed by a horizontal line both above and below these verticals. In the centre of each of the vertical lines, an X is carefully tattooed, creating a grid-like pattern that is both bold and intricate.

4.1.2 Nokpu village

In the village of Nokpu, the inhabitants are said to have migrated from the eastern region, eventually integrating themselves into the Mongsen community. While they adopted significant aspects of Mongsen culture, the tattoo artistry of the Nokpu people is marked by its own distinct characteristics. These unique features narrate a story of migration and integration while preserving aspects of the villagers' original cultural identity.

One of the most striking aspects of the Nokpu tattoo tradition is the pronounced chain of lozenge tattoos descending from the throat to the breast. While this design element is recognisable as a classic feature of Ao tattoos, among the Nokpu it is rendered on a grander scale. The lines of these tattoos are bold and prominent, making a clear and assertive statement on the wearer's body. These enlarged and audacious designs echo the resilience and boldness of people who migrated and adapted to a new cultural landscape while retaining their identity (*Plate 52 & 53*).

Similarly, the inverted V's that grace the shoulders of Nokpu individuals are unmistakably reminiscent of Ao's tattooing styles. However, in Nokpu tradition, these V's are significantly larger, emphasising the shoulders as a prominent and powerful body part. This divergence from the Ao norm, in both size and boldness, may reflect the Nokpu people's desire to integrate while maintaining unique aspects of their identity.

The leg tattoos of the Nokpu villagers mirror those of the Mongsen community, indicating a significant cultural exchange and adaptation. The designs are distinctly Mongsen in style on both the shin and calf. However, unique to the Nokpu tradition, above the calf there is an additional, novel element: six slightly bent lines are tattooed, and at the center of this pattern, a straight and a vertical line intersect. This particular configuration does not have a direct parallel with the tattoo patterns of other Ao groups, highlighting the Nokpu's distinctiveness within the broader community (*Plate 54 & 55*).

Remarkably, the arms of Nokpu individuals are left unadorned, a stark contrast to the other groups in which arm tattooing is a significant aspect of the tradition. This absence of arm tattoos is a salient feature of Nokpu identity, setting them apart visually and culturally from their Mongsen neighbours. It is a poignant reminder of the Nokpu people's unique journey, suggesting that they have selectively adopted and adapted certain traditions while consciously preserving others.

4.1.3 Tattoo variations in other Ao villages

In the continual pursuit of understanding the intricate tapestry of tattooing practices among the Ao Naga tribes, recent research has yielded fascinating nuances that challenge previously held beliefs. Specifically, in Khensa, Chungtia, and Khar villages, the tattooing traditions display distinctive characteristics that set them apart from the more commonly documented styles. These variations underscore the rich diversity within the Ao Naga tribes and point to a complex, localised evolution of tattooing practices.

In contrast to the earlier belief that women in these villages mark their chins with four vertical lines, the recent findings indicate that the tattooing practice in these villages is markedly different. Instead of a chin tattoo, women in these villages receive a bold, shaded design below the chin. This design is reminiscent of three lines converging at the bottom, giving the appearance of a trident-like figure. This unique pattern, positioned prominently under the chin rather than on it, creates a visually striking distinction that clearly demarcates these women from those of other Ao Naga groups (*Plate 55, 56, 57, 58, 59 & 60*).

In Chungtia village, the diversity of tattooing practice extends even further, as documented through individual variations within the community. One notable example is a woman of Chungli heritage who bears a singular, vertical line that extends from below the breast to the navel. This linear tattoo, simple yet bold, diverges from common patterns and presents a unique personal narrative, potentially indicating her individual status, lineage, or personal choice. Another respondent from the same village displayed a 'W' shaped tattoo on her stomach, a design that closely resembles the tattooing style associated with the Changki group. These instances of variation within a single village illustrate the fluid and complex nature of tattooing traditions, which can encompass both communal and individual expressions of identity (*Plate 61 & 62*).

In Khar village, the tattoos similarly commence from below the chin with the trident-like design. Following this pattern, a chain of lozenge tattoos extends downward from the throat to the breast. This continuation of the lozenge pattern aligns with a broader Ao Naga tattooing tradition, yet the initiation point of the trident-like figure under the chin marks a significant departure, once again emphasizing the unique identity of the Khar villagers within the larger Ao context.

These recent findings illuminate the extraordinary diversity of tattooing practices among the Ao Naga tribes. Each village, while sharing certain foundational elements of design, seems to cultivate its own variations—whether in the form of unique starting points for the tattoos, additional elements like the 'W' shape, or entirely distinct patterns such as the trident-like design under the chin.

4.1.4 Ao Men

In the complex cultural landscape of the Ao Naga tribes, tattooing has traditionally been viewed predominantly as a practice among women. Contrary to the central belief held by a majority of the Ao community, Ao men may have also once engaged in tattooing. This practice is deeply intertwined with issues of honour, valour, social recognition, and the strict dietary prohibitions that are a hallmark of Ao cultural life.

In the book "The Ao Nagas," J.P. Mills provides an important historical account that challenges the commonly held belief regarding tattooing among Ao men. Mills writes: "Tradition has it that formerly Ao warriors who had taken heads had circles tattooed on their backs, and the conventional Chang curved design on their chests, but the practice has been given up, it is said because of the irksome food restrictions imposed on men so decorated" (Mills 2003). This passage from Mills suggests not only that Ao men practised tattooing but

that it was deeply tied to acts of valour—specifically, the taking of heads, a practice which was historically associated with honour and prowess in many Naga tribes.

The Ao's stringent dietary restrictions, imposed both during the tattooing process and as a lifelong commitment after that, are offered as a possible explanation for the cessation of this practice among Ao men. These restrictions, likely considered burdensome, may have contributed to the eventual abandonment of male tattooing in Ao society.

Furthermore, evidence of tattooing among Ao men is also evident in their material culture and architectural heritage. For instance, motifs reminiscent of headhunter tattoos have been documented on the village gates of Chuchuyimlang and Changki and on the shields of Ao warriors. These designs, intimately associated with headhunting and valour, suggest that tattoos have once been a prominent symbol for male warriors, commemorating their prowess and status within the community (*Plate 63, 64, 65, 66, 67 & 68*).

Adding further to this narrative is a sketch drawn in 1920 by Henry Belfour, depicting an Ao man bearing the hallmark tattoos of a headhunter. While Belfour's account has some discrepancies, it nonetheless provides a compelling visual record that aligns with Mills' textual description (*Plate 69*).

The geographical aspect of this practice also warrants consideration. The evidence suggests that tattooing among Ao men may have been more prevalent in certain villages, particularly those that shared borders with the Phom and Chang tribes. This proximity may have facilitated cultural diffusion, exchanging and adapting tattooing practices across tribal boundaries.

4.2 Pochury Tattoo

Tattooing in the Pochury tribe offers a window into a vibrant tapestry of cultural beliefs and practices, although not all sub-groups within the tribe engage in this art. Specifically, the Rengma-Kuchuri and Kuki groups abstain from this form of body modification, highlighting the diversity within tribal traditions. Conversely, several other groups, such as the Sapo-Rüwu: Phor group, the Khwiry: Laruri group, and the Apoksah group, uphold the practice of tattooing. Each group presents unique variations in their tattoo designs, adding their distinct flavour to this age-old tradition. For the Sapo-Rüwu: Phor group, Khwiry: Laruri group, and Apoksah group, tattoos are not merely aesthetic adornments. Instead, they carry significant cultural and symbolic weight. They serve as rites of passage, marking crucial milestones in an individual's life, perhaps denoting the transition from adolescence to adulthood or signifying

a person's status or achievements. Moreover, these tattoos are deeply intertwined with the group's spiritual beliefs. They often symbolise a connection with supernatural beings, possibly serving as protective charms or as an expression of reverence towards these entities. Despite the differences in design and interpretation among these groups, the fundamental concept underlying their tattooing practices remains the same: they are important cultural markers that signify major life transitions and spiritual beliefs. This shared essence underscores the common cultural threads that run through these diverse sub-groups within the Pochury tribe.

The practice of tattooing within the Apoksha group, which belongs to the broader community of Naga tribes, presents an intriguing deviation from the norms observed in other Naga societies. While many Naga tribes traditionally associate tattooing with successful headhunting exploits, this is not the case for the individuals of Akhewago within the Apoksha group. In the context of the Akhewago community, tattoos serve as a marker of maturity, indicative of the progression from adolescence to adulthood. This ritual is typically conducted when a male reaches approximately 17 years of age. The tattoo design consists of a complex sequence of elements: beginning from each collarbone, two prominent horizontal lines are inscribed. Following this, a series of 'X' motifs is drawn, which is then succeeded by another set of four bold lines. This alternating pattern of 'X' symbols and bold lines continues until the design extends to the navel. Significantly, this cultural practice is not confined to males. Both genders participate in this tattooing ritual, symbolising their transition into marriageable age, thus marking it as a rite of passage. The tattoos, therefore, serve as a social marker, signifying an individual's readiness to take on the responsibilities associated with adulthood (*Plate 70*).

However, the origins of this deeply ingrained cultural practice remain a mystery. This tradition has persisted over multiple generations, and its participants usually accept it as an essential rite without delving into its historical roots. This aspect underscores the deference to tradition that characterizes the Apoksha group's cultural ethos and the integral role of rites of passage in shaping the social fabric of this community.

The practice of tattooing within the Pochury tribe provides a fascinating case study in cultural specificity. Notably, beyond the community of Akhewago, there seems to be an absence of recorded instances or empirical evidence of men in other villages within the tribe participating in the tattooing tradition. This uniqueness sets the Akhewago men apart within the broader Pochury tribal context. Their tattooing tradition, a rite of passage marking maturity and readiness for marriage, starkly contrasts the apparent lack of similar practices in

other Pochury villages. The absence of tattooing rituals in the other villages may suggest varying cultural norms, rites, and traditions across the Pochury tribe.

The fascinating tattoo patterns of the females in Akhewago are complex and intricate. These designs not only epitomise the cultural significance of body art in their society, but they also represent the profound symbolism, beauty, and strength inherent in womanhood. These distinct patterns, which are far more complex than their male counterparts, reflect an array of societal roles and life stages that women navigate, thus endowing them with a unique identity. Upon close observation, one notices that the female body serves as a canvas for a variety of geometric shapes and lines, all meticulously placed and formed. The forehead, for instance, is marked by an 'X' tattoo design. The 'X' might represent the intersection of life paths, symbolising a woman's ability to balance different roles and responsibilities, a testament to her resilience and versatility. Further to that, the chin tattoo with a distinct 'V' shape with five smaller vertical lines inside is also prominent. Such tattoos act as powerful visual reminders of women's pivotal role in the propagation and sustenance of their society (*Plate 71*).

Moving to the shoulders, they feature two vertical lines with two horizontal lines intersecting in the middle, bracketed by two shorter lines on each edge. This symmetrical design could denote the balance and harmony women bring into their society and families. The arms' tattoo design shows a rhythmic repetition of eight horizontal lines interspersed by four inverted 'V' shapes, with the pattern recurring twice before concluding with a chain of lozenge patterns on the forearms. These recurring designs could signify the cyclical nature of life, while the lozenges might represent the interconnectedness within their community. Lastly, the leg tattoos are equally intricate. A pattern of three lines starting from the knee and tapering into a single line towards the ankle is repeated in intervals. The bold 'X' markings with three lines on the calf, similar to those on the forehead, might reinforce the significance of balance in a woman's life. The two horizontal lines circling the ankle might represent protection or grounding, denoting women as the pillars of their community (*Plate 72 & 73*).

The rite of passage marked by tattooing in the Akhewago community is a complex and deeply ingrained societal norm. Tattoos are considered an integral part of their culture and serve various crucial functions, from signifying maturity to securing future sustenance in the afterlife, and even serving as identity markers for ancestral recognition. Initiation into adulthood for Akhewago girls is marked by the significant ritual of receiving a tattoo. This event coincides with the onset of adolescence, a period of transition when a girl begins her journey towards womanhood. The process of tattooing is a cultural affirmation that the girl

has reached a certain age and maturity level and is now prepared to take on the responsibilities that come with adulthood.

Intriguingly, in the Akhewago society, these tattoos also as a precondition for marriage. A woman without her tattoos is perceived as too young to enter matrimony. Therefore, once a girl is tattooed, it acts as a societal declaration that she is now of marriageable age. Men in the village interpret these tattoos as a signal that the girl is eligible for marriage, prompting them to ask for her hand in marriage.

Furthermore, these tattoos hold considerable spiritual significance. There's a common belief that upon death, these tattoos can be traded for food and drinks in the afterlife. This belief might be anchored in the idea that good deeds or accomplishments in life continue to provide sustenance and comfort in the hereafter. In this context, tattoos can be seen as spiritual currency or collateral that can ensure their well-being in the afterlife.

Finally, tattoos serve as distinctive identity markers in the Akhewago community. When women pass on to the next life, it is believed that their ancestors can recognise them through these unique designs. This gives a sense of continuity to their identity beyond life and fosters a sense of belonging to their lineage, strengthening their ties with their ancestors.

4.2.1 Laruri Village

Only the women of Laruri practice tattooing, beginning at adolescence. The girls are adorned with a *Tekhangyak* pattern on the forehead, a design similar to the evil eye of the Chang tribe but smaller in size. This connection may suggest a shared cultural heritage or a symbolic link between the tribes. Other designs are specific to various parts of the body, each carrying its unique meaning and association. The chin tattoo pattern, known as *Mukhayak*, is a V shape with one large X inside and smaller Xs on the edges. The shoulder features the *Lüpuyak* pattern, similar to snowflakes, while the *Pepviyak* design on the arm bears resemblance to Akhewago women's tattoos, yet differentiated by size and the number of inverted Vs and lines. Leg tattoos are particularly significant, marked with the *Langmezüyak* and *Mezetsangyak* patterns. Starting behind the knee with inverted Vs and Xs, the designs progressively become smaller as they reach the ankle. The repetition and shrinking of these designs might represent a journey or transition in life, culminating with three simple lines at the ankle. Significantly, the top patterns are only completed when a girl is engaged for marriage, marking an essential transition into adulthood.

Before marriage, a woman also receives the *Tsilüzüyak* pattern on both thighs, the same design as her forehead tattoo. This repetition signifies a confirmation of maturity and her readiness for the next stage of life (*Plate 74 & 75*).

These tattoos are not merely decorative; they serve as rites of passage and a tangible expression of coming of age. Like in many Naga tribes, the tattoos of Laruri women signify not only their age but also their marital status, social role, and tribal affiliation. Despite the similarities with other tribes, the tattoos of Laruri women are unique in their intricate designs and the specific rituals surrounding them. Each pattern and its application's timing tell a story deeply connected to the individual's place within the community.

4.2.2 Phor and Hütsü Villages

In the yisi dialect, the term for tattooing is “yo,” a practice believed to have been followed since time immemorial. Its origins remain mysterious, with no clear historical record or oral narratives to trace its beginnings. Uniquely, all females in the village are tattooed before marriage with the same designs, symbolizing a shared identity and unity. The only exception is an additional design for the elite class or royal family, signifying their elevated status. The tattoos are applied exclusively during the winter season, a detail that may have practical or symbolic significance. Together, these “yo” tradition elements create a rich cultural tapestry, where tattooing is not merely body art but a ritual, rite of passage, and visual expression of community values, social hierarchy, and shared heritage.

Beginning with the *Niyo*, this design spans from the knee to the ankle and consists of interconnected triangles followed by inverted ‘v’ patterns and four parallel lines. Its continuity and complexity may symbolize unity and a series of connected experiences within the community (*Plate 76 & 77*).

The *Tihuyo* design is reserved for the forehead, featuring a single broad vertical line. Its central placement might symbolize wisdom or spiritual enlightenment. On the chin, the *Mukhachiya* consists of two intersecting ‘V’ shapes, possibly reflecting a connection between contrasting elements or a harmony of dualities (*Plate 78*).

The arm and shoulder are adorned with the *Yapiyo*, which consists of four horizontal lines on the elbow followed by interconnecting chevron pattern that repeat up to the shoulders. This could symbolize strength and resilience or perhaps represent the unity and connection within the family or community (*Plate 79, 80 & 81*).

Two designs are reserved exclusively for the elite class or the royal family line: the *Mukhuo*, which stretches from the knees to thighs, and the *Lukhripiyo*, covering the area from the wrist to elbow. However, these two specific tattoos have become enigmatic, as no surviving individuals bear these marks. The significance behind them remains an intriguing mystery, but what is known is that these tattoos were only applied in the year to be married.

For the other females in the village, these designs, except for *Mukhuo* and *Lukhripiyo*, are a standard practice. They serve as body adornments and as embodiments of community roles, values, and connections.

4.3 Sangtam Tattoo

4.3.1 Phelungre Village

In the intricate cultural matrix of the Sangtam Naga tribes, tattooing presents itself as a vivid tapestry woven with distinctive local variations and profound cultural meanings. The Phelungre village stands out in this context, particularly with respect to the tattooing practices of men, who in Phelungre, unlike in other Sangtam villages, are known to adorn the distinctive V-shaped tattoo associated with headhunters. This intriguing divergence invites exploration into the unique cultural context of Phelungre, which seemingly preserves a tattooing tradition that has been eschewed by other Sangtam communities, despite their shared history as headhunters.

In Phelungre, the tattoo is known as '*Yah*,' which translates to 'mark' in the local dialect. This term is illuminating in its simplicity, as it captures the essential function of these tattoos: they are marks, indelible inscriptions on the skin that narrate a complex story of identity, valor, and tradition. The V-shaped tattoo, in particular, is a poignant symbol. Historically associated with headhunting, it serves as a visual testament to a warrior's courage and prowess, a permanent emblem of an individual's passage through significant social rites and martial achievements.

When a man from Phelungre successfully returns to the village after taking a head in combat, he earns the right to receive a distinctive double V-shaped tattoo, which runs from his chest down to his navel. In the centre of this tattoo, between the two V's, is a vertical line topped with a circle. According to a respondent, this central motif is symbolic of a human being. The tattoo is bold and prominent, designed to be a visible and lasting testament to a warrior's accomplishments and bravery (*Plate 82*).

The elaborate tattooing does not end on the chest; it also extends to the arms, with each arm bearing a unique design. On the left arm, a straight line is marked with four inverted V's, beginning from the top of the arm and extending downward. This line concludes with a circular design at its end (*Plate 83*).

The right arm features an equally intricate pattern, beginning just below the joint of the arm with a chain of X's. Below this chain lies a design reminiscent of an arrowhead, followed by a small vertical line. This line is intersected near its bottom by a horizontal line, forming a shape that resembles an inverted 'T'. Beneath this, three horizontal lines are tattooed in descending order of size, with the topmost line being smaller than the two that follow. The design concludes with three shapes resembling arrowheads. While the precise interpretation of these elements remains largely unknown, the respondent suggested that the chain of X's at the top of the design represents a boundary. The arrowhead motifs are interpreted as symbols of the warrior, perhaps indicating both the individual's martial skill and his role as a defender of that boundary (*Plate 84*).

These tattoos, laden with symbolism, serve multiple functions within the community. They are marks of distinction, signifying a man's courage and successful participation in headhunting, a practice that, while no longer active, remains a powerful element of cultural memory. Moreover, these tattoos serve as embodiments of identity, linking the individual not only to the history of his people but also setting him apart as a person of notable status and achievement within his community.

Women

In the Phelungre community, tattoos among women are deeply symbolic and ritualistic, marking significant life stages and serving multiple important functions within the cultural and spiritual life of the community. These tattoos are a vibrant and enduring expression of identity, familial recognition, and societal status.

When a young girl reaches adolescence, she receives her first tattoo on her chin, a pattern known as *Ninghkangyak*. This design consists of a large X, with a horizontal line touching both edges of the X. Inside the upper half of this configuration, a smaller X is delicately placed. This tattoo marks her transition into womanhood and serves as an indelible marker of her identity, one that would allow her villagers to recognise her even after death (*Plate 85*).

On the same day, she receives her forehead tattooed with a design known as *Mükhayah*. This design resembles the forehead tattoo of the Chang tribe, but it is notably smaller in size. As she grows older, the woman will receive a tattoo on her calf known as

Müzingyah. Subsequently, she will receive a shin tattoo called *Loungyah*. This design covers her calf and shin with a lozenge or mascle pattern. In the centre of this design, three lines encircle the leg, dividing it into an upper and lower half. (*Plate 86*)

The same mascle pattern is tattooed from shoulder to elbow on both arms but does not envelop the entire arm. This pattern is known as *Phayah*. Continuing downward, the tattoo pattern from the elbow to the wrist is known as *Khüpoahyah*. This pattern echoes that of the chin tattoo but is rendered in a much larger size. In the centre, three small horizontal lines are added. This pattern is uniform on both hands (*Plate 87, 88, 89 & 90*).

The knee tattoo, known as *Mükhohyak*, is special as it is received when a woman is engaged or about to get married. It signifies her commitment to a partner and serves as a clear message to the community that she is spoken for, thereby deterring other suitors. On both knees, the design begins with a line of chevron patterns, below which there is a bold shading of the chin tattoo design, descending in size.

Beyond their aesthetic appeal and their function as markers of life stages, these tattoos hold deeper significance. They are believed to act as a form of spiritual currency in the afterlife, exchanged for food and drinks, and enabling her ancestors to recognise her in the world beyond.

4.3.2 Kiphire Village:

Women

In Kiphire village, situated within the same cultural landscape as Phelungre, the belief system surrounding tattoos echoes that of the Phelungre village: the tattoos serve as rites of passage and identity markers. Despite these similarities, the specific tattoo patterns exhibit distinctive variations, creating a nuanced tapestry of cultural expression that is unique to the inhabitants of Kiphire.

Like their counterparts in Phelungre, the women of Kiphire village receive their first tattoos on their forehead and chin at adolescence. These patterns are the same, establishing a shared cultural practice between the two villages. The forehead and chin tattoos serve as essential markers of identity and transition into womanhood, paralleling the practices in Phelungre (*Plate 91*).

However, when it comes to the arm tattoos, the design, while following the mascle pattern similar to that of the Phelungre village, presents a unique characteristic. Smaller X patterns are angled and placed in the diamond-shaped designs at regular intervals. While the

upper part of the arm features tattoos only on the outer side, from the elbow downward, the intricate pattern encircles the entire arm, both front and back. This continuation of design, fully encompassing the arm, is a striking aspect of the Kiphire village's tattoo tradition (*Plate 92 & 93*).

The leg tattoos of Kiphire women also employ the masle pattern but differ subtly from those in Phelungre. In Kiphire, the diamond shapes of the pattern are wider, and the lines used to create them are notably finer, producing a more delicate and expansive visual effect. Additionally, the three lines found at the bottom of the design are rendered in a thinner stroke, giving the entire leg tattoo a more refined appearance.

A significant divergence between the tattoo practices of the two villages lies in the treatment of the knees. Unlike the women in Phelungre, who receive specific knee tattoos—often associated with engagement or impending marriage—the women of Kiphire village traditionally abstain from tattooing this part of their bodies.

Men

In stark contrast to the Phelungre men, who mark their successful headhunt with a distinctive V-shaped tattoo that stretches from chest to navel, men in the other Sangtam villages follow a different tradition to commemorate this significant rite of passage. Instead of chest tattoos, these men are awarded cowrie shawls and brass necklaces, tangible tokens of honour that publicly acknowledge their valour and skill. These items, rich in symbolism, serve not only as physical rewards but also as lasting status symbols within their communities, akin to the significant tattoos adorned by their Phelungre counterparts.

However, it should be noted that while the chest remains untouched by ink in these other Sangtam villages, tattooing is not entirely absent from their rites of passage. The men in these villages engage in a unique form of arm tattooing, a practice that aligns them with the broader tattooing tradition observed across various Naga groups.

The pattern of these arm tattoos, known locally as '*Nguriyahk*', is intricate and evocative. It consists of a horizontal line crossed by four bent lines facing downward and another four bent lines facing upward, creating an arresting visual that conjures the image of arrowheads. Situated at the centre of the design are two Xs on both sides of the line, and at the bottom, the pattern culminates in a shape that echoes the appearance of an arrowhead (*Plate 95*).

Interestingly, the symbolism behind this arm tattoo is tied to the daily life and sustenance of the Sangtam people. According to a respondent from the community, this design is believed to represent a fishbone. This interpretation harks back to the cultural

significance of fish in the Sangtam people's diet in earlier times. The fishbone serves as both a literal and symbolic nod to a key aspect of the people's traditional way of life – a life deeply intertwined with the rivers and streams that have long nourished these communities.

4.3.3 Samphur village

In Samphur village, time has witnessed the loss of a living connection to a rich cultural tradition; the last men adorned with tattoos have passed away. This loss complicates efforts to document and preserve the intricate details of these tattoos; each unique tapestry is woven from the threads of history, identity, and valour. It is clear, however, that the men of Samphur did not practice chest tattooing as a mark of headhunting, differentiating them from certain other Naga communities where such tattoos were customary.

Women

In the Samphur village, tattoos serve as rites of passage for women, marking significant life events from adolescence to marriage. As a girl reaches puberty, a significant cultural milestone, she receives her first tattoos: on her chin and forehead. The forehead tattoo, known as *Tsitenseyak*, and the chin tattoo, referred to as *Tsimukuyak*, echo the designs of the Chang tribe but are notably different in their more elongated and smaller form (*Plate 96*).

The leg tattoos are intricate and run the length of the leg, beginning above the calf and extending down to the ankle. They are characterised by a delicate, thin-lined muscle pattern. The upper part of this leg pattern, which extends from the calf upwards, is named *Müzinyak*, while the lower part that covers the shin down to the ankle is called *Ransakya*. (*Plate 97*).

The arm tattoos of Samphur women are the same as compared to those of the Kiphire village. The tattoo known as *Tsituphuyak* graces the upper arm, but interestingly, it only occupies about a fifth of the front arm, leaving the majority of the skin untouched. The lower arm features more extensive designs on the front and back, with the front part known as *Khupyayak* and the back as *Tsitutsuyak*. Despite the intricate details, these designs are tightly spaced and appear quite elongated, emphasising the slender form of the arm (*Plate 98, 99 & 100*).

A particularly unique and defining aspect of the Samphur village's tattoo culture is the *Mükoyak* tattoo. This pattern spans from the thigh all the way down to just below the kneecap. It is composed of three compact, vertical lines with X patterns woven between them. Due to its tightly packed design, at first glance, it can resemble a bold, singular line. Traditionally, this tattoo is received on both legs shortly before a woman's marriage. It is not merely an aesthetic choice; it bears deep cultural significance. The *Mükoyak* serves as a clear

visual statement that the woman is engaged, and it is akin to a commitment marker, akin to a Western engagement ring but more permanent, symbolising that she is pledged to marry her chosen partner (*Plate 101 & 102*).

4.4 Yimkhiung Tattoo

In ancient times, a couple was blessed with a daughter and the daughter grew skilled and beautiful but reported a mysterious creature visiting her at night. The mother devised a plan to identify the creature, revealing it to be a large snake that demanded to marry the daughter. Fearing the snake's threats, the mother reluctantly agreed.

The mother used a trail of rice husks to track her daughter after the snake took her. This led her to a lake where she found her daughter living underwater, now with snake children. Learning the snake's husband was going to war; the mother gave her daughter seeds to poison him. The daughter obeyed, leading to the snake husband's death.

This story is central to the Longpürr people, explaining the origin of their tattooing practice. When a girl is betrothed, she is tattooed on her face, hands, and legs, inspired by the markings on the snake's skin. This signals to others that she is engaged (DUDA, 2017).

4.4.1 Pungro Village

Men

In the Pungro community, tattoos, known as "*Yajhte*" in their dialect, hold significant cultural importance as a rite of passage and an identity marker rather than as symbols of headhunting. For Pungro men, the tattoo design is relatively simple but deeply meaningful. The tattoo is placed on both forearms and is identical on each. The design begins with a chain of Xs and six horizontal lines extending down to the wrist. This pattern is an adornment and a significant transition in a young man's life. Starting from approximately 15, boys in the Pungro community receive these tattoos to signify their coming of age and acceptance as full members of their village. It marks their passage from childhood into adulthood and their readiness to take on the responsibilities that come with this new stage of life. (*Plate 103*)

Women

In the Pungro community, women's tattoos are more intricate and detailed than men. These tattoos are initiated when a girl reaches adolescence, symbolising her coming of age and transition into womanhood. This elaborate process of tattooing can span over a period of about five years or more, gradually completing the entire pattern.

The tattoo design for Pungro women closely resembles that of the Kiphire village. The forehead tattoo known as *Tulayak* is designed to ward off the evil eye, akin to the Chang tribe's tattoo patterns. The chin tattoo known as, *Mokhokyak*, is a V-shape with a smaller X, highlighting her maturity and readiness for marriage (*Plate 104*).

Extending from the shoulder down to the wrist, the tattoo known as *Kapeyak* exhibits a mascle (diamond-like) pattern, mirroring the Phelungre village of the Sangtams, albeit with slightly larger designs. The forearm tattoo, named *Khipheyak*, again parallels the design of the Kiphire village; it features the same pattern as the chin tattoo abut with an additional mirror image below that forms the illusion of a large X (*Plate 105*).

The leg tattoos are distinctively named as *Mazyak* for the calf and *Mewayak* for the shin. These, too, reflect the patterns of the Kiphire village, with the recurring mascle design and three lines encircling the bottom of the legs. These tattoos not only adorn the women but also convey their life stage, personal identity, and deep-rooted cultural heritage (*Plate 106*).

4.4.2 Phykyu Village

Men

In the Phykyu community, tattooing is a significant cultural practice for men, marking their rite of passage into manhood and their status as headhunters. These tattoos, known as *Gheyak*, vary in design among individuals but maintain a fundamental concept.

For a man undergoing the rite of passage, the basic tattoo design consists of a chain of Xs, accompanied by six horizontal lines on his left arm. On his right arm, only six plain horizontal lines are typically inked. However, it is noted that most Phykyu men, regardless of their status, bear only the six horizontal lines on both arms, symbolising their transition into adulthood and belonging to the community (*Plate 107, 108, 109 & 110*).

The headhunter tattoo of a Phykyu man is distinct from that of headhunters in other tribes. This design resembles a necklace or a 'U' shape, starting as a double line extending from one shoulder to another and bending in the middle. There are intricate patterns on the lower line of this 'U' shape: four bold vertical lines on each side, three additional vertical lines with a circle at the end on each side, and the women's chin tattoo pattern mirrored on each side. At this design's centre is one prominent vertical line with a circle at the end, representing a human head—a poignant symbol of the headhunter's conquests (*Plate 111*).

These lines are referred to as *Müliukhuyak*, and the intricate designs within the 'U' shape are known as *Nüngkuyangsangyak*, translating to "necklace design." These tattoos are

not mere decorations but are deep-rooted in the culture and history of the Phykyu people, signifying the strength, valour, and status of the men who wear them.

Women

The tattoos are intricate and elaborate for women, serving as rites of passage, markers of identity, and spiritual symbols. The forehead tattoo, known as *Tulayak*, is similar to the "evil eye" tattoo of the Chang tribe but is smaller. The chin tattoo, also called *Tulayak*, marks a woman's coming of age and resembles the tattoos of Sangtam women (*Plate 112 & 113*).

Extending from the shoulder to the elbow is the *Kiphunyak* tattoo, which features a mascle (diamond-shaped) pattern that is strikingly similar to that of the Sangtam women. On the forearm, the *Khiphiyak* tattoo displays a chain of large Xs with smaller Xs inside, followed by the same pattern below. Unique to this design is a set of two small horizontal lines between the upper and lower patterns. This tattoo is identical on both forearms. On the back of the hands is the *Küloukütseoyak* tattoo, which is a mascle pattern that starts just below the elbow and extends all the way to the wrist. It is a prominent symbol of deep-rooted cultural identity (*Plate 114 & 115*).

The shin tattoo, called *Lükonyak*, begins below the knee and consists of a chain of mascle patterns that are smaller and more compact compared to the upper arm tattoo. The pattern encircles the leg and continues down to the ankle. On the calf is the *Maziyak* tattoo, which integrates horizontal lines and continues the mascle patterns from the shin (*Plate 116*).

On both thighs are small designs resembling the chin tattoo, and below are four additional small horizontal lines. There is also an optional tattoo known as *Khienüiyak*, a simple, single horizontal line on the top of the hand (*plate 117*).

These tattoos for women are not just a form of body art; they are deeply woven into the culture and spirituality of the Phykyu community. The belief is that these tattoos will serve as currency in the afterlife, allowing the women to buy food and drinks during their journey to the other world. These tattoos, therefore, are a poignant testament to the women's identity, symbolising not just their transition into womanhood but also their connection to their tribe, their heritage, and their spiritual beliefs about life and the afterlife.

4.4.3 Shalomi Village

In the Shalomi village, where tattoos are deeply ingrained in the culture and serve as significant markers of identity and rites of passage, the absence of male survivors with the head hunter's tattoo marks the end of a distinct era. This once-potent symbol, which tied the

men of the village to their warrior heritage and to rituals of valour and prestige, is fading from the living memory of the community.

Men

In this changing cultural landscape, one man in the Shalomi village carries the marks of tradition, albeit in a different form. He wears a tattoo on his forearms, which he received in his teenage years, symbolizing his transition into adulthood. The design includes a chevron pattern, random horizontal lines, and, notably, the chin tattoo design usually found on women of the tribe. These lines were chosen based on his preference, underscoring the individuality often embedded in these symbols (*Plate 118*).

Given the seemingly random placement of the patterns on his arms, it is difficult to determine whether this was a standardised tattoo design for men of the village or whether it has evolved into a more personal and individualised form of expression.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this man's tattoos is found on his right thigh: an outlined figure of a man, deliberately positioned upside down. According to him, this unique tattoo is reserved for those who have not taken a head. This is significant within a culture where head-taking was once a central rite of passage and a source of great honour and status for men. This upside-down figure may symbolize a profound shift in values and traditions, reflecting a move away from the head-taking practices of the past (*Plate 119*).

Women

In the Naga tribe, particularly among the Shalomi women, tattoos are much more than mere markings on the skin; they are deeply woven into the fabric of their lives and beliefs. The tattoos are seen as sacred and significant, representing a profound mix of identity, tradition, and spirituality.

For the Shalomi women, coming of age is an important milestone, and the tattooing process is intrinsically tied to this rite of passage. It marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood, a significant moment celebrated and acknowledged within the community through tattooing. It's a shared cultural experience that reinforces social bonds and signifies a young woman's readiness for the responsibilities of adult life.

Their belief system also intertwines with these markings. According to their faith, when Shalomi women pass from this life to the afterlife, their tattoos serve as a means for their ancestors to recognise them. This deep-seated belief highlights these tattoos' spiritual and otherworldly importance, elevating them from mere art to sacred symbols. The tattoos are not just ink; they are a profound connection to their ancestors and a passageway to the spiritual realm.

The designs themselves are intricate and meaningful. For example, the tattoo on a Shalomi woman's forehead resembles that of the Sangtam tribe, emphasising shared cultural elements among different Naga groups. The chain of mascle patterns that start from the shoulder and run down to the wrist is an elaborate and distinctive design, reflecting the unique identity of Shalomi women (*Plate 120 & 121*).

A large X pattern is featured on both of her forearms, with a smaller X nestled inside. Flanking these designs are four to five random horizontal lines, the meaning of which could be personal or symbolic. The tattoos on the legs, both shin and calf, mirror each other in design: chains of mascle patterns start above the calf and stop just short of the ankle, and the design is completed by the standard three lines encircling the leg near the bottom (*Plate 122 & 123*).

These intricate patterns are not just aesthetically pleasing; they narrate the story of each Shalomi woman's life, her place within her community, and her spiritual journey beyond this world. In a world where traditions are constantly redefined, these tattoos stand as resilient and poignant markers of the Shalomi women's deep-rooted culture and beliefs.

4.4.4 Zanger Village

Men

The prominent tattoo on the shoulders of Zanger men is a powerful marker of coming of age. This initiation rite is symbolised through a unique and distinct pattern: a central vertical line upon which two 'V' shapes and two inverted 'V' shapes are tattooed. This seemingly simple design carries profound meaning, signifying a boy's transition into manhood and his acceptance as an adult within the community. Arrowheads or pointers ascend the ends of the vertical line, which might symbolise direction, protection, or a warrior's spirit. This tattoo is typically acquired at an early age, marking a significant milestone in the life of a Zanger male (*Plate 124*).

Remarkably, even if a man is not a headhunter – a role that traditionally held great prestige among many of the Naga tribes – he might still bear the renowned 'V-shaped tattoo. In a distinctive departure from other tribes, this tattoo is not found on the chest but rather on the left forearm of Zanger men. This placement is unique to the Zanger community and speaks to reimagining a symbol deeply tied to the history and warrior culture of the Naga tribes.

The tattoos on a Zanger man's right forearm are just as significant, though they are different in design. Here, three small horizontal lines are etched, followed below by two vertical lines, each adorned with circles at their edges. These circles face in opposite directions, perhaps symbolising balance, duality or a harmonious life.

Interestingly, the respondent received his forearm tattoos prior to his shoulder tattoos. This sequence might have its cultural significance, marking different stages or achievements in life. The tattoos are not mere adornments but intricate narratives of life, beliefs, and status within the Zanger community.

For the Zanger men, these tattoos are far more than skin-deep. They are lifelong symbols of identity, coming of age, and the rich cultural heritage of the Zanger tribe, providing a visually stunning link to their history and traditions.

Women

Tattooing in the Zanger community, particularly among women, plays a multifaceted role, intertwining aspects of identity, rites of passage, and spiritual beliefs. Like many of their Naga counterparts, for Zanger women, tattoos are not just decorative or aesthetic markings; they carry profound meaning and are deeply entrenched in their cultural and spiritual beliefs. Coming of age is a significant event in the life of a Zanger woman. Tattoos mark this rite of passage as she transitions from childhood to adulthood. Her journey starts with the markings on her forehead and chin, known as *Nheyak* and *Mukhuyak*, respectively. The design of the *Nheyak*, reminiscent of the Chang forehead tattoo, is elongated and smaller, probably signifying its importance while distinguishing its design from the original. *Mukhuyak*, on the other hand, borrows its design from the Sangtam tribe, featuring an 'X' with another smaller 'x' nestled within (*Plate 125 & 126*).

Muvhanyak, a tattoo that spans the entire length of the upper arm, exhibits a chain of mascle patterns, seamlessly continuing on the forearm under the name *Khapok*. The *Khapok* mirrors the design of the *Mukhuyak* – a large 'X' with a smaller 'x' inside. This continuity of design not only weaves a story but also accentuates the woman's arms, marking her transition and her standing in the community (*Plate 127*).

The Zanger women's leg tattoos, named *Muzhangtse*, showcase an even more elaborate design. Borrowing inspiration from the Phelungre women, this tattoo is a chain of mascle patterns, but they are slightly elongated compared to those on the arms. Beginning just below the back of the kneecap, this design encircles the shin and calf. The pattern halts two-thirds of the way down, giving way to three horizontal bands. Following these bands, the mascle design resumes, culminating in a final horizontal line at the ankle (*Plate 128*).

These tattoos do more than mark stages in life; they offer protection and guidance in the afterlife. The Zanger women believe these markings will serve as a form of currency, ensuring they can purchase food and drinks during their journey to the after world. It's a reflection of how deeply intertwined daily life, rites of passage, and spiritual beliefs are in the Zanger community. Each tattoo's intricate design and placement tells a story of life, transition, and beliefs, making every Zanger woman a living testament to her tribe's rich history and traditions.

4.4.5 Mimi Village

Men

In Mimi village, the longstanding tradition of tattooing tells a vivid story of its people's heritage. While today there are no male survivors who bear the traditional tattoos, insights gathered from the village council paint a picture of its significance in days gone by. Historically, Mimi men would receive a distinctive V-shaped tattoo, a mark of honor earned after achieving a successful headhunt. This was not just a mere decoration but was an emblem of bravery, skill, and status within the tribe. It set apart those who had proven themselves in what was considered a rite of passage. What is particularly unique about the Mimi tribe is the exclusivity of this design; unlike many neighbouring tribes with a plethora of designs, Mimi men only wore this solitary tattoo. Over the years, as traditions evolved and the practice of headhunting waned, the art of tattooing in Mimi village also witnessed a decline. Today, while the ink may have faded, the memory and significance of these tattoos remain deeply etched in the community's collective consciousness, serving as a bridge to their ancestors and a bygone era.

Women

In Mimi village, tattoos are more than mere body art; they're a repository of history, identity, and milestones. For the women of Mimi, tattoos serve as an intricate rite of passage, marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The commitment to these designs, evolving over several years, displays their resilience and patience.

Their forehead boasts the evil eye motif, reminiscent of the Chang tribe but distinctly smaller. The chin is adorned with a nested X design. The shoulder carries four sideways chevron patterns bisected by a vertical line. This precision extends to their arms: large muscle patterns encapsulate smaller ones, punctuated by horizontal lines at their intersection, ending at the elbow. The back of the arm features an extended muscle chain, ending at the wrist,

crowned with a double chevron and dual chin designs on the hand (*Plate 129, 130, 131 & 132*).

Leg tattoos carry their own narrative. Beginning above the knee, a circumscribing horizontal line marks the start. Vertical lines, morphing into triangular designs beneath the kneecap, descend to the mid-leg, encircled by horizontal lines. The lower leg bears a cascading diamond pattern, thrice repeated in diminishing sizes, culminating in two horizontal ankle bands (*Plate 133 & 134*).

These designs, while reminiscent of neighbouring tribes, are distinctly Mimi, showcasing their unique identity and tradition.

4.4.6 Zhimkiur village

In the Zhimkiur village, men's tattoos are not just symbols of bravery or rites of passage; they intertwine belief, tradition, and identity. The iconic V-shaped tattoo on the chest, a mark of the headhunter, is noticeably smaller in comparison to other tribes. This might signify unique attributes or a distinct clan lineage. Additionally, forearm tattoos received during adolescence mark the transition to manhood. But these tattoos are more than just symbolic; they're a testament to their faith. They believe these tattoos are a currency for the afterlife, used to procure sustenance for their eternal journey. The intricate design features two chevron lines topped with nine ascending V-shapes, bisected by a central vertical line, reminiscent of a fishbone. This evocative pattern underscores their connection to nature and bridges the physical and spiritual realms (*Plate 135, 136 & 137*).

4.5 Tikhir Tattoo

Men

In Tikhir, the intricate art of tattooing isn't just skin-deep; it's a woven tapestry of stories, milestones, and traditions that binds the individual to their community. Each inked design is a reflection of one's identity, achievements, and the broader cultural heritage of the tribe.

Starting with the most emblematic of them all, the head hunter's mark, it tells tales of valour and bravery. While many tribes have adopted the V-shaped design, Tikhir's rendition, known as "*Pokyak*", stands out. It doesn't settle for a singular bold V but showcases three parallel lines extending from the chest to the navel. This deviation from the norm not only distinguishes Tikhir men from their counterparts in other tribes but also adds layers of depth, indicating that beneath the surface, there's always more to the story (*Plate 138*).

The shoulder art, "*Topoyak*", is a masterclass in symmetry and balance. The combination of V and inverted V shapes intersected by a vertical line exhibits harmony. The arrowheads punctuating the ends of this line could symbolise direction, purpose, or even protection. It's a design that fuses elegance with purpose (*Plate 139*).

On the arm, the "*Khelanyak*" pattern, shared with the women of the village, strengthens community bonds. It's a design that underscores unity and a shared heritage. The repeated motif of large Xs filled with smaller ones may signify the interconnectedness of generations, suggesting that within every elder, there's a memory of their youthful self and vice versa (*Plate 140*).

However, the forearm design truly captures the essence of Tikhir's tattooing philosophy. While it retains elements of tradition, this part allows for personal interpretation. A small vertical line flanked by arrowheads might be a nod to an individual's personal journey or milestones.

Tikhir's tattoo artistry is a blend of collective memory and individual narrative. It celebrates the community's shared history and the personal journeys of its members, making each tattoo a living testament to the past, present, and future.

Women

For the Tikhir tribe, tattoos move beyond visual allure; they are symbolic vaults, preserving a deep-rooted heritage of customs, personal identity, and rich cultural nuances. These markings are a rite of passage for a woman, signifying her transition into adulthood.

As a young Tikhir girl crosses the threshold into womanhood, the initiation begins with the chin tattoo known as *Mukhouyak* and the forehead tattoo known as *Tilayak* tattoos. While many tribal tattoos hold resemblances across tribes, the nuanced variations tell each tribe's unique tale. The chin tattoo's X with a nested x may symbolise the dual nature of life – the outer world and inner spirit, a reflection of strength and vulnerability, and the connection between the past and the future (*Plate 141 & 142*).

The forehead's tattoo draws inspiration from the Chang tribe. Still, the Tikhir interpretation is distinctively petite, possibly symbolising a more reserved strength or emphasising the importance of subtlety in their culture.

The upper arm tattoo, *Thopoyak*, with its mascle pattern, tells a tale of interconnectedness. The addition of the X shape within alternating diamonds adds a unique rhythm to the design, making it distinct to the Tikhir tribe. This might symbolise the balance between tradition and innovation, a hallmark of their culture. *Khipokyak*, the forearm tattoo, seamlessly continues the story of *Thopoyak*. The leg tattoo, devoid of the customary

horizontal lines at its end, distinguishes Tikhir women from others. Their deliberate omission may signify a never-ending journey or a tribute to their unique identity (*Plate 143, 144 & 145*).

The Tikhir tribe's tattoos aren't mere adornments; they are visual memoirs that blend ancient tales and individual journeys, painting a vivid picture of the tribe's ethos and pride.

4.6 Chang Tattoo

Tattooing has a long history in Chang society, remaining significant even into the Christian era and until the mid-20th century. For the Changs, tattoos were not merely decorative but served essential cultural functions. For warriors, tattoos were a way to display their valor, particularly in the act of bringing enemy heads back to the village. For women, facial tattoos were crucial for indicating clan identity and upholding the reputation of their respective clans. Thus, tattooing was deeply embedded in the Chang way of life, fulfilling social and symbolic roles.

Women

The clan of each person is recognised through names and tattoos. The Chang women tattoo to indicate their clan identity. The women tattooed on their foreheads, cheeks and chins. Each clan has a different way of tattooing, however, with a bit of similarity for some clans. This is done so that people can recognise them through it. The Chongpho and Hongang women have similar tattoos, and so do Oungh and Hake-ung (Chingmk, 2020). In Chang tribe culture, women often wear a distinctive tattoo known as the "evil eye," a term coined by British ethnographers. This tattoo features a large, singular masle pattern with two elongated inverted Vs at the top and two elongated Vs at the bottom. According to Chang's beliefs, this tattoo possesses supernatural powers that protect women from tiger attacks when they venture into the jungle to fetch water or firewood. The tattoo indicates the tigers that the women are from the Chang tribe, so the tigers do not attack them.

Chang women adorn their chins with chevron patterns and two slightly curved lines on either side of their lips. These chin tattoos vary in design and serve as identity markers within clans. This is particularly significant for men when choosing a spouse, as they cannot marry women from their own clan. The facial tattoos thus assist in identifying suitable partners. Therefore, marriage between the same clan is taboo. It is strictly observed and in practice even today. In those days, a woman was easily identified through her tattoo.

Beyond serving as identity markers, these tattoos also function as rites of passage for Chang girls, marking important life transitions (*Plate 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151 & 152*).

Men

In Chang society, the practice of tattooing is deeply interwoven with the community's social and cultural norms, particularly among men. Tattooing is not merely an aesthetic choice but a formal recognition of valour and bravery, especially in tribal raids and warfare. The tattoos are applied to specific body areas, such as the chest, arms, forearms, and calves. Still, the eligibility to receive these tattoos is strictly regulated by a set of cultural conditions.

The most significant condition for a man to be eligible for a tattoo is his success in combat, specifically if he has decapitated an enemy. This act is considered a rite of passage and a mark of honour and dignity within the community. Men who have not achieved this feat are categorically prohibited from receiving tattoos, thereby creating a clear demarcation between those who have proven their valour and those who have not. For men who have successfully taken an enemy's head, it becomes not just an option but a cultural obligation to tattoo their chests. This tattoo is a permanent mark of their bravery and elevates their social standing within the community (*Plate 153*).

In addition to receiving tattoos, these warriors also engage in the ritual of ear-piercing each time they achieve the feat of decapitating an enemy. This ritualistic ear piercing is another layer of symbolism, further emphasising their courage and adding to their social prestige.

The tattooing process is highly ritualised and confined to a specific time of the year. According to the local calendar, the month of March, known as *Jeinyulümlit*, is designated for this practice. The restriction to a particular month adds another layer of significance to the process, making it a communal event that is anticipated and prepared for throughout the year. It also allows the community to collectively honour and recognise the bravery of its warriors in a structured, ceremonial manner.

Tattooing among men in Chang society is a complex cultural practice that serves multiple functions. It is a formal recognition of valour, a rite of passage for warriors, and a deeply symbolic tradition that reinforces social hierarchies and communal bonds. A set of strict cultural norms governs the practice. It is carried out with a high degree of ritualistic and symbolic significance, making it an integral part of the Chang community's cultural identity.

4.7 Phom Tattoo

Like many women in her village, Pangtitenla was proficient in weaving, agriculture, and domestic tasks. However, she also had a unique skill: she was adept at using the dao, a weapon she kept within arm's reach even while sleeping to protect herself from headhunters. One morning, Pangtitenla inadvertently let out a noticeable fart after a substantial meal. She jokingly attributed the sound to the wooden platform she was sitting on. Unexpectedly, her jest was met with laughter from beneath the platform, revealing the presence of an enemy warrior who had been hiding there. As he sprang up to attack her, Pangtitenla swiftly rose to her feet, disengaging her weaving backstrap. In his hurried movements, the warrior tripped over some grains drying on the floor. Seizing the moment, Pangtitenla used her weaving sword to defend herself, ultimately killing the intruder. Her courageous act saved her life and led to her being hailed as a local heroine. This incident inspired a new tattooing tradition for young girls in her village. (DUDA, 2017)

In Yachem, the art of tattooing is referred to as *Ashi Tepla*. While it was common knowledge that women were prepared to defend themselves, the primary responsibility for village defence and headhunting typically fell on the men. Men who succeeded in headhunting were honoured with chest tattoos as a mark of their bravery. However, in Yachem, the situation was different for women. Influenced by Pangtitenla's valour, women in the village began receiving leg tattoos, known as *kojok*, setting them apart from women in neighbouring regions.

Tattoo artists in the area of Pongo village are called *Hutukhangnyang*. There usually were only one or two tattoo artists at one time and these would be from the Chingshong clan. When it was time to tattoo, they went into the forest to harvest Hetha thorns, the *Shebu* and *Yemlak* leaves and a branch of the *Ecchep* with its one tuberous end. They also collected resin from the bark of the *Upau* tree and burned it, placing a large shard from a broken pot over the thick smoke to collect the soot. They scraped off the soot, which was mixed with a paste of *Shebu* and *Yemlak* leaves and made into ink. They inserted the *Hetha* thorns into the tuberous end of the *Ecchep* making it the handle, and dipping the needles into the black ink, hand poked tattoo pattern into the skins of men and women. They were assisted by other women who stretched the skin of their clients. For all their work, the tattoo artists received money, *Laya*, or provisions of food, woven cloths and household items. No medicines or ointments were applied on the tattoo wounds, but there were certain food taboos to be observed. Chicken and goat meat were avoided and only the meat of pig and buffalo could be consumed. Among the

greens, tattooed women had to avoid eating all plants and leaves that have thorns, like the *Tanlak* (Rev Among Phom, 2018).

Women

Unlike in other parts of the region where young girls received coming-of-age symbols, here in Pongo, girls received their tattoos only when they were around twenty years of age. When warriors brought back enemy heads to the village, all the girls who were around this age got the *Kah Tüpa* pattern, four vertical lines on their chins and a double arrowhead on either side of their mouths.

When the village took more enemy heads, the girls who had earlier received their chin tattoos would then get the *La Tüpa* tattooed on their calves. This would roughly be around the same time when they started styling their hair differently and became eligible for marriage. To signify their marital status, newly married women received the *Kaplah* tattooed at the back of their thighs and knees. This was the only tattoo they got which was not associated with head taking. When her husband took a head, then the wife received the *Tum Tüpa* tattooed above her breasts. And when the woman herself took a head, then she received the *Phak Tüpa* tattooed on the upper arms of both hands. Here in this region, women also participated in headhunting. They stood guard at the village post and when enemy warriors who had come to raid their village tried to escape, they slew them with their *daos*. But they could do this only after they were married. They assisted their men and equally defended their village and families from enemy raids. Since the duties of women included fetching water from the springs and foraging for food in the jungle, they stayed ever present and alert in case of attacks and kept their sharpened *daos* close at hand (*Plate 154, 155, 156, 157 & 158*).

Men

Men received their tattoos only after they had taken a head. These would be the big curved pattern on their chests and smaller curved lines down their arms. When a head was taken, three men's names were considered. The first, *Theba*, was he who had done the actual beheading, and the next two *Jaba* and *Kashauba*, were those whose *daos* had made the second and third cuts on the kill.

Men from the Chingshong clan sometimes gave tattoos, although it was largely the women who tattooed. And it was only the women who could tattoo on women. This profession was hereditary and stayed within the Chingshong clan.

4.8 Khiamniungan Tattoo

The diverse and rich tapestry of cultures and traditions within the Naga tribes showcases a fascinating journey into the world of body art and tattoos. A prominent feature of this cultural practice is the *Kongshang* tattoo. This significant and deeply symbolic design adorns the warrior's chest, extending in a bold V-shape to the navel. The ubiquity of this design among Naga tribes who partake in the tattooing tradition signals its profound importance.

Historical accounts and tribal narratives highlight that a warrior only earns the right to sport the *Kongshang* upon exhibiting unparalleled bravery and martial prowess. The seminal moment arrives when he presents an enemy's head to his village. Presenting the head, often gruesome to the outsider's eye, is not mere barbarism but a complex interplay of honour, valor, and tribal supremacy. However, colonial explorers, often struggling to grasp the depth of indigenous customs, merely labelled this design as the 'V-shaped tattoo.' They did this without diving into the myriad of interpretations and significance it held within the community (*Plate 159 & 160*).

Yet, the symbolism behind the *Kongshang* remains shrouded in mystery. It's a testament to the living traditions of the Naga tribes that, despite the passing of generations and the influence of modernity, the core essence of the *Kongshang's* meaning has been preserved, albeit undefined. It stands as a silent sentinel, bearing witness to countless acts of bravery, sacrifices, and the age-old traditions that bind the community together.

Accompanying the *Kongshang*, some warriors embellish their chest tattoos with an intricate design that stretches across the collarbone, resembling a necklace—referred to as *Sangkom*. Though primarily aesthetic, some elders whisper tales of its deeper significance. They talk of the 'tiger spirit,' an embodiment of strength, stealth, and prowess, linking it to the world of lycanthropy. Given the resemblance of this design to tiger stripes, such an association isn't far-fetched. The *Aethso*, a depiction of a human figure tattooed at the heart of the warrior's chest, is yet another symbol believed to represent the feat of capturing an enemy alive. However, interpretations vary; in some clans, it may be purely ornamental (*Plate 161 & 162*).

Yet, the world of Naga tattoos doesn't end with the chest. The bravest warriors, who have tales sung about their valour, dare to undertake the *Phemthsolao*. This intricate design commences at the shoulder, winding down the arm to the wrist. It showcases a mesmerising diamond-shaped pattern created by intersecting lines. Within these diamonds, an outline of a human figure can be discerned. Opting for the *Phemthsolao* isn't a mere whim. Given the

intense pain and incapacitation that accompanies the tattooing process, it stands as a testament to the warrior's resilience, determination, and unwavering spirit (*Plate 163 a & b*).

Furthermore, tattoos among the Naga tribes aren't solely symbols of earthly achievements. They bear spiritual implications, particularly concerning the afterlife. Men from certain villages adorn themselves with tattoos believed to function as currency in the afterlife. Such designs underscore the belief that these markings assist the soul in acquiring sustenance on its journey to the final resting place. This perspective offers a unique glimpse into the profound interconnectedness of the physical and metaphysical realms within the Khamniungan culture.

Women

The intricate art of tattooing, as practised by the Khamniungan tribe, offers a lens into the rich tapestry of their cultural traditions. For women in this community, tattoos extend beyond mere adornment; they are markers of age, rites of passage, and identity.

One of the pivotal traditions for a Khamniungan girl is receiving her tattoo during adolescence. This practice signifies more than an aesthetic rite—it marks her transition into adulthood, a passage deeply respected and celebrated within the community.

In the village of Noklak, the tattoo known as *Khalao* graces the foreheads of women. This design, bearing similarity to the "evil eye" motif of the Chang women, might hint at shared cultural narratives or ancestral influences. The chin is also marked with the *Koplao*, characterised by three distinctive vertical lines. The symbolism behind such specific patterns is a captivating subject for further exploration (*Plate 164*).

However, the art form displays regional variances. Pangsha village offers an alternative take on the traditional chin tattoo, where women exhibit seven vertical lines instead of the conventional three. Their shoulder tattoos are also distinct, showcasing a cylindrical shape intersected with horizontal lines (*Plate 165 & 166*).

In contrast, Peshu, Kingniu, and Nokhu villages present a different aesthetic. Peshu's women incorporate masle patterns interspersed with X motifs on their shoulders, while Kingniu and Nokhu villages lean towards a more minimalistic style. These regional nuances highlight the tribe's diverse cultural fabric, illustrating how traditions can adapt and evolve even within closely connected communities (*Plate 167, 168, 169*).

One consistent element in this cultural practice is the leg tattoo, a design from the calf to the ankle. Comprising horizontal lines interspersed with lozenge and masle patterns, this tattoo might represent various stages or challenges in a woman's life (*Plate 170 a & b, 171, 172 & 173*).

4.9 Konyak Tattoo

Among the Naga tribes, it's noteworthy that the Konyaks exhibit the widest variety in terms of headhunter tattoo patterns. Phejin Konyak (2017) has shed light on the distinctiveness within the Konyak tribe itself. She highlights that there are three distinct groups among the Konyaks, each defined by specific linguistic attributes, unique tattoo designs, dialects, social constructs, and lifestyle patterns.

The first of these groups is named the Shen-Tu, recognised for their signature face tattoo that resembles spectacles. This design has become emblematic of the group and is widely acknowledged for its distinctiveness.

The second group is referred to as the Tangta-Tu. Their tattoo artistry primarily focuses on the chest and body, creating a visually captivating and unique body artwork that differentiates them from the other groups.

The third and equally intriguing group is the Kong-Tu. Their tattoo signature is perhaps the most unconventional, featuring a striking vertical line extending from their forehead to their nose. This design stands out, marking them distinctly among the Konyak subdivisions.

Men

In the village of Jaboka among the Konyaks, there's a distinctive tattoo pattern that stands as a testament to age-old traditions and rites of passage. A particular man in this village sports a unique tattoo on both his upper arms: three double curved lines, the topmost facing upward while the two below face downward, each line punctuated by dots. Known as the *Soklohu*, this tattoo was imprinted on him during his teenage years, signalling his coming of age. Although traditionally a sign associated with headhunters, this man, having embraced Christianity, never partook in the ritual. In his village, the hallmark of a headhunter was evident in distinct tattoo patterns: the face tattoo known as *Thanhu* (head), the neck tattoo named *Khapanglan*, and the throat tattoo called *Dinghu*. Sadly, time has taken its toll, and no surviving member of the village bears these traditional headhunter tattoo patterns (*Plate 174*).

Conversely, in the village of Sangsha, another tale of tattoo legacy unfolds. One resident showcases a prominent headhunter's facial tattoo and a distinct chest tattoo. The central design on the chest resembles a mascle pattern, flanked on either side by elongated mascle patterns that are slightly tilted, stretching up to the shoulders. While the design comprises three separate lines, they appear as a single bold line from a distance. What's truly fascinating about this individual's tattoo is the narrative behind it. By the time he reached the

age for headhunting, Nagaland had integrated into the Indian Union, making the act of taking a human head as a trophy illegal due to the Indian Army's presence. Yet, the urge to prove bravery and uphold tradition remained strong. So, he and his peers devised a different form of bravery. They ventured into enemy territories, not to take heads, but to chop down trees. Despite the change in the act, the symbolism of the headhunter tattoo remained, serving as a proud emblem of their courage and the enduring significance of their traditions (*Plate 175 & 176*).

In Longwa, the very act of getting a tattoo carries with it deep cultural significance and stringent criteria. Individuals suffering from leprosy (known locally as "*Anonon*"), epilepsy (referred to as "*Wokak*"), and those with mental illnesses or believed to be possessed by the demon "*Dakshet*" are strictly prohibited from receiving tattoos. This prohibition underscores the weighty meaning behind these traditional marks. Only the bravest of men, those who have successfully ventured into the dangerous realm of headhunting, are considered worthy to bear the esteemed facial and V-shaped chest tattoos.

The facial tattoo that adorns the Longwa headhunters is akin to that of their counterparts in Sangsha, but with a distinguishing feature: an additional chain of muscle patterns delicately encircling their jaws, making their mark truly unique. Their chest tattoos are also remarkable, displaying a bold double V-shaped design that extends from the shoulders and cascades down to the ribcage. Intricately woven within this V-shaped pattern are designs reminiscent of the arm tattoos of Sangtam men. These designs feature a series of V-shapes and inverted V-shapes, which can be likened to arrowheads. Central to this design, on the ribcage, are three spear-like patterns; with the central spear being noticeably larger than the ones flanking it, further accentuating the tattoo's significance and aesthetic (*Plate 177, 178 & 179*).

However, in Tangnyu village, a particular headhunter's tattoos narrate a blend of traditions from both Sangsha and Longwa. His face and chest bear tattoos akin to the Sangsha style. Intriguingly, he also has the iconic V-shaped design from Longwa, but with a twist: instead of adorning his chest, this pattern is emblazoned on his back. This fusion of tattoo styles from two villages showcases the fluidity of traditions and the individual's personal journey in the world of headhunting (*Plate 181*).

In the village of Wakching, there's an intriguing perspective held by some of the villagers that the word "tattoo" might have its origins in their local dialect. They refer to it as "*Tatu*," with "*Ta*" meaning "body" and "*Tu*" translating to "paint" or "hammering." Contrary to many neighboring tribes, Wakching villagers don't traditionally ink their faces. Instead,

they bear a unique V-shaped tattoo on their chests. This distinct design starts from the upper arm, gracefully curves around the shoulder, and then descends down towards the navel. Comprising four lines on each side, the pattern stands apart from other V-shaped tattoos as the lines don't converge in the centre. Rather, they remain as two independent designs. To accentuate and define the design's boundaries, both its starting and ending points are sealed with horizontal lines (*Plate 182*).

Over in Yangnu village, another tale of tradition and personal identity unfolds. A local recall receiving his tattoos around the age of 20, marking his rite of passage into manhood. On his right arm, he bears a tattoo reminiscent of the Jaboka Village's design, but with a twist: all three curved lines are inverted. Time has faded the design on his left arm, making it challenging to discern, but it seems to hint at some mascle pattern. A striking tattoo graces his collarbone, running from one shoulder to the other and dipping slightly in the middle, evoking the impression of a necklace. Embedded within this bold linear design is a continuous chain of mascle patterns, adding layers of meaning and complexity to the artwork (*Plate 183 & 184*).

Women

The tattoos among the Konyak tribe serve not just as a symbol of tradition but also as markers of significant life stages, especially for women. In the Shen-Tu group, a girl's journey into womanhood is intricately inked on her body. As she steps into adolescence, her legs are adorned first with about 20 closely placed horizontal lines, known as *Chithumhu*, followed by a series of X patterns positioned above the calf. As she grows, the shoulders are graced with double X patterns termed *Hubok*, a design that's mirrored on the backs of their hands. The approach of matrimony introduces new tattoos: the X pattern, or *Somhu*, on their knees and a single X marking the collarbone. For those of elevated social standing, like the *Angh*, the forearms receive additional X patterns, signalling their societal prominence. Notably, while there's an extensive range in tattoo designs among Konyak men, the patterns for women in the Shen-Tu group remain consistent (*Plate 185, 186 a & b, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191 & 192*).

Conversely, the Tangta-Tu group, particularly those from the Wakching village, has a different narrative inked on their bodies. For these women, the onset of puberty is marked with tattoos that not only represent the rite of passage but also their social standing. Although the leg tattoos share similarities with the Shen-Tu group, they are bolder and larger. Their shoulders are canvassed with chains of Xs, evoking a mascle pattern, but with a grander presence. An added distinction is the elongated mascle patterns stretching from their elbows

down to their wrists. Furthermore, their navels become the centrepiece of a unique design: three lines extending out on each side, forming a design reminiscent of a trident (*Plate 193 & 194*).

The Konyak tribe, with its rich tapestry of tattoo designs, especially for men, is a testament to a deep-rooted cultural heritage. However, the inexorable march of time has claimed many of the older headhunters, and with them, the living stories inked on their skins. What were once proud symbols of prowess, valour, and honour are now becoming rare sights, making the quest to find and document them even more pressing and valuable.

CHAPTER-5

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON TATTOO CULTURE

Animism is one of the most foundational forms of spiritual and religious beliefs, tracing its origins to the earliest human societies. Rooted in the Latin word "anima", meaning "breath" or "spirit," animism posits that all objects, creatures, and even phenomena have a distinct spiritual essence. This belief system contends that everything, from animals and plants to rivers, mountains, and other natural elements, possesses its soul or consciousness.

Central to animism is the idea that the spiritual and physical worlds are deeply intertwined. This means that all elements of nature are not just alive, but they also have feelings, intentions, and consciousness. Such a perspective shapes how people interact with their environment, fostering deep respect, reverence, and responsibility towards nature.

Animistic societies often engage in rituals and ceremonies to communicate with, appease, or honour these spirits. Dreams, visions, and trance states are particularly significant in these cultures, viewed as direct conduits to the spirit world. Shamans or spiritual leaders often mediate between the human and spirit realms, using their unique abilities to heal, provide guidance, or communicate messages.

Historically, animism is thought to have developed as early humans tried to make sense of the world around them. This worldview, which sees a fusion of spirit and matter, provides explanations for natural events and phenomena. Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor was among the first to delve into animism in depth, suggesting it as the earliest form of religious belief that evolved from human interpretations of life, dreams, and death (Park 2020).

While many contemporary societies have moved towards more structured religious systems, animism remains a primary belief in many indigenous and tribal communities. Moreover, its fundamental principles resonate with modern ecological movements, emphasising humanity's interconnectedness with nature.

5.1 Animism among the Nagas

Animism was the traditional religion of the Naga people, who inhabit the northeastern Indian states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and northwestern Myanmar. The

Nagas are a diverse group of people from different ethnic groups, but they share a common belief in the existence of spirits and deities.

The central belief of Naga animism is that spirits, both good and bad, inhabit the natural world. These spirits can be found in mountains, rivers, forests, and even in inanimate objects. The Nagas believe it is important to maintain good relations with these spirits, and they do this through various rituals and practices. The Nagas believe that the spirits of their ancestors continue to exist after death, and they play an important role in the lives of the living. Ancestors are often worshipped at special shrines, and they are also consulted for advice and guidance. The Nagas also believe in a number of gods and goddesses. These gods are responsible for various aspects of the natural world, such as the weather, the harvest, and war. The Nagas pray to these gods for protection and blessings. The Nagas believe that the world is divided into two realms: the upper world, which is inhabited by gods and spirits, and the lower world, which is inhabited by humans and animals. The Nagas believe that spirits can influence the lives of humans, both positively and negatively. They can bring good luck, prosperity, and health or cause illness, misfortune, and death. The Nagas believe that it is important to maintain good relations with the spirits. They do this through a variety of rituals and practices, such as ancestor worship, animal sacrifices, and divination. Naga animism is a very oral tradition. The beliefs and practices of Naga animism are passed down from generation to generation through stories, songs, and dances. Naga animism is a fascinating and complex religion that provides a glimpse into the culture and history of the Naga people. It is a religion still practised by a small but significant minority of the population, and it is likely to continue to evolve in the years to come.

In addition to ancestor worship and the worship of gods and goddesses, the Nagas also practice a variety of other rituals and practices. These include:

- **Animal sacrifices:** The Nagas sometimes sacrifice animals to appease the spirits.
- **Divination:** The Nagas use a variety of methods to divine the future, such as reading animal entrails and interpreting dreams.
- **Spirit possession:** The Nagas believe that some people can be possessed by spirits. These people are often called upon to mediate between the living and the dead.
- **Festivals:** The Nagas celebrate a number of festivals throughout the year, many of which are associated with agriculture and the harvest.

5.2 Christianity in Nagaland

The introduction of Christianity into the north-eastern hills of India by Reverend Miles Bronson in 1839 marked a significant chapter in the region's religious history. Bronson, an American Baptist missionary, ventured into the remote and rugged terrains of the Naga hills, aiming to bring the teachings of Christianity to the indigenous Naga tribes. His zeal and dedication bore fruit when he established the Christian Mission Centre in Namsang, a village nestled amidst the hills.

The mission was bolstered with the arrival of his wife and sister, Rhoda Bronson, the subsequent year. Their combined efforts saw the foundation of a primary school that aimed to educate and instil Christian values among the local populace. Bronson's dedication to the cause was evident in his endeavour to author religious texts in the native Naga dialect, a significant step towards bridging the cultural divide.

However, the journey was fraught with personal challenges. The adverse climatic conditions of the region took a toll on the health of the Bronson family. This led to their relocation to Assam, a decision further cemented by the tragic demise of Rhoda Bronson on December 7, 1840. Her death symbolised the challenges faced by early missionaries, with Rhoda becoming the first among them to sacrifice her life for the Naga cause.

The aftermath of this personal tragedy saw Bronson join the Sibsagar Mission, marking an end to his direct involvement with the Namsang Mission. Christianity's journey in the region saw further challenges and milestones. In 1847, the first Naga converts, Hubi, was baptised by Nathan Brown, only to meet an untimely death within a month. A few years later, in 1851, Longchangleplepzuk from Merangkong village embraced Christianity, but his life was cut short due to tribal conflicts.

The tumultuous events of the early years, marked by both milestones and tragedies, resulted in the Namsang Naga Mission being deserted for approximately three decades from 1840 to 1870. However, these initial steps, fraught with challenges, laid the groundwork for subsequent missions and the eventual spread of Christianity in the region.

Rev. E. W. Clark, alongside Godhula Brown, rekindled missionary work among the Nagas. Arriving in Sibsagar in 1869, Clark initially set his sights on the Assamese. He took charge of both the mission and the press at Sibsagar, eventually involving himself with outreach amongst the tea garden workers. Over his three-year tenure, his interests shifted towards the Nagas, predominantly the Aos, who regularly visited the Sibsagar market.

Remarkably, despite prevalent aversions, the Assamese held against the Nagas, an Assamese evangelist named Godhula dared to venture into Naga territories to spread Christianity. During this endeavour, an Ao Naga from the Dekahaimong, Subongmeren village encountered Godhula and Clark. His subsequent conversion to Christianity in 1871 marked the genesis of deeper evangelisation into Nagaland.

Godhula's multiple visits to Molungkimong bore fruit when, in November 1872, he descended the hills with several Naga acquaintances, nine of whom were baptised by Clark in the Dikho River. This event led to Clark's visit to Molungkimong the following month, where fifteen additional Nagas were baptised. By December 23, 1872, these newfound believers, combined with the earlier group from Sibsagar, formed the inaugural Naga Church.

He epitomised his commitment upon returning from a twelve-day journey in the Naga hills. Yet, the journey was challenging. The village found itself divided over this new faith. Clark's resemblance to the British, whom the Nagas distrusted, raised suspicions. Many believed that Christianity, with its peace and love ethos, would obliterate their cherished customs and traditions.

Nevertheless, fortified by faith, Clark's resilience led him to engage with the locals. He endeavoured to understand their language, nature, and medicinal practices, paving the way for more intimate interactions and spiritual conversations. Encouraging prayers for the ailing, Clark noticed that recoveries often resulted in the renunciation of animistic rituals. By 1894, Mulong emerged as a focal point for evangelisation among the Naga tribes, later becoming Nagaland's first Christian village. Clark relocated the mission centre to Impur a year later, now known as Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang. The year 1905 saw an astounding 190 baptisms, attesting to the rapid spread of Christianity across the hills. However, alongside its spiritual awakenings, Christianity also heralded the end of headhunting and gradually eroded many of the traditional cultural practices of the Naga tribes. (Nagaland Baptist Church Council n.d)

5.2.1 Konyak

In 1837, Reverend Miles Bronson, an American Baptist Missionary, reached Sadiya on July 17th. He was the first to connect with the Konyak Naga tribe. By 1840, he moved to the Namsang villages, now called Nocte, in Arunachal Pradesh. Sadly, due to health issues and his sister Rhoda's death, he had to leave. Still, he kept in touch with the Namsang Nagas. In 1847, a local, Hubi Konyak, became the first Naga Christian but died soon after.

In 1885, Reverend Bronson baptized Aklong and Amlai in Sibsagar. They tried spreading Christianity in their village but faced opposition. So, early efforts to introduce Christianity to Konyak Nagas had limited success (Nagaland Baptist Church Council).

In 1881, another missionary, Dr. E.W. Clark, met with the Konyak Naga people but didn't preach. And in 1920, Dr. Bailey and Reverend Supongwati's attempts to visit more Konyak villages were stopped. Then, in 1929, Imkongmayang from Akhoia built a post office in Tamlu, a Konyak village. There, he met a boy, Longna, who went on to study at Impur Mission School. Longna became a Christian in 1932 and started introducing his friends to Christianity.

By 1933, more people in the community were learning about Christianity, thanks to Longna and others. Despite facing challenges from local authorities, these early Christians continued to spread their faith. They initially worshipped in a simple house and later built a church in 1935. This small church in Tamlu played a key role in spreading Christianity among the Konyak people.

By 1936, only two Konyak churches existed, in Tamlu and Kangching. In 1946, a new church was set up in Wanching village. Two locals trained by the Ao Women's Association helped establish nine more churches.

The Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Bangjum, supported by ABAM, further strengthened the spread of Christianity. In 1950, a turning point came when the Council of Baptist Churches in Assam took over the Konyak mission. Reverend Longritangchet Ao was sent as their first missionary to the Konyak Nagas.

Also, in 1950, the Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Bangjum was founded. Their first annual meeting in 1951 marked the beginning of organized efforts to spread Christianity among the Konyak Nagas with the support of major Baptist groups (Chingang Konyak, 2008). The Phom and Chang Christians played a significant role in spreading Christianity among the upper Konyak Nagas. A Phom evangelism team from Pongo and Montikang Attoi, led by Reverend Müngkham Phom, travelled to Longchang village. They successfully converted at least sixteen families, including Muhpa and Puyong. On December 23, 1952, Reverend Müngkham Phom baptised 101 people, leading to the foundation of the Longchang Church. The Pongo Church supported this new church by sponsoring the pastor's monthly salary of Rs. 10.

In 1947, Mr Hongpe Lempa was baptised in Yimpang village by Reverend Onen Ao. He later founded a church in his village, Changlangshu, in 1956. The same year, the Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Bangjum (KBBB) appointed him as the pastor of this church.

The upper Konyak Churches found it hard to coordinate from the Wakching mission center due to transportation issues. Reverend Longri felt it would be beneficial for the upper Konyak churches to join the lower ones. As a result, the KBBB integrated the upper Konyak churches during a 1956 meeting at the Tamlu church (Chingang Konyak 2008)

Christianity's growth among the Konyak Nagas was a joint effort between missionaries and the local people. Key figures like Reverend Bronson, Dr. E.W. Clark, and Longna were essential in introducing Christianity to the Konyak Nagas. Despite challenges, their foundation allowed future missionaries and evangelists to continue the work.

Organisations like the KBBB played a crucial role in the growth of Christianity among the Konyak Nagas by supporting and guiding the community. This led to the building churches, schools, and institutions that met the Konyak people's needs.

Local converts were pivotal in adapting Christianity to the Konyak context, making the faith relevant and integrated into the community. The Konyak Nagas experienced a spiritual transformation and benefited socially from Christianity, as schools and other institutions improved literacy and strengthened communities. The shared language introduced through education enhanced communication and the gospel spread among various Konyak tribes.

5.2.2 Phom

Nestled in the rugged terrains of north-eastern India, the Phom tribe, like many indigenous groups, once stood sentinel over a way of life shaped by centuries of tradition. Yet, in a span of decades, the tribe underwent a profound transformation that intertwined their ancient customs with the tenets of a globally dominant faith: Christianity. This journey of mutual discovery, respect, and integration is a testament to the resilience of the Phom people and the Christian faith.

In the early 1880s, whispers of a new faith started circulating among the tribes of Northeast India. The rumour mills spoke of a white man and a novel way of life that promised spiritual salvation and a new perspective on life, community, and the cosmos. The Phom tribe, deeply rooted in their traditional beliefs, were curious and apprehensive about these tales. Such was their intrigue that the Tamlu village extended an invitation to the neighbouring Merangkong village, which was believed to have had firsthand encounters with this new faith (Nohochem, 2017).

When Dr E.W. Clark, an early Christian evangelist associated with the gospel, learned of this interest, he saw it as an opportunity to bridge cultures and share his faith. However, his maiden journey to the Tamlu village was fraught with challenges. Encounters that might seem mundane today, such as meeting villagers returning from their fields, were misinterpreted as invasions due to existing inter-village tensions and prevalent headhunting practices. But even in the face of these adversities, the efforts to communicate and understand were palpable. Shouts of "Come back, come back, we have come to meet you" echoed the forest, signifying attempts to de-escalate situations built on misinterpretations.

The Tamlu villagers' decision to welcome Dr Clark and his team into their Morung, or communal house, marked the beginning of a slow, delicate dance of cultural exchange. Over time, as the two communities got to know each other better, moments of exchange, such as Dr Clark offering his cap as a gesture of friendship, became symbols of growing mutual respect.

However, initial efforts to introduce Christianity to the Phom tribe were slow to bear fruit. Dr Clark's inaugural visit did not result in any conversions. And it was in the mid-1920s that the first known conversions among the Phom took place. These early adopters of the faith, like Imkum Phom, would prove pivotal in the subsequent spread of Christianity within the tribe. Yet, even as some embraced the new faith, the overarching environment was scepticism. The formidable challenges posed by headhunting and inter-village rivalries limited the gospel's spread.

It's essential to understand that the spread of Christianity wasn't merely about changing religious affiliations; it signified a transformation in worldviews, societal norms, and daily practices. Given this, it's hardly surprising that the Phom people approached the faith cautiously. However, the 1940s saw a shift in this dynamic. As neighbouring Ao tribe villages began embracing Christianity, the Phom tribe's exposure to the gospel intensified. Villages like Pongching, Sakshi, and Yachem began to experience the influence of Christianity, mostly brought in by fellow tribespeople who had converted (Bangben Shukha, 2019).

This period of rapid evangelisation was not just the result of external forces. Within the Phom tribe, newly converted individuals played a central role in integrating Christian teachings with Phom traditions. Their unique position as cultural insiders allowed them to act as bridges, ensuring that the introduction of Christianity didn't erase the rich Phom heritage but rather enriched it.

By the mid-1950s, this symbiotic relationship between Christianity and the Phom way of life had solidified to such an extent that there was a church in every Phom village. What's remarkable about this transformation is the rapidity with which it occurred and the depth of its impact. From initial scepticism in the 1880s to complete integration by the 1950s, the journey of Christianity within the Phom tribe is nothing short of astonishing.

Today, the influence of Christianity within the Phom community is undeniable. With over 22,000 baptised members and a network of churches and fellowships, the faith has firmly rooted within the tribe's socio-cultural landscape. Yet, this isn't a story of one culture overshadowing another; it's a tale of fusion, of two distinct traditions intertwining to create something new and beautiful.

The journey of the Phom tribe and Christianity serves as a poignant reminder of humanity's ability to evolve, adapt, and grow. It highlights the possibilities when people, even those from seemingly disparate worlds, come together with open hearts and minds. Through mutual respect, perseverance, and a willingness to understand, the Phom tribe and Christianity have together woven a tapestry that reflects the best of both worlds.

5.2.3 Chang

The rapid transformation of the Chang tribe's religious landscape in the early to mid-20th century presents a compelling study in cultural shifts, evangelism, and the dynamic nature of faith. Over a brief 13-year period from 1936 to 1949, the Chang people, residing in the hinterlands of Northeast India, experienced a sweeping transition from their indigenous beliefs to the Christian faith. By delving deeper into this transition, one can glean insights into the complex interplay of internal and external factors that drove this change (Rev T Among Chang 2020).

In 1936, the seeds of Christianity were first sown among the Chang people. What makes this initial phase intriguing is the backdrop against which it occurred. Evangelists, the primary agents of religious conversion, were barred from accessing the Chang territories until 1937. Yet, the fervour for the new faith managed to seep into these territories, leading to a notable number of baptisms among the Changs, Sangtams, and Konyaks by 1939. The swift embrace by these tribes, resulting in 744 new converts in such a short period, sets the stage for understanding the profound appeal and resonance of Christianity.

With the faith taking root, 1940 saw the establishment of the Chang Baptist Association. This move can be interpreted as a community-driven effort to institutionalise and give structure to

their newfound faith. Within the broader context, though, this was but a modest beginning. The Chang Christian community, at this juncture, counted just 50 individuals among its followers. However, this small group was destined to be at the vanguard of a more expansive religious wave.

The subsequent years witnessed a deepening involvement of the Ao Naga Christians. By 1944, their commitment to tribes like the Changs along the Burma border was unmistakable. The Ao Naga Christians, already an influential Christian community in the region, recognised their shared spiritual bond with the Changs and their obligation to help their fellow tribesmen on their spiritual journey. Their dedication enriched inter-tribal relationships, marking an era of religious collaborations and community-building.

Individual stories within this larger narrative deserve special mention, as they provide a nuanced understanding of the era. Reverend Kijungliba Ao, granted unique access across the region, emerges as a linchpin in the Changs' journey towards Christianity. His unparalleled reach meant he could interact closely with these tribes, guiding them through their spiritual awakening. Alongside him, figures like Imlong Chang played a pivotal role. By translating the Gospel of Mark into the native language, Imlong not only made Christian teachings more accessible but also provided tangible support to evangelists. Such indigenous advocates for Christianity were instrumental in accelerating the faith's acceptance.

1943 and 1944 stand out as seminal years. Two Chang churches were established, signifying the community's growing dedication to their new faith. While these churches served as spiritual hubs, they became centres for community interaction, debate, and discussion, further embedding Christian beliefs within the Chang social fabric.

The expansion of evangelistic activities, notably to the far-flung Tuensang region by 1947, highlights the missionary zeal during this period. Despite the challenges of terrain and traditional beliefs, the commitment of the evangelists and their community supporters remained unwavering.

By the late 1940s, the ripple effects of this evangelistic push became evident. The Chang Christian community had swelled to 250 members, a five-fold increase in just a few years, with 11 churches dotting the landscape. In 1949, in what can be seen as a testament to the consolidation of the Christian faith among the tribes, the Chang and Phom communities took a decisive step. They forged a joint association, bringing together over 30 churches. This coalition was not just about administrative convenience; it symbolised the deep-rooted presence and acceptance of Christianity within these tribes.

The association's establishment also highlighted the tribes' intent to foster unity, collaboration, and shared vision in their spiritual pursuits. It emphasised that faith, when embraced collectively, can serve as a powerful tool for community cohesion and mutual support. The joint venture of the Chang and Phom communities mirrored the broader regional trend where tribes found common ground in their Christian beliefs despite their distinct identities and histories.

The socio-cultural implications of this swift religious transition are profound. A tribe, largely untouched by external religious influences until the mid-20th century, had embraced a new faith and became a beacon of that faith in its region. The reasons for this can be manifold. The Christian teachings resonated with the Changs' intrinsic beliefs or values. Or the efforts of local figures like Imlong Chang and Reverend Kijungliba Ao acted as catalysts, bridging the gap between foreign religious teachings and indigenous understanding.

However, another critical dimension to consider is that era's broader geopolitical and cultural milieu. The mid-20th century was a time of significant change across the globe. Colonial influences, interactions between the East and West, and global movements of ideas and people might have indirectly facilitated the Changs' openness to new religious ideas.

The narrative of the Chang tribe's embrace of Christianity between 1936 and 1949 is a rich tapestry woven with threads of faith, determination, community spirit, and individual leadership. It's a story that underscores the transformative power of belief systems, the role of community leaders in guiding such transformations, and the broader interplay of historical and socio-cultural forces. The Changs' journey from indigenous practices to Christianity serves as a reminder of the fluidity of cultures and the enduring human quest for spiritual meaning. Their story, unfolding in just over a decade, offers a unique window into the resilience and adaptability of communities and the universal human longing for connection, meaning, and a sense of belonging.

5.2.4 Yimkhiung

The introduction of Christianity among the Yimkhiung Naga tribe in the mid-20th century serves as an emblematic example of the dynamic interplay between mission work, local communities, and the transformative power of faith. It's narrative rich with details of determined evangelists, the receptive hearts of the converted, and the community structures that evolved to sustain and nurture the burgeoning Christian community within the tribe.

At the forefront of this spiritual movement was the Sema (now referred to as Sümi) Association, which played a pivotal role in introducing the teachings of Jesus Christ to the Yimkhiung Naga tribe. Despite the geographical and cultural challenges, the Sema Association's determination was evidenced by its efforts to reach out to this community. Dr Anderson, a missionary stationed at Aizüto, was instrumental in these early efforts. The presence of foreign missionaries like Dr Anderson suggests the broader backdrop of international Christian mission work that was prevalent during this period.

However, the arrival of Mr Lhovikhü, an evangelist, to Huker village marked the turning point. On the 15th of March 1947, a significant event occurred: Mr Pungji and Mr Rikiumung became the first Yimkhiung Nagas to embrace Christianity through baptism. This event can be seen as the initial breakthrough, setting the stage for further evangelistic efforts and laying the foundation for the Yimkhiung Christian community.

Subsequently, in April 1950, the Yimkhiung Nagas encountered another evangelistic endeavour from the Ao region. Known as the “Pastor’s gospel team,” this group embarked on their mission with fervour and conviction, disseminating the message of the Kingdom of God. Led by the pastor of Longmisa village, the team's efforts culminated in the conversion of several individuals, including Mr Yankiuba, Mr Bümbakui, Mr Yansomung, Mr Kiuthro, Mr Ngangkui, and Mr R. Shophu. These individuals' acceptance of the gospel reflects the resonance and appeal of Christian teachings among the Yimkhiung Naga tribe (Nohochem, 2017).

Despite the success of these missions, a significant challenge arose: the need for a dedicated mission centre in the Yimkhiung region. This posed a potential impediment to the continuity and consolidation of the Christian faith among the tribe. Recognising this, Rev. Imtiluin took on overseeing this newly converted community, operating out of Tuensang until 1958. His stewardship ensured the nascent Christian community received guidance and pastoral care during these foundational years.

The year 1959 marked another watershed moment for the Yimkhiung Naga Christian community. Rev.G. Kihoto, an evangelist from the Sema Association, participated in the formation of the Yimkhiung Christian Association at Kiussor village. This establishment provided an organised structure, facilitating the coordination of religious activities and strengthening the community's collective identity.

Following this, in 1960, the Association saw the arrival of its first Field Supervisor, Rev. Onenlepten Ao. His leadership role suggests the growing maturity of the Yimkhiung

Christian community and its integration within the broader Christian framework of the region.

5.2.5 Impact of Christianity

Christianity's introduction into Naga society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a pivotal moment in their cultural history. The shift went beyond mere religious conversion. The Nagas, once deeply rooted in ancestral traditions and spiritual practices, found their very essence reshaped by the teachings of Christ. This transformation seeped into every aspect of their daily existence.

Whereas long-standing customs had governed the Naga culture, many intertwined with animistic beliefs and rituals, the new Christian doctrine offered a contrasting perspective on life, morality, and interpersonal relations. For instance, practices like headhunting, once seen as rites of passage and valour, were now viewed through the lens of Christian morality, which emphasised compassion and forgiveness. This inevitably led to the abandonment of such customs.

The change wasn't restricted to rituals alone. Festivals, songs, dances, and even the narratives that the older generation passed down were impacted. The tribal-centric worldview began to transform, making way for themes of universal love, brotherhood, and a broader sense of global community. No longer were the Nagas isolated tribes in the hills; they became part of a larger global Christian community, sharing values and ideals that transcended their geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, the shift induced a deep introspection within the community. As the values of love, charity, and humility became more central, many Nagas began reassessing not just their cultural practices but also their personal beliefs and conduct. A culture in flux emerged, trying to find a balance between ancient customs and newly acquired Christian values, leading to a profound change in societal norms, daily routines, and even their collective worldview.

5.2.6 Headhunting and the Influence of Christianity

Naga tribes, dwelling amidst the hills of the north-eastern frontier of India, held steadfastly to their cultural practices for centuries. Among these was the deeply entrenched tradition of headhunting. Taking an enemy's head was believed to bestow power, prestige, and spiritual favour upon the taker as a rite of passage. Young men proved their mettle through this act, and headhunting became a symbolic representation of valour and strength. Often displayed as

trophies, the heads were not mere war spoils but were deeply woven into the tribe's rituals, influencing harvest ceremonies, warrior festivals, and even interpersonal relations.

However, the landscape began to shift with the incursion of British colonialists and Christian missionaries. These newcomers viewed headhunting through a different lens, perceiving it as a savage and primitive act. Christianity, with its doctrine of the sanctity of life, stood in stark contrast to headhunting. The teachings of peace, love, and forgiveness were antithetical to a practice built on violence and warfare. Driven by a divine mandate, missionaries sought to extinguish headhunting, portraying it as barbaric and incompatible with a Christian ethos.

But the missionaries' approach was multifaceted. Apart from spiritual guidance, they saw education as a potent tool for transformation. Missionary-established schools became windows to a wider world for the Naga youth. They began re-evaluating their age-old practices as they delved into global histories, ethical debates, and stories from distant lands. The once-cherished act of headhunting faced increasing scrutiny, especially among the younger, educated Nagas. Questions on its moral validity surfaced, leading to fervent debates within the tribes.

Simultaneously, the British colonial administration, seeking to establish order and control, implemented policies curbing headhunting. Their administrative measures, combined with the relentless moral persuasion of missionaries, began to make inroads. As tribal chiefs and influential figures converted to Christianity, they acted as bridges between the old world and the new, often wielding their influence to propagate peace and suppress headhunting. Yet, this cultural metamorphosis was full of its complexities. As headhunting waned, a palpable void ensued. For young Naga men, the absence of this rite of passage was deeply felt. The power, pride, and prestige once derived from headhunting now required new outlets. The ensuing identity crisis nudged many Nagas to seek fresh means of cultural expression. While Christianity provided spiritual fulfilment, other facets of Naga culture, such as dance, song, and traditional crafts, witnessed a resurgence as they sought to reconcile their past with their present.

In a broader sense, the Naga tribes' experience serves as a testament to the profound ways external influences can reshape societies. The transformation from fearsome headhunters to peaceful Christian believers wasn't merely about renouncing a violent custom; it was emblematic of the broader struggle of reconciling tradition with change. While the end of headhunting was, in many ways, a step towards a less violent society, the journey

underscored the intricacies involved in navigating the confluence of two divergent worldviews.

As the years progressed, the headhunting practice saw a steady decline. This transformation wasn't spontaneous but rather the outcome of a confluence of internal reflections and external influences.

- **Spiritual Convictions:** As Christianity's footprint expanded across the Naga Hills, it presented an alternative worldview, sharply contrasting the inherent beliefs associated with headhunting. At its core, Christian theology emphasises values like love, compassion, and the sanctity of life. The Gospel narrated tales of forgiveness, where turning the other cheek was more valorous than retaliation. These teachings posed profound moral questions for a society where prestige was derived from taking a rival's head. Could one reconcile the act of headhunting with the Christian call to "love thy neighbour"? For many Nagas, the answer increasingly leaned towards a 'no'. As more tribal members embraced Christianity, local spiritual leaders, often revered and influential, began advocating against headhunting. Their spiritual convictions, deeply influenced by Christian values, made them question and eventually abandon the practice that once defined their warrior identity.
- **Education and Awareness:**
Beyond the pulpit's teachings, another silent revolution was taking place: education. Missionary-established schools became the crucibles where traditional Naga beliefs met global knowledge. As young Nagas grappled with subjects like ethics, literature, and world history, they became more introspective. Exposure to global perspectives made them aware of how headhunting was perceived outside their community. Furthermore, the awareness of the physical and psychological traumas associated with headhunting started to dawn upon them. Why should one kill another, they pondered, just for societal acclaim? Once sown by spiritual convictions, the seeds of doubt found fertile ground in these educational settings, further propelling the decline of headhunting.
- **Administrative Measures:**
The external push against headhunting wasn't just spiritual or educational but also administrative. During their rule, the British and the Indian government viewed headhunting as a barbaric vestige that impedes civilising the frontier. Laws were enacted, making headhunting a punishable offence. But the administrations didn't rely

solely on punitive measures. Recognising the deep-seated cultural significance of headhunting, they also initiated reward systems. Tribes that refrained from headhunting received benefits in the form of trade privileges, developmental aids, or even recognition. This blend of stick and carrot proved effective. As tribal chiefs saw the tangible benefits of abandoning headhunting, they became more amenable to the idea, using their influence to discourage the practice.

The decline of headhunting among the Naga tribes wasn't the result of a single factor but a mosaic of influences. Spiritual reflections, educational enlightenment, and administrative interventions converged, steering the Nagas away from a tradition that had once been the bedrock of their identity. Yet, this transition was more than just the abandonment of practice; it marked the Nagas' journey from a localised worldview to one that increasingly resonated with global ethos and values. The Naga tribes' odyssey from their headhunting past, influenced by the tide of Christianity, reflects the profound and often tumultuous impact of cultural intersections. It's a tale of loss and discovery, introspection and growth, and, above all, of the enduring human spirit's ability to adapt and evolve.

5.2.7 Tattooing in Naga Culture and Its Journey of Transformation

In the labyrinth of Naga culture, where each mark and gesture held profound meaning, tattooing emerged as a vibrant language, narrating tales of valour, maturity, beauty, and societal hierarchies. These intricate designs, painstakingly etched onto the skin, weren't just mere adornments; they were badges of honour, chronicles of milestones, and evocative symbols of one's place in the tribe's intricate tapestry.

For Naga warriors, tattoos were the silent witnesses of their battlefield exploits. Every mark represented a conquered enemy, a battle won, or a rite of passage fulfilled. It was as if their bodies became living canvases, showcasing their bravery and prowess. On the other hand, for Naga women, tattoos were emblematic of a different journey. These tattoos were personal and communal, from symbols of beauty that mirrored nature's patterns to marks indicating their transition from girlhood to womanhood. They signified not only an individual's growth but also their integration into the tribe's collective narrative.

However, as the winds of change swept across the Naga Hills, bringing with them the teachings of Christianity, this deeply ingrained tradition found itself at a crossroads. Christian doctrine, with its emphasis on the sanctity of the body, posited that the human form, being created in the image of God, was a temple of the Holy Spirit. This view stood in stark

contrast to the practice of altering the body through tattooing or other forms of body modification. Thus, as more Nagas embraced Christianity, the very act of tattooing began to be seen through a new lens—one of scepticism and, often, reluctance.

With church sermons, community discussions, and personal introspection, many Nagas began to view tattooing as incompatible with their newfound faith. The implications were manifold. Some saw tattoos as an affront to God's perfect creation, while others felt it was a tether to their pre-Christian past, a relic of an era they were evolving from. Consequently, as the decades rolled on and conversions became more widespread, the once ubiquitous sight of tattooed Naga elders started becoming rarer among the younger generations.

Yet, it's essential to understand that while the practice receded, it didn't vanish into oblivion. As with many cultural practices that face external influences, tattooing underwent a metamorphosis. While retaining their Christian beliefs, some Nagas began to reinterpret tattooing in the light of their faith. Designs started incorporating Christian symbols like the cross, the fish, or verses from the scriptures. For others, tattooing evolved to align with modern aesthetics and global trends, moving away from traditional patterns to more contemporary designs.

In this transformative journey, tattooing in Naga culture offers a poignant insight into the dynamic interplay between tradition and change. While the practice might not hold the same ubiquitous prominence it once did, it remains a testament to the Nagas' ability to adapt, evolve, and weave new narratives while paying homage to their rich heritage.

5.2.8 Negative Impacts of Embracing Christianity

- **Cultural Erosion:** The concept of cultural erosion is not new to civilisations. It often surfaces when one culture interacts significantly with another, leading to the blending or, in some cases, the suppression of certain traditions, values, or practices. The Nagas provides a striking example of this phenomenon in the context of their encounter with Christianity. Historically, the Naga tribes had a rich tapestry of traditions. Their life was punctuated by rituals and ceremonies, each significant in its own right. These were not mere acts; they were the lifeblood of Naga culture, weaving together tales of valour, love, respect for nature, and reverence for ancestors. Such rituals were passed down through generations, ensuring every Naga, irrespective of age, had an intrinsic connection to their tribe's ancient history. However, with the introduction of

Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th century, these age-old practices faced an existential challenge. The core tenets of Christianity, often propagated by missionaries who had little understanding or appreciation of the local traditions, were sometimes at odds with Naga beliefs. Practices that the Nagas revered were seen through the prism of 'paganism' by the missionaries. Over time, as the tribe members converted to Christianity, they were encouraged, and at times even coerced, to abandon practices deemed antithetical to their new faith.

In place of their indigenous ceremonies, they adopted Christian practices. While these rituals also offered a sense of community and spiritual connection, they were not born from the land of the Nagas or their ancestral tales. The hymns and sermons of the church began to overshadow the oral traditions, songs, and dances of the Naga tribes. In essence, the spiritual tapestry of the Nagas was being rewoven, thread by thread.

As decades passed, a realisation began to dawn upon the newer generations. The stories their grandparents told, the songs their ancestors sang, and the rituals that once defined the very essence of being a Naga were fading into obscurity.

The narrative of cultural erosion among the Nagas is not just about the loss of practices. It's about the gradual fading of a collective memory, a shared heritage. The oral traditions of the Nagas, which once served as bridges connecting generations, were now crumbling edifices, with only the elderly having a vivid memory of them.

Concerns about this loss began to surface, leading to introspection within the community. There emerged a desire to reconcile with the past, to ensure that while the Nagas walked the path of Christianity, they didn't lose their way from their roots. Efforts were made to document, preserve, and even rejuvenate traditional practices without compromising their Christian beliefs.

- **Identity Conflict:** The profound impact of Christianity on the Nagas opened the door to a profound identity conflict within the community. For centuries, the Naga tribes had lived with customs, traditions, and beliefs that were not merely rituals or habits but formed the backbone of their collective identity. These traditions were stories, life lessons, songs, histories, ceremonies, and affirmations of their relationship with nature, ancestors, and the cosmos. This deeply rooted cultural framework, which had remained largely unaltered over generations, began to shift its axis with the arrival of Christianity.

It is essential to understand that the Naga encounter with Christianity wasn't simply a matter of swapping one set of religious beliefs for another. It was a deep and often

unsettling reorientation of their worldview. The Bible's stories, the doctrines of sin and salvation, and the rituals of the church—while they all offered spiritual solace and a broader connection to the worldwide Christian community—also posed questions about the validity and sanctity of Naga traditions.

Many Nagas found themselves standing at the crossroads of spirituality. While their hearts felt the pull of Christian teachings, their minds were filled with the rich tapestry of Naga lore passed down through generations. This dichotomy often led to profound internal conflicts. Could they, for instance, participate in traditional harvest festivals that honoured ancient deities while attending Sunday Mass that revered the Christian God? Could they respect and honour their warrior ancestors who practised headhunting while also accepting the Christian teachings of peace and brotherhood? Such questions weren't merely philosophical; they touched the core of their identity. For the older generation, there was a palpable feeling of loss—a mourning for the world they once knew, now deemed 'pagan' or 'backward' by the new standards. The younger generation, on the other hand, raised amid Christian teachings but still tied to their roots through familial traditions, faced a different kind of struggle. They sought to define their identity in a world that increasingly saw things in binaries: traditional vs. modern, pagan vs. Christian, old vs. new.

The identity conflict also had broader societal implications. As conversions increased, fissures began to appear within communities. Those who held onto traditional beliefs often found themselves marginalised, while newly converted Christians grappled with guilt or confusion about their ancestors' practices. The shared history, once a source of pride and unity, became a ground for debate and division.

However, with time, many Nagas began to search for a middle path—a way to embrace the spiritual tenets of Christianity while also respecting and preserving their cultural heritage. This led to a unique syncretism where Christian teachings were blended with Naga traditions. Christmas, for instance, while celebrating the birth of Christ, could also become a time for community feasting and storytelling reminiscent of old tribal gatherings. In essence, the identity conflict faced by the Nagas underscores the complexities inherent in the confluence of cultures and beliefs.

- **Dependence on Western Thought:** The transition of the Nagas into Christianity was not merely a religious evolution but also marked a significant shift in their epistemological landscape. As presented to the Nagas, Christianity was deeply intertwined with Western thought, values, and worldviews. This was not surprising,

given that the missionaries who introduced Christianity hailed from Western backgrounds and naturally infused their teachings with their cultural and philosophical underpinnings. Over time, as Christianity took root, the impact of Western thought became increasingly evident, leading to a dependence that had both subtle and profound implications on Naga society.

Firstly, there was an undeniable shift in the conceptual frameworks through which the Nagas began to understand and interpret their world. The Judeo-Christian narratives, with their linear progression of history and concepts of sin, redemption, heaven, and hell, were starkly different from the cyclical, nature-centric, and ancestral belief systems of the Naga tribes. These new narratives, backed by the authority of religious texts and the fervour of missionaries, began to overshadow the indigenous stories, myths, and legends, leading to a slow erosion of the latter.

This shift wasn't limited to the religious sphere. Missionaries' introduction of Western-style education further intensified the sidelining of indigenous knowledge systems. Western literature, history, science, and philosophy became the mainstays of the curriculum, while Naga folklore, oral histories, and traditional knowledge were relegated to the peripheries. Over generations, this led to a scenario where many Nagas became more familiar with Western classics than their ancestral tales.

The dependence on Western thought also influenced social dynamics and self-perception. Concepts of modernity, progress, and civilisation, as defined by Western standards, began to permeate the collective psyche. Practices and traditions that didn't align with these concepts were often viewed as primitive or regressive, even by the Nagas themselves. The tattoos, headhunting traditions, and nature worship, once sources of pride, became symbols of a past that many sought to distance themselves from.

While the Western influence brought undeniable benefits, including advancements in healthcare, education, and infrastructure, the heavy reliance on its thought systems posed challenges. For one, it led to an internalised inferiority complex among some Nagas, who began to view their indigenous ways as lesser. This also affected decision-making at community and leadership levels, with Western methods often given precedence over local wisdom.

In the broader context of colonialism and post-colonial societies, the Naga experience mirrors the challenges faced by many indigenous communities worldwide. The dominance of Western thought, often under the banner of progress and modernity, has

led to the sidelining of rich indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained communities for centuries. For the Nagas, the journey has been one of rediscovery and reclamation as they navigate the intertwined paths of tradition and modernity, seeking to carve out an identity that pays homage to their roots while embracing the broader horizons opened up by their new faith.

- **Division among tribes:** The story of the Nagas and their encounter with Christianity is emblematic of the broader dynamics that ensue when a foreign religion intersects with indigenous beliefs. On the one hand, Christianity served as a unifying force for many Naga tribes, offering a shared platform of faith and community. On the other hand, the influx of this new faith also magnified existing divisions and, in some cases, birthed new schisms within and among tribes.

Historically, the Naga hills were home to diverse tribes with distinct languages, customs, and practices. While there were common cultural threads, each tribe held onto its unique identity and often viewed others through lenses of competition and at times, hostility. Headhunting raids and territorial disputes were not uncommon, and the tapestry of the Naga society was one of intricate balances and negotiations.

When Christianity entered this landscape, it was, in many ways, a great equaliser. The Christian gospel, with its universal message of love, redemption, and brotherhood, transcended tribal boundaries. The church became a space where members from different tribes could congregate as equals, bound by a shared faith. Over time, many Nagas started identifying themselves primarily as Christians, with their tribal affiliations taking a secondary role. This was a monumental shift in a society where tribal identity was paramount.

However, this transformative process could have been smoother and uniform. As some members of the tribe embraced Christianity, others clung to their ancestral beliefs, viewing the new religion with suspicion. This resulted in divisions within families and villages, as the converted and the non-converted found themselves on opposite ends of a spiritual chasm. In some cases, these divisions were amicable, with each group respecting the other's choices. But in others, tensions flared, leading to misunderstandings, ostracisation, and conflict.

The rift wasn't just internal. Inter-tribal dynamics also evolved in complex ways. Tribes that had converted en masse sometimes viewed non-Christian tribes as 'other,' reinforcing stereotypes of them being 'primitive' or 'backward.' This was an ironic twist, considering that the very essence of Christianity preached inclusion and

acceptance. Furthermore, denominational differences began to emerge with the establishment of churches and missionary activities. As tribes aligned with different Christian denominations, new divisions sprouted based on religious interpretations and practices. Over time, these denominational differences sometimes became as pronounced as the age-old tribal divisions, with each group asserting the superiority of its interpretation of the Christian faith.

While Christianity played a pivotal role in reshaping the socio-cultural fabric of the Naga society, weaving tribes together under a shared spiritual canopy, it also introduced new fault lines. The challenge for the Nagas, as with many indigenous communities worldwide, lies in navigating these complexities and building bridges of understanding that honour their ancient heritage and their adopted faith.

5.2.9 Positive impact of Christianity

- **End of Violent Traditions:** While integral to the Naga way of life, this practice of headhunting was also a significant contributor to inter-tribal tensions. Raids on neighbouring villages, often initiated to take heads, led to cycles of revenge and counter-raids. The need to protect one's village from potential headhunters or to avenge a previous raid meant that tribes were perpetually on edge. Trust between tribes was minimal, and peace treaties were fragile, often collapsing under the weight of old grudges and the lure of headhunting prestige.

Enter Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the Naga hills began witnessing seismic shifts in their cultural landscape. Missionaries, with their teachings of peace, love, and the sanctity of human life, found themselves in direct opposition to the practice of headhunting. To them and the colonial administrators who often backed their endeavours, headhunting was barbaric and needed to be eradicated.

As more Nagas converted to Christianity, the weight of spiritual convictions began tilting the scales against headhunting. The New Testament's teachings of turning the other cheek, loving one's neighbour, and the inherent value of every human life started resonating with many. The practice, which once defined the might and spirit of the Nagas, began to be seen in a new light, not as a source of pride but as a moral quandary. Moreover, the British colonial administration and, later, the Indian government took administrative and legal measures to discourage and punish headhunting. Such measures further solidified the decline of the practice.

As headhunting waned, so did the reasons for many inter-tribal conflicts. Villages that were once fortified against potential raids started opening up. Former enemies began engaging in dialogue, and inter-tribal marriages, previously unthinkable, became more common over time.

The decline of headhunting, catalysed by the advent of Christianity and enforced by administrative measures, inadvertently paved the way for relative peace in the Naga hills. Tribes that had previously been at loggerheads found common ground in their shared faith. Churches became places of communal gathering, not just for spiritual nourishment but also as venues for inter-tribal dialogue and reconciliation.

In the absence of the constant threat of headhunting raids, tribes started collaborating in areas of mutual interest, such as trade, agriculture, and cultural exchanges. The shared Christian identity also fostered a broader Naga identity, transcending individual tribal affiliations. While differences and occasional conflicts persisted, the scale and intensity were notably reduced. The decline of headhunting, intertwined with the rise of Christianity and external administrative influences, transformed the socio-political dynamics of the Naga hills. From a region marked by inter-tribal warfare and mistrust, it gradually evolved into a more cohesive community bound by shared faith and collective aspiration for peace and progress.

- **Education and Literacy:** The arrival of missionaries in the Naga hills wasn't just a spiritual journey; it heralded an era of educational awakening. Before the missionaries set foot in the region, the Naga tribes had their traditional systems of knowledge dissemination. This typically revolved around oral traditions, where elders and tribe leaders would pass histories, rituals, customs, and life skills to the younger generation through stories, songs, and direct demonstrations. There needed to be a formalised structure for education, and the concept of literacy, as understood in the Western sense, was absent.

However, with the advent of Christianity, the missionary agenda wasn't limited to religious conversions. These missionaries, many of whom hailed from Europe, brought with them a belief in the power of the written word. They understood that for Christianity to take root and their teachings to proliferate, they had to teach the locals to read and write. This realisation led to the establishment of mission schools across the Naga territories.

Often rudimentary in their initial stages, these schools became focal points of villages and towns. Initially, the curriculum was heavily focused on religious studies,

primarily teaching children to read the Bible. But as time progressed, the scope of education broadened. The missionaries introduced subjects like Mathematics, Science, History, and Geography, exposing the Naga students to knowledge beyond their hills, opening up vistas about a world they had never known.

One of the most significant impacts of these mission schools was the rapid increase in literacy rates among the Nagas. As more and more children got educated, the value of literacy started becoming evident to the older generations as well. Seeing the benefits of reading and writing, adults began attending night schools or informal classes set up by missionaries or local teachers.

But the influence of these schools wasn't just academic. They became melting pots of cultural exchange. The Naga students were introduced to Western etiquette, clothing, music, and food. English became a medium of instruction, and over time, it became a bridge language, connecting different Naga tribes and facilitating communication with the outside world.

Increased literacy and education also led to heightened socio-political awareness. Educated Nagas began questioning the practices of both their tribal leaders and the external colonial rulers. In many ways, this sowed the seeds for the later demands for Naga sovereignty and self-rule.

- **Healthcare:** The introduction of Christianity in the Naga hills marked the awakening of a healthcare revolution. Before the missionaries arrived, the Naga tribes primarily depended on traditional medicine. The indigenous healthcare system comprised local herbs, rituals, and shamanistic practices. While these methods had their merits and were effective in treating certain ailments, they also needed to be expanded in scope, especially in the face of epidemics or more complex medical conditions.

With the advent of Christian missions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern healthcare started taking root in the Naga hills. The missionaries, apart from spreading the word of God, felt a moral obligation to improve the general well-being of the communities they served. They recognised that their religious message would resonate more profoundly if they also addressed the immediate physical needs of the population.

Thus, alongside churches and schools, healthcare centres, clinics, and later on, hospitals began to emerge. Initially, these healthcare centres were basic, addressing common ailments and providing first aid. But as time progressed, with more resources and specialised missionaries – many of whom were doctors or had medical training –

the scope of healthcare services expanded. These centres began treating a variety of diseases, providing vaccinations, maternity care, and even surgical procedures.

One of the immediate benefits of these healthcare interventions was the control and reduction of infectious diseases. Malaria, dysentery, and other communicable diseases that had previously claimed many lives began to be managed more effectively. Vaccination drives ensured that children were protected from once-deadly diseases. Maternal and child healthcare programs reduced childbirth-related complications, leading to declining infant and maternal mortality rates.

Moreover, the healthcare education provided by these missions had a lasting impact. Communities were educated about sanitation, nutrition, and personal hygiene. Clean drinking water became a priority, and habits like boiling water before consumption started becoming common. Basic knowledge about first aid, wound care, and disease prevention spread through villages, leading to healthier living conditions.

This transformation in healthcare also resulted in a significant socio-cultural shift. The shamans and traditional healers, who once held significant sway in the Naga society due to their roles as healthcare providers, began to experience a decline in their influence. The tangible benefits of modern medicine made many Nagas trust the clinics more than traditional methods. This transition wasn't without friction, with many traditionalists viewing the new healthcare methods with suspicion and considering them a threat to their age-old practices.

Over time, however, the advantages of modern healthcare have become undeniable. Life expectancy began to rise, and the overall health of the Naga population improved. While traditional medicine still held its place, especially in more remote areas, the narrative had shifted towards a more integrated approach, combining the best of both worlds.

- **Unity and Identity:** The spread of Christianity in the region gradually began to alter this tapestry of divisiveness. One of the fundamental tenets of Christianity is the idea of a universal church – a single body of believers irrespective of their ethnic, racial, or linguistic backgrounds. As more and more Naga tribes embraced Christianity, this concept began to make practical inroads into the socio-cultural fabric of the Naga society.

Missionaries who ventured into the Naga hills were keenly aware of the diverse tribal dynamics. They recognised that while spreading the Christian faith was essential, it was equally crucial to foster unity and cooperation among the tribes. The common

platform of church services, prayer meetings, and Christian festivals started becoming venues where members of different tribes interacted, shared, and began understanding each other's worldviews. Singing hymns, studying the Bible, and praying together acted as powerful binding forces, cutting across tribal lines.

Furthermore, the establishment of Christian schools by the missionaries played a pivotal role in fostering unity. These educational institutions, while imparting formal education, also became melting pots of diverse tribal identities. Children from different tribes studied together, played together, and formed friendships that often lasted a lifetime. Such interactions at a young age played a foundational role in moulding a generation that viewed itself less through the lens of individual tribal identities and more as a unified Naga Christian community.

Moreover, the Christian emphasis on love, forgiveness, and reconciliation resonated deeply with a society scarred by inter-tribal conflicts. The teachings of Christ, which emphasised seeing every individual as a child of God, gradually started diminishing age-old prejudices and biases. As the message of the Gospel spread, inter-tribal marriages, which were previously rare and often frowned upon, began to gain acceptance, further intertwining the fates and futures of various tribes.

However, it's essential to note that this journey towards unity was challenging. Traditionalists, who viewed Christianity as a threat to their ancient customs and traditions, often resisted this growing unification under the Christian banner. But over time, as the benefits of unity became apparent, especially in negotiations with colonial powers and later with the Indian state, the collective identity became a strategic advantage.

- **Social Reforms:** The transformation of the Naga society under the aegis of Christianity is a testament to the enduring influence that religion can have on deep-rooted cultural norms. As Christianity permeated the Naga hills, it became more than just a spiritual path; it began to function as a lens through which the people evaluated, understood, and sometimes reformed their age-old traditions. Many of these traditions, which had been unquestioned for generations, came under scrutiny as they clashed with the new set of moral and ethical standards introduced by Christianity.

Among the most significant impacts of Christian teachings on the Naga culture was the reassessment of rituals and practices that were considered essential components of their identity. Sacrifices, of animals were integral to certain Naga rituals. These practices were believed to appease the spirits, seek blessings for a good harvest, or

cleanse the community of evil. However, with the advent of Christianity and its emphasis on the sanctity of life, the ethics of such sacrifices came under the scanner. Christian doctrine, rooted in the teachings of Christ, places immense value on life and compassion. The concept of Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for humanity's sins became a central narrative, rendering further sacrifices unnecessary and even seen as redundant. Over time, as the acceptance of Christian values grew, there was a discernible decline in these sacrificial rituals.

Additionally, certain other rituals, which might have involved self-harm or extreme forms of penance, were discouraged. Christianity introduced the idea of a loving and forgiving God, contrasting with certain traditional deities' vengeful and demanding nature. As a result, rituals that revolved around appeasing these deities by inflicting harm on oneself or others began to wane.

The older generation, which revered these rituals, sometimes saw Christian values as an affront to their way of life. The tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing a new set of moral standards led to internal conflicts within the community.

But over time, with sustained efforts from church leaders, missionaries, and the growing number of Christian converts, there was a gradual understanding that the essence of Naga culture could be retained without some of its harmful practices. Elements of Naga traditions were integrated into Christian celebrations, creating a unique blend of old and new.

The Nagas' historical journey, inextricably linked with the ascent of Christianity, offers a profound insight into how deeply a religious faith can mould and shape an entire culture. The embrace of Christianity by the Naga people was not just a mere adoption of a new belief system; it was a seismic cultural shift. The practices that once defined the Naga identity, such as headhunting and tattooing, underwent significant transformations. In its wake, the introduction of Christian values brought about modern education, healthcare, and a new moral compass that profoundly influenced societal norms.

However, as with any potent force that brings about change, the consequences were varied and layered. Christianity's introduction was a harbinger of peace, ending inter-tribal animosities and introducing a unifying thread among diverse tribes. It played a pivotal role in advancing socio-economic growth, introducing modern educational methods and healthcare practices, thereby improving the quality of life.

Conversely, the rapid changes and the overshadowing of age-old traditions kindled a debate over the preservation of the unique Naga cultural identity. Could the Nagas retain the essence of their cultural heritage while also integrating the tenets of their newfound faith? This posed a quandary, reflecting the intricate nuances involved when two powerful cultural and spiritual forces intersect.

This transformative journey of the Nagas—shifting from their ancestral beliefs to embracing Christianity—symbolises the delicate balance cultures worldwide strive to achieve. While on the one hand, the new faith brought with it undeniable benefits, the potential erosion of a rich cultural tapestry was the price to pay. This dynamic interplay between the old and the new, the ancestral and the adopted, highlights societies' resilience, ability to adapt, and undying spirit to preserve their essence.

CHAPTER-6

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE NAGAS AND THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

In this Chapter an attempt has been made to conduct a comparative study between the Nagas and the Southeast Asian countries to provide valuable insight into the tattooing traditions and cultural practices of these regions.

6.1 Dayak tribe- Borneo

The Dayak people are indigenous ethnic groups native to the island of Borneo, which is shared by several Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The term "Dayak" means 'interior' or 'inland' person. Dayak is a collective name that encompasses various subgroups with distinct languages, cultures, and traditions. They have a rich cultural heritage and have inhabited the Borneo Island for centuries.

It's important to note that the Dayak people are not a single homogenous tribe; rather, they are a diverse collection of communities, each with its own unique customs, languages, and ways of life. Some of the major Dayak subgroups include the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, Kenyah, and Penan, among others.

Historically, the Dayak people practiced animism and had strong spiritual connections to nature and their surroundings. They were skilled in various traditional crafts such as weaving, carving, and pottery. Additionally, headhunting was a significant cultural practice among some Dayak communities in the past, although this practice has largely ceased in modern times (Authentic Indonesia, n.d)).

6.1.1 Tattooing among the Dayak tribe

Tattoos hold significant cultural and spiritual meanings for many Dayak tribes on the island of Borneo. Tattooing is an ancient practice that has been an integral part of their cultures for centuries. Tattoos among the Dayak people are not merely decorative; they often convey social status, personal achievements, and spiritual beliefs. Different tattoo patterns and designs have specific meanings within Dayak culture. These meanings can vary widely between tribes and communities. Some patterns may symbolize protection, courage, fertility, or other qualities deemed important within the culture.

Traditional Dayak tattooing techniques involve using bamboo sticks or bone needles to manually puncture the skin and apply ink. The process is labor-intensive and requires a high level of skill on the part of the tattoo artist. Designs can vary greatly among different Dayak subgroups. For example, the Iban people are known for their distinctive hand-tapped tattoos, which include intricate geometric patterns and natural motifs. Other Dayak groups have their own unique designs and styles (Tattmag, 2019). Here are some key aspects of Dayak Tattoos:

- I. **Symbolism and Meaning:** Dayak tattoos are rich in symbolism and often depict animals, plants, and other elements of nature that hold spiritual significance. Different motifs represent different attributes, such as strength, protection, fertility, and courage. Tattoos can also commemorate important life events, such as coming of age, marriage, and successful hunts.
- II. **Social Status:** In some Dayak communities, tattoos were used as indicators of social status. Individuals with higher social status or achievements would often have more elaborate and extensive tattoos. This practice helped establish a person's place within the community.
- III. **Spiritual Protection:** Spiritual beliefs and tattooing are closely intertwined aspects of Dayak culture. Tattoos hold significant spiritual and cultural meanings among many Dayak tribes in Borneo. They are not only symbols of beauty and identity but also serve as markers of social status, protection, and connections to the spiritual world. Tattoos are often believed to have spiritual significance and provide protection against malevolent spirits or supernatural forces. The intricate designs were thought to act as a shield, safeguarding the individual from harm. Tattoos can also symbolize a connection to ancestral spirits. The tattoos may be seen as a way to honor and pay homage to the spirits of one's ancestors, seeking their guidance and protection in daily life. Tattoos may be chosen based on the guidance of shamans or spiritual leaders. Shamans may have the knowledge and insight to suggest specific tattoo designs that align with an individual's spiritual needs or aspirations. In some cases, Dayak people believe that tattoos can enhance an individual's spiritual power, making them more attuned to the spirit world and better equipped to navigate life's challenges. Some tattoo designs among the Dayak depict animals, plants, or other elements of nature that hold spiritual significance. These symbols can represent the person's relationship with the natural world and the spirits associated with it.

- IV. **Rites of Passage:** Tattooing is frequently associated with important life events and rites of passage within Dayak communities. These events may include reaching adulthood, marriage, or other significant milestones. The act of receiving a tattoo during these moments is believed to mark the individual's transition and provide spiritual support for their journey.
- V. **Rituals and Ceremonies:** Tattooing was often part of important rituals and ceremonies within Dayak communities. These ceremonies were not only about physical transformation but also spiritual growth and connection.
- VI. **Cultural Revival:** Tattooing is a way of preserving and passing down cultural traditions. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional Dayak tattooing. Efforts to preserve and revive these practices have led to a renewed appreciation for the cultural heritage of the Dayak people. By getting traditional tattoos, individuals help keep their cultural heritage alive and ensure that spiritual beliefs associated with these tattoos are not lost over time.

6.1.2 Headhunting among the Dayak tribe

Headhunting was a traditional practice that was historically associated with several Dayak tribes in Borneo. However, it's important to note that headhunting was not a universal practice across all Dayak communities, and its significance, motivations, and methods varied between different tribes.

Headhunting was practiced by some Dayak tribes as a way to demonstrate bravery, honour, and social status. It was often carried out as part of inter-tribal conflicts, territorial disputes, and revenge-driven confrontations. The practice held deep cultural and spiritual significance in some communities.

In certain Dayak cultures, capturing an enemy's head was believed to capture the enemy's spirit and power. The severed heads were sometimes believed to serve as protectors of the village, bringing security and blessings.

Headhunting was often accompanied by rituals and ceremonies that were performed before and after the act. These rituals were conducted to seek the favour of ancestral spirits, ensure success, and offer gratitude for the victory. Among tribes that practiced headhunting, individuals who had taken heads were often regarded as brave warriors and held higher social status within their communities.

Headhunting, as a ritual practice, played a pivotal role in upholding the collective welfare of the community by guaranteeing both agricultural productivity and communal fertility. From the perspective of both deities and forebears, the act of acquiring fresh heads held significant favour – a favour that merited considerable rewards. To illustrate, the divine entities offered guidance on where to clear and cultivate fields within the forest, safeguarding the rice crops against potential failures. They extended their insight into illnesses and accompanied men during warfare or headhunting expeditions to ensure favourable outcomes. Consequently, headhunting was an established institution seen as a means to maintain equilibrium and serenity within the Dayak universe. Often, an individual's stature within the community hinged on their ability to demonstrate success in headhunting endeavours.

In the perspective of the Iban beliefs, a singular soul inhabits the head, and through the act of acquiring another person's head, this soul is captured along with their societal standing, physical prowess, abilities, and influence. As a result, the veneration of human heads held ritual significance, as the spirits within them were incorporated into the community of the group that acquired them. These spirits were believed to join the group and were called upon to support their captors in various manners.

The practice of headhunting declined with the influence of colonial powers and the spread of modernization. European colonization, Christianity, and changing cultural values led to the abandonment of headhunting by many Dayak communities during the 19th and 20th centuries.

While headhunting is no longer a prevalent practice, some Dayak communities have preserved stories, artefacts', and rituals associated with this practice as part of their cultural heritage. These elements provide insights into their history and traditional way of life.

6.1.3 Tattooing practices associated with headhunting

Tattooing practices associated with headhunting among the Dayak tribes varied depending on the specific tribe, their cultural beliefs, and historical context. While not all Dayak tribes practiced headhunting, for those that did, tattoos often held significant cultural, social, and spiritual meanings.

Tattoos played a pivotal role in signifying participation in the headhunt ritual, with the Iban referring to them as "*pantang*." Within the Kayan group, they tattooed anthropomorphic figures called "*tegulun*" onto their fingers. Although these tattoos symbolized successful headhunting endeavours, they may have also represented offerings to a helper spirit. In the

past, this spirit was appeased through the sacrifice of a slave during the construction of a new longhouse. Besides finger tattoos, other body tattoos were extensive. The chest tattoo of the Dayak tribe showcases the trunk of the immortal and invulnerable Garing tree, flanked by the outstretched wings of a hornbill, a messenger of the Iban war god, Lang Singalang Burong. The Garing tree represents durability, while the hornbill, symbolising prestige, serves as protection against malevolent spirits dwelling in the jungle. Intriguingly, representations of the hornbill (Iban: *tenyalang*) were often carved, propitiated with offerings of pigs and human heads, and mounted on display poles. This was done as it was believed that the spirit of the *tenyalang* could leave its wooden form to weaken the headhunters' spirits in an enemy's longhouse.

The intricate tattoos extending along the arms and shoulders symbolise the leaves of the areca palm, a potent defence against evil spirits. Collectively, these tattoos form a visual camouflage of the creatures and flora inhabiting the jungle domain of the Dayak men. This tattooing served as a form of indelible camouflage against the hostile forces encountered in the jungle, including malevolent spirits and headhunters. In the past, tattoos acted as a crucial means of cohesion, binding the body and its components within a perilous world. This might explain why the Ngaju Dayak proverb states, "the tattooed man is the perfect and sacred man, and only such may receive the perfect tattooing" (Sharon Guynup, 2004).

Here's how tattooing was related to headhunting among some Dayak tribes:

- I. **Symbolism of Tattoos:** Tattoos were often earned through acts of bravery, including headhunting. A warrior who had successfully taken a head or demonstrated valour in battle might earn the right to specific tattoo designs. These tattoos were considered marks of honour, courage, and social status within the tribe.
- II. **Rite of Passage:** The act of taking a head and subsequently receiving a corresponding tattoo could be a rite of passage for young Dayak men. It marked their transition from adolescence to adulthood and from being considered a boy to becoming a respected member of the warrior class.
- III. **Spiritual Protection:** Tattoos were sometimes believed to provide spiritual protection to the warrior who had taken a head. The tattoos were thought to carry the power of the captured spirit and offer a form of defence against malevolent forces.
- IV. **Connection to Ancestors:** In some Dayak cultures, tattoos were believed to connect the warrior with the spirits of their ancestors. The tattoos symbolized a link between

the present and the past, honouring the legacy of previous generations and their bravery.

- V. **Tribal Identity:** Tattoo designs could vary between tribes, reflecting the unique cultural and tribal identities of different Dayak groups. These tattoos not only marked the individual's achievements but also identified their tribal affiliation.
- VI. **Ceremonies and Rituals:** Tattooing ceremonies were often accompanied by rituals that involved the entire community. These rituals were performed to invoke blessings, honour the spirits of ancestors, and ensure the spiritual well-being of the recipient.
- VII. **Narratives of Valour:** Tattoos served as visual narratives of the wearer's bravery and accomplishments. They were a way for warriors to communicate their achievements to others and were often proudly displayed during ceremonies and gatherings.
- VIII. **Community Recognition:** Tattooed individuals were recognized and respected within their communities. Their tattoos and the stories behind them were an integral part of social interactions and helped build their reputation as brave warriors (Tattmag, 2019).

Just as accomplished warriors showcased their achievements through tattoos, women received tattoos as evidence of their accomplishments in fields such as weaving, dancing, and singing. These tattoos also served protective purposes. Weavers adhered to ritual precautions by consulting their spirit helpers before initiating a design, aiming to avoid offending other spirits present in the weaving. The Iban recognized textile work as a hazardous endeavour, referred to as "women's war" (*kayau indu*), and marked it both socially and ritually through tattooing. Among the Kayan group, women received hand-tapped tattoos (*tedek*) on their fingers in diverse patterns. The motif of black spikes extending from knuckles to mid-digits, known as "*song irang*" or shoots of bamboo, connected plant life to fertility. Anthropomorphic designs above the wrists symbolized protective ancestor spirits. Floral symbolism, representing spiritual power and connections, infused all aspects of Dayak culture. Plants were considered akin to living beings, sharing fundamental attributes of life and death with humans. The meticulous care of rice fields (*padi*) by the Iban was rooted in the belief that rice plants embodied the souls of ancestors and provided physical energy when consumed, enhancing the Iban's resilience.

6.2 Chin tribe- Myanmar

The Chin people are an ethnic group residing primarily in the western mountainous regions of Myanmar (Burma). Known for their unique culture, history, and rich diversity, the Chin tribe is comprised of various subgroups, each with its own distinctive customs, languages, and traditions.

The Chin people predominantly inhabit the Chin State, which is located in the western part of Myanmar, sharing borders with India and Bangladesh. The region's challenging terrain has contributed to the preservation of the Chin culture, as it has historically been isolated from other parts of Myanmar.

The Chin tribe is not a monolithic entity; rather, it is a collective term that encompasses various subgroups, each with its own language and identity. These languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The diversity within the Chin tribe is reflected in their distinct languages, clothing, customs, and practices.

The Chin people have a rich cultural heritage that is characterized by traditional music, dance, and art. They are known for their skilled craftsmanship, creating intricate textiles, pottery, and wood carvings. Facial tattoos were once a significant cultural practice among certain Chin subgroups, although this practice has become less common due to societal changes and government policies.

The Chin people have traditionally practiced animism and ancestor worship, attributing spiritual significance to natural elements such as mountains, rivers, and forests. In recent years, Christianity has gained prominence among many Chin communities, with various denominations represented.

The Chin tribe's economy is primarily based on subsistence agriculture, with the cultivation of crops such as rice, millet, and maize. The hilly terrain necessitates terrace farming, a method that helps optimize arable land. Livestock rearing and traditional hunting also contribute to their livelihoods.

The Chin people, like many indigenous groups, have faced challenges in preserving their cultural heritage due to external influences, modernization, and government policies. The suppression of certain cultural practices during Myanmar's military rule posed a threat to the Chin's traditional way of life. However, efforts by both local communities and international organizations have been made to promote and safeguard Chin culture.

In recent decades, economic and political factors have led to migration from the Chin State to other parts of Myanmar and abroad. Some Chin people have sought refuge in

neighbouring countries due to conflicts and persecution, leading to a Chin diaspora community in places like India and Malaysia.

6.2.1 Facial Tattoos among Chin Women

One of the most well-known aspects of Chin culture is the tradition of facial tattoos among women. Different Chin subgroups have their own unique practices, but facial tattoos were historically a common cultural practice among some Chin tribes. The tattoos were used as a form of identity, beauty, and cultural expression.

According to Chin folklore, a Burmese monarch's visit to the region left him captivated by the local women's beauty, leading him to abduct one as his bride. This event sparked a practice among Chin families: tattooing their daughters. This measure was taken to safeguard against similar abductions (Mamta Naik, 2016).

Alternate Chin narratives suggest that the tattoos served both aesthetic and practical purposes. They potentially helped differentiate tribes, reducing the likelihood of intra-tribal abductions. Furthermore, these markings could have been intended to prevent women from being taken by members of other tribes.

A religious angle to the practice is also considered. Since British colonial times, numerous Chin minority groups embraced Christianity, alongside their animist beliefs. Local pastors imparted teachings suggesting that those adorned with tattoos would be deemed worthy of entering heaven.

In essence, Chin traditions surrounding facial tattoos are layered with stories of protection, differentiation, and even spiritual significance, reflecting the intricate tapestry of their cultural heritage.

Among the various Chin tribes, two subgroups are particularly famous for their facial tattoos: the Munn and the Dai. These tattoos often involved intricate geometric patterns, dots, lines, and symbols that were tattooed onto the women's faces. The tattoos were usually started at a young age, often around puberty, and the process could take several years to complete.

The facial tattoos among certain Chin tribes in Myanmar were not only a cultural practice but also a significant symbol of identity and beauty (Dave Stamboulis, 2016).

- I. **Identity and Cultural Significance:** Facial tattoos were more than just decorative patterns; they carried deep cultural and social meanings. They were markers of belonging to a specific Chin tribe and community. Each subgroup had its own distinct tattoo designs, patterns, and meanings that set them apart from other groups. The tattoos were a way to visually identify which tribe or community a woman belonged to. This played a crucial role in maintaining a sense of unity and identity among the various Chin groups.
- II. **Rite of Passage:** The process of receiving facial tattoos was often seen as a rite of passage for young girls transitioning into womanhood. It was a significant event that marked their maturity and readiness for marriage and family life. The tattoos were a symbol of entering into adulthood and taking on the responsibilities that came with it.
- III. **Symbol of Beauty:** In Chin society, the facial tattoos were considered a symbol of beauty. Women with tattoos were seen as more attractive and desirable. The intricate and unique designs were thought to enhance a woman's features and make her stand out. The tattoos were a way for women to showcase their cultural pride and adherence to traditional norms of beauty within their community.
- IV. **Marriage and Social Acceptance:** Men often preferred to marry women with facial tattoos. This preference was rooted in cultural norms and perceptions of beauty. A woman with tattoos was seen as more suitable for marriage because it indicated her commitment to traditional values and cultural practices. It also implied that she was well-prepared to take on the responsibilities of a wife and mother within the Chin society.
- V. **Cultural Preservation:** The practice of facial tattooing also played a role in preserving the Chin cultural heritage. It was a tangible and visible way of passing down cultural traditions from one generation to the next. By continuing the practice, Chin communities aimed to ensure that their unique customs and identities were not lost in the face of outside influences. Facial tattoos among Chin women were deeply rooted in cultural identity, rites of passage, and perceptions of beauty within their society. They were not only a physical adornment but also a reflection of a woman's place within her tribe and community. The tradition of facial tattoos has faded in more recent years due to changing cultural attitudes, increased exposure to modern influences, and governmental efforts to discourage the practice. Many Chin women today choose not to continue this tradition, opting for more contemporary lifestyles and appearances.

6.3 Mentawai tribe- Indonesia

The Mentawai tribe is an indigenous group that resides on the Mentawai Islands, located off the western coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The Mentawai Islands are known for their lush rainforests, diverse wildlife, and unique cultural heritage. The Mentawai people have animistic and shamanistic beliefs. They believe in the presence of spirits in nature, and their lives are deeply intertwined with the spiritual realm. Shamans, known as "*sikerei*," play a vital role in the community by communicating with spirits and maintaining harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. The Mentawai live in traditional houses known as "*uma*." These houses are usually raised on stilts and have distinct architectural features. They serve as communal living spaces for extended families and are designed to withstand the region's environmental challenges. The tribe practices subsistence agriculture, hunting, and gathering. They rely on the rainforest for resources such as sago palm, which is a staple food source. Additionally, traditional hunting methods are employed to catch game.

Mentawai society is organized around clans and extended families. Clan members share resources, provide support, and maintain social cohesion within their communities. Traditional customs and protocols govern interactions within and between clans. Various ceremonies and rituals are an integral part of Mentawai life. These include rituals related to hunting, agriculture, and important life events such as birth, marriage, and death. Ceremonies are often accompanied by music, dance, and traditional chants.

The Mentawai people have a distinct way of life, traditional practices, and a strong connection to their natural environment. The Mentawaians have a belief that they can maintain a close connection with their souls by adorning their bodies. Regardless of gender, those who do not engage in body adornment with elements like beads, flowers, sharpened teeth, and particularly tattoos may lose their attractiveness to their own souls. In these instances, the soul might choose to separate from its human vessel and wander unhindered throughout the body. However, if the soul opts not to return to its original abode, it might opt to retreat to the world of ancestors, signifying that the individual's life must come to an end.

The Mentawai people emphasize the continuous nurturing of their souls as a central principle in their way of life. To achieve this, they engage in permanent body decoration through tattooing, ensuring their souls remain closely connected. Likewise, the pursuits of enjoying good food, music, and dance are regarded as religious practices that bring benefit to the community members and their communal spaces (longhouses or "*uma*"), pleasing not only their souls but also their revered "Grandfather."

In their traditional context, tattooing followed a religious ceremony known as "*punen lepa*." This ritual was conducted to cleanse the village or longhouse from the negative influence of spilled blood. A specialized porch was constructed in front of the *uma* to prevent blood from touching the ground. If any blood did come into contact with the earth, the presence of *Pagele Sabbau* or *Teteu* ("Grandfather") would be invoked, often leading to an ensuing earthquake.

According to myth, *Pagele Sabbau*, the inaugural Mentawai shaman, imparted crucial knowledge to his people, including the art of tattooing. Despite his benevolence, jealousy grew among the people due to his mystical abilities, and they conspired to end his life. They enticed *Teteu* to dig beneath the central post of their first *uma* and then lowered the post onto his head, entrapping him within the earth. In retaliation, *Teteu* exacted his revenge by toppling the *uma* with an earthquake.

To reconcile the tragedy of their history, the Mentawai community initiated human sacrifices for their Grandfather. Traditionally, these rituals took place under the central pole of newly constructed *uma*. While such sacrifices are no longer practiced, the act of shedding blood on the ground is taboo, as it is feared to trigger earthquakes. Thus, when animals like chickens or pigs are offered, their necks are twisted or their bodies are pierced to ensure internal bleeding and avoid contact with the earth.

The Mentawai tribe has a rich cultural heritage that revolves around their spiritual beliefs, social organization, and traditional practices.

6.3.1 Tattooing and Body Decoration

Tattooing is a significant cultural practice among the Mentawai people. Both men and women in the tribe are known for their intricate tattoo designs. Tattoos are considered a form of art, cultural expression, and a rite of passage. Different tattoo designs signify various life stages, accomplishments, and social statuses.

The Mentawai people firmly believe that adorning their bodies with beautiful and comprehensive tattoos pleases their souls, creating a connection that extends even into the afterlife. This conviction is rooted in the notion that their tattoos (referred to as "*titi*") allow them to carry their material prosperity beyond earthly existence. Additionally, these tattoos serve as a means for their ancestors to recognize them in the realm after death. Perhaps most significantly, specific forms of tattooing are held to act as protective shields against malevolent spirits that dwell in the surrounding jungle (Lars Krutak, 2008)

The process of tattoo application is carried out by a designated artisan known as a *sipaniti*, or "man who makes the needle." This practice follows a well-defined timeline, corresponding to various stages in an individual's life. Within the Mentawai community, the opportunity to become a tattoo artist was open to anyone. However, it was only those individuals possessing the necessary skills and aptitude who managed to secure employment in this field. Traditionally, children received their back tattoos around the age of seven, although nowadays this initiation often begins in the mid-teens or may even be skipped altogether. After a waiting period of one to two years, the upper arms and the backs of the hands were adorned. Subsequently, tattooing extended to the upper thighs and legs—traditionally occurring just before marriage—followed by the intricate patterns on the chest and neck. The final phase, typically initiated around the age of forty, involved tattooing the calves, shins, and forearms, marking the culmination of this deeply ingrained cultural tradition.

Tattoos possess the remarkable ability to distinguish individuals based on their regional origins. Notably, the Mentawai possessed the expertise to identify accomplished headhunters of the past through distinctive markings, such as frog tattoos adorning their torsos or shoulders.

In contemporary times, specific regions of Siberut reflect the Mentawai's intricate body tattoo artistry, often portraying the symbolic "Tree of Life" or the revered sago palm. In this symbolism, the upper thigh's stripes emulate the sago's veins and trunk, while elongated dotted lines down the arms embody the fronds' thorny branches. Patterns gracing the hands and ankles may mirror bark or roots, and the chest's curved lines represent the sago flower. According to Mentawai people, this vital "Tree of Life" must be inked onto every shaman, as it embodies an existence entwined with the perpetuity of life. Evidently, the sago palm serves as a pivotal dietary element for the Mentawai people, sustaining not only the community but also their domestic animals.

The tattoos of Mentawai community in Buttui extends beyond the portrayal of the "Tree of Life." For instance, the barbed tattoos adorning their arms symbolize the thorny fronds of the rattan palm. Delicate marks on the inner thighs and tops of men's feet, resembling chicken's feet, are representative of dog's paws—a form of sympathetic magic believed to empower men with swiftness akin to their hunting companions (Lars Krutak 2008)

Intricate chest tattoos (*dudukat*) and wrist tattoos consist of inked beads (*ngalou*), which essentially "tie in" the soul, maintaining its proximity to the body. Similarly, hook-like tattoos on the backs of hands serve a comparable function. These tattoos enhance manual

dexterity, making fishing and hunting more effortless by rendering fingers and hands more skillful. Rosette tattoos on men's shoulders (*sepippurat*) and striking starburst patterns (*gaylan*) on women's shoulders and backs signify the intent for malevolent forces to deflect off their bodies like raindrops on a flower. Significantly, this symbolic protection forms an impenetrable shield—a sanctuary that repels any malevolent influences from approaching those adorned in this manner.

6.4 Atayal tribe- Taiwan

The Atayal tribe is one of the indigenous peoples of Taiwan. They are part of the Austronesian-speaking ethnic groups that have inhabited the island for thousands of years before the arrival of Han Chinese settlers. The Atayal people are known for their distinct culture, language, and traditional way of life.

The Atayal tribe primarily resides in the mountainous regions of northern Taiwan, particularly in areas such as Hsinchu, Miaoli, Taoyuan, and Yilan. The Atayal people have their own language, which is part of the Austronesian language family. This language is known as Atayal (also spelled as "Tayal" or "Tayuan"). However, due to historical and cultural influences, the use of the Atayal language has declined over the years, and Mandarin Chinese is now more commonly spoken among the younger generation. Traditionally, the Atayal people practiced subsistence agriculture, cultivating crops such as millet, taro, and sweet potatoes. They also engaged in hunting, fishing, and gathering to support their dietary needs. Historically, Atayal clothing was woven from natural materials like hemp and was adorned with colorful decorations. Tattoos were also an important aspect of their cultural identity, and they were often used to signify important life events or achievements. The Atayal society was organized into clans, and each clan had its own chief or leader. These leaders were responsible for maintaining order within the community and representing their people in larger societal contexts.

The Atayal people practiced animistic and shamanistic beliefs, where spirits were believed to inhabit natural elements, animals, and ancestors. Rituals and ceremonies were performed to appease these spirits and seek their favor.

6.4.1 Headhunting among the Atayal tribe

The practice of headhunting, a central ritual for various groups including the Atayal, Paiwan, and Saiset, served dual purposes. It not only ensured the fertility of crops and community

through appeasing ancestral spirits and deities but also guaranteed a man's martial success and safe passage into the afterlife. This custom was perceived as utterly indispensable, intricately intertwined with the essence of life and existence itself.

For the Atayal, the achievements attained through headhunting were visibly acknowledged through deliberate chin tattoos sported by warriors. Those headhunters who had secured more than five heads using traditional tools, such as a machete-like knife with a curved blade, might have extended their tattooing to their chests or the backs of their hands. Among the Paiwan community, the belief resided in the notion that the spirits of ancestors inhabited these beheading knives, heirlooms passed down through several tribal generations. However, it's worth noting that the Paiwan did not necessarily receive tattoos upon accomplishing headhunting feats. Instead, the triumphant warrior was identified by wearing a specific type of cap crafted by the tribe's women (Lars Krutak, 2012)

6.4.2 Tattooing among the Atayal tribe

Tattooing has a rich cultural significance among the Atayal tribe of Taiwan. The Atayal tribe is one of the indigenous groups in Taiwan, known for their distinctive traditions, art forms, and cultural practices. Tattooing holds a special place in Atayal culture and has both historical and symbolic importance.

Traditionally, tattooing was an integral part of Atayal society, particularly among women. Tattoos were often seen as a rite of passage, marking important life events such as reaching adulthood, marriage, or even mourning the loss of a loved one. These tattoos were not just decorative; they carried deep spiritual and social meanings within the tribe.

In a broader context, tattooing held significance among the Atayal community as it extended to unmarried boys and girls in their teenage years who could tattoo their foreheads. While women with tattooed foreheads were a distinctive sight, the privilege of adorning tattoos extended to those who demonstrated skill in weaving, encompassing their cheeks and various body parts.

Illustrating this practice, Atayal women skilfully wove exquisite fabrics on looms, concurrently crafting net bags. These bags, were considered as cherished possessions and were employed by husbands engaged in headhunting to carry severed human heads. Intriguingly, these bags held comparable importance to the warriors' beheading knives.

Given this cultural backdrop, it's unsurprising that the Atayal held the belief that only women proficient in weaving, evident through their tattoos, and men who achieved success in headhunting, also marked by tattoos, could traverse the passage to the afterlife unscathed.

The Atayal tattoos were created using traditional methods, which involved using thorns or needles to puncture the skin and applying natural pigments made from plants. The designs often featured intricate patterns and motifs that held specific meanings within their cultural context.

In the past, these tattoos were not only a sign of social status and personal identity but also served as a form of protection. Atayal women believed that these tattoos had the power to ward off evil spirits and bring blessings. The tattoos were often placed on the face, hands, and arms, making them visible and integral parts of their identity.

6.4.3 Facial tattoos

Face tattoos, known as "*ptasan*," hold significant cultural and spiritual importance in the Atayal tradition. Serving as a distinctive emblem of adulthood, these tattoos possess both aesthetic charm and the power to ward off malevolent forces. The Atayal people, embracing their ancestral heritage, view the face tattoo as a reflection of their cherished cultural values. In this age-old practice, men earn the privilege to bear a face tattoo after accomplishing feats such as headhunting or successful hunting endeavours. For women, mastery of weaving stands as a prerequisite before adorning their faces with these intricate marks. The Atayal community holds a profound belief that as a person's spirit transitions from the mortal realm to the realm of ancestral spirits, the facial tattoos serve as a testament to their lineage. In essence, these tattoos carry profound spiritual significance, intertwining the cultural and religious aspects of Atayal life.

The tattoos can grace various parts of the body, including the chest, abdomen, hands, and legs, with the face tattoo taking precedence. Ancestral patterns predominantly feature 3-5 horizontally layered motifs, constructed using vertical lines. Males further enhance their facial tattoos with vertical patterns on their chins, while females grace their cheeks with oblique parallel or intersecting lines.

Facial tattooing holds immense importance within Atayal society, serving as a profound ritual that encapsulates their fundamental principles and cultural ethos. These intricate markings serve as a living embodiment of their core values and philosophical beliefs. The Atayal firmly hold the conviction that these facial tattoos enable the spirits of

their forebears to recognize them, facilitating the departed's journey across the ethereal rainbow bridge in the afterlife.

Within this societal framework, the attainment of facial tattoos is a significant rite of passage, distinctly marking the transition into adulthood. Beyond their aesthetic allure, facial tattoos bear profound implications for women, signifying their attainment of adulthood and upholding their virtue. Consequently, women devoid of such tattoos find themselves barred from the institution of marriage within Atayal tradition (Sylvia Dean, 2020).

Facial tattoos among the Atayal tribe of Taiwan are among the most distinctive and culturally significant forms of traditional body art. These tattoos were primarily worn by Atayal women and played a crucial role in marking various stages of their lives and reflecting their social status, identity, and spirituality.

- I. **Rite of Passage:** Facial tattoos were often a rite of passage for Atayal women, marking their transition from adolescence to adulthood. The process of receiving these tattoos was considered a significant and transformative experience. It signified a girl's readiness for marriage and her entry into adulthood, making her eligible for marriage and childbirth.
- II. **Symbolism and Spiritual Significance:** Atayal facial tattoos were not merely decorative; they were deeply symbolic and held spiritual significance. The designs were believed to represent protective spirits and symbols of strength, which were thought to guard the individual against harm and evil influences. These tattoos were believed to have the power to connect the person to the spiritual world and provide a sense of identity within the tribe.
- III. **Social Status and Identity:** The designs and placement of facial tattoos also conveyed social status and identity within the tribe. The more tattoos a woman had, the higher her social status was perceived to be. Different tattoo patterns and motifs represented different achievements and milestones in a woman's life. They could include designs related to animals, plants, and geometric shapes, each carrying specific meanings.
- IV. **Cultural Heritage and Identity:** Facial tattoos were a crucial aspect of Atayal cultural identity. They set the Atayal women apart from other indigenous groups and were a visual representation of their unique heritage. The tattoos connected individuals to their ancestors and traditions, serving as a reminder of their roots and the history of their tribe.

- V. **Artistic Expression and Craftsmanship:** The process of tattooing itself was a highly skilled and artistic endeavour. Skilled tattoo artists within the tribe would create intricate patterns using traditional tools like thorns and needles. The process required both technical expertise and cultural knowledge to ensure that the tattoos accurately conveyed their intended meanings.

However, it's important to note that the practice of facial tattooing among the Atayal tribe has significantly declined over the years due to factors such as external influences, changing societal norms, and limited knowledge of traditional tattooing techniques. Many factors, including government policies and cultural shifts, have led to a decline in the practice. Despite this decline, efforts are being made to preserve and revive this cultural practice to ensure that the rich heritage and symbolism associated with Atayal facial tattoos are not lost to history.

Efforts have been made to preserve and revive this cultural practice among the Atayal tribe. Some members of the tribe and cultural organizations have been working to document the traditional tattoo designs, techniques, and their meanings. Additionally, there are initiatives to teach younger generations about the cultural significance of these tattoos and their role in preserving Atayal heritage.

6.4.4 Tattoo artist

Tattoo artists within the Atayal culture, referred to as "*patisan*," were predominantly women of virtuous character. This esteemed role was often passed down through maternal inheritance, while some acquired the skill through apprenticeships. Given the scarcity of tattoo artists in specific regions, external artists were occasionally invited to Atayal villages. Typically, the fee for an individual's initial tattoo consisted of a piece of cloth or two strings of beads. However, those who were married or had committed adultery were charged more, sometimes even the equivalent of one or two beaded skirts.

The tattooing process commenced with tattoo artists stencilling their designs onto the skin using a linen thread soaked in black soot. The tattooing instrument resembled a toothbrush, featuring rows of four to sixteen needles (*atok*) attached to a wooden handle measuring around 1.5 cm in diameter and 15 cm in length. Prior to the introduction of iron, thorns from orange or tangerine trees were utilized. The hammer, termed "*totsin*," was employed to drive the tattoo instrument into the skin. This hammer was constructed from a

single piece of wood measuring approximately 2.5 cm in diameter and 17 cm in length. Excess blood was removed using a scraper (*quwar*), crafted from a bent rattan splint bound at both ends with linen thread. Pigment was derived from lampblack (*ihoh*), though occasionally soot from charred pinewood resin was collected and stored in a gourd or small iron container (Lars Krutak, 2012).

Tattooing sessions were conducted in small huts situated away from living quarters. The majority of tattooing took place during winter, as the cold weather was believed to expedite healing and prevent scabbing. Interestingly, scabbing was associated with the client's perceived lack of virtue.

Prior to the operation, the client adhered to various taboos, refraining from sexual relations, consuming animal blood, and wearing red-coloured attire. The auspicious day for tattooing was selected through dream divination by the client's parents. On this day, they observed bird omens and offered blood sacrifices to ancestral spirits to ensure a safe and successful procedure. Bird omens were consulted for various ceremonial occasions, particularly before hunting or war/headhunting campaigns, as specific birds were believed to communicate with ancestral spirits, bestowing fortune in war, health in life, and fertility in agriculture.

Regrettably, the core socio-cultural foundations of the Atayal gradually eroded. Between 1920 and 1935, Japanese authorities executed a widespread program of forced relocation, displacing Taiwanese aborigines from their ancestral lands. This upheaval detrimentally impacted the Atayal, dismantling their social structure based on "*gaya*," where descendants of a common ancestor collaborated in ritual, labour, and other communal endeavours. As families were dispersed across the nation, the collective fabric of "*gaya*" disintegrated, leading to the decline of many other cherished Atayal traditions, including weaving, headhunting, tattooing, and communal land ownership.

6.5 Igorot tribe- Philippines

The Igorot people are an indigenous ethnic group residing in the Philippines, primarily in the Cordillera Administrative Region of the northern part of the country. They have a rich cultural heritage and are known for their unique customs, traditions, and practices.

The term "Igorot" is actually a collective term used to refer to several distinct ethnic groups within the Cordillera region, each with its own language, culture, and traditions. Some of the

major Igorot groups include the Apayao, Ibaloi, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga, Kankanaey and Isneg, among others.

The Ifugao are renowned for their intricate and breathtaking rice terraces carved into the mountainsides. These terraces are not only a feat of engineering but also a testament to the Igorot's sustainable farming practices. Traditional Igorot clothing varies among the different groups, but woven fabrics play a significant role in their attire. The women often wear wrap-around skirts while the men wear loincloths or G-strings called "*wanes*." Igorots have a strong belief in ancestral spirits and engage in various rituals to honor them. These rituals are often associated with agricultural practices, such as planting and harvesting. The Cordillera region is also known for its unique burial customs, such as hanging coffins in cliffs. Igorot music and dance are characterized by rhythmic movements and the use of gongs, bamboo instruments, and other indigenous musical instruments. These performances are often part of their celebrations and rituals. Traditionally, Igorot societies were organized into *barangays* (villages) governed by a leader called a "*Punong Barangay*." The *barangays* were further divided into clans, and kinship played a significant role in their social structure. Like many indigenous groups, the Igorot people faced challenges during the colonial period when the Philippines was under Spanish and American rule. Modernization and urbanization have also impacted their way of life, leading to changes in their traditional practices and values.

6.5.1 Headhunting among the Igorot tribe

Headhunting was a practice that historically existed among various indigenous groups in the Philippines, including some Igorot tribes. It's important to note that headhunting was not a universal practice among all Igorot groups and was more prevalent in certain regions and communities. The practice of headhunting had cultural, social, and even spiritual significance within these societies.

Headhunting was often associated with notions of bravery, honour, and power within the community. Warriors who successfully engaged in headhunting were often held in high regard and seen as protectors of their tribe. In some cases, headhunting was linked to spiritual beliefs. Some Igorot groups believed that the heads of enemies contained powerful spirits that could be harnessed for protection or to ensure a successful harvest. The act of headhunting was seen as a way to capture and control these spirits. The process of headhunting involved tracking and ambushing enemies from rival tribes. Once a head was taken, it was often

brought back to the village as a trophy and as evidence of the warrior's prowess. Rituals and ceremonies would follow to celebrate the victory.

Headhunting was often associated with inter-tribal conflicts and competition for resources or territory. This practice sometimes escalated tensions between different Igorot groups.

Inter-tribal conflicts within the Igorot culture often commenced when a member of one tribe severed the head of an individual from a rival tribe. This act of obtaining a trophy head served as a significant rite of passage into manhood. Another trigger for raids or battles was a tribesman's intention to marry, which could lead to conflict if the other tribe was offended.

To address such situations, the offended tribe had several options. They could immediately initiate war if they were discontented, or they could opt for peaceful negotiations through tribal leaders to seek compensation for their loss. If no agreement was reached, full-scale war would ensue. During this time, all men from both sides would engage in heated battle, initially exchanging insults at the border. Peace remained possible if one side decided to surrender, and an envoy might be dispatched to offer a peace offering, often involving pigs. Acceptance of the gift would restore friendship, but if rejected, war between the tribes became imminent.

When conflict erupted, Igorot warriors entered battle equipped with wooden shields, battle-axes, and three spears. The battle would ebb and flow, with retreats and advances. Spears had the range to be thrown up to 29 feet. As the fight drew closer, warriors would employ their battle-axes and shields for close combat. These battle-axes had a sharp edge for slicing and a pointed end for puncturing. When weaponry was depleted, rocks would serve as improvised weapons until the enemy was injured. As history progressed and firearms were introduced to the Igorot, warfare saw a higher death toll.

Battles varied in intensity, sometimes unfolding rapidly with fierce clashes or lasting an entire day, resulting in numerous trophy heads taken. The heads of fallen enemies were typically severed using battle-axes, often before the enemy was deceased. The heads would be washed in the river by gripping the hair, and the lower jaw was removed before boiling to eliminate flesh. This jaw then became the handle for the victor's ceremonial metal drum called a *gangsa*. An elaborate ceremony followed, during which the victorious warrior earned the right to a head-taking tattoo.

For the Igorot, headhunting held religious significance and was tied to acquiring magical powers. It also aimed to secure bountiful harvests, enhance prosperity, and ensure the tribe's fertility (Silentreed, 2012).

During the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines, efforts were made to suppress practices like headhunting. The Spanish authorities viewed headhunting as barbaric and sought to convert indigenous communities to Christianity, which led to the decline of this practice in some areas. Over time due to various factors including colonial influence, changing social dynamics, and modernization, headhunting gradually disappeared from most Igorot communities. Today, very few instances of headhunting still exist.

6.5.2 Animism

At the core of Igorot religion lies a deep belief in the spirit world, a common thread found among many primitive tribes. The Igorot people held a strong belief in the *Anito*, spirits of the deceased that held sway over all aspects of life, encompassing both benevolence and malevolence, as well as the forces of life and death.

Throughout an Igorot person's life, there existed a spirit known as "*tako*," which represented the living individual's soul. This spirit would occasionally depart the body, venturing into the realm of the spirit world to bring back knowledge through dreams and visions. Upon death, the spirit acquired a new name and continued its existence in a form invisible to human sight, yet maintaining the appearance it had during life. In this realm of spirits, the cycle of existence continued, with individuals striving to placate the spirits until they joined the more potent and numerous spirits, acquiring their powers.

The spiritual embodiment of the human body was referred to as "*Limum*." *Limum* manifested at times in communities and habitations, its presence considered harmless. Although the term "*Limum*" might be translated as "ghost" in English, it did not carry the negative connotations often associated with that word.

An *Anito*, upon passing or undergoing a transformation, could become a serpent. To honour this belief, the Igorot refrained from killing snakes, except when their presence became intrusive. Through dreams, the dreamer obtained detailed insights into the *Anito* world, witnessing spirits of varied statuses—rich and poor, young and old—along the spectrum of existence, from birth and marriage to old age and death. Familiarity with the dwelling places of specific ancestral *Anito* was common, as some ancestors were known to inhabit particular locations, attracting their descendants.

Ancestral *Anito* were invoked in specific ceremonies to safeguard living descendants from malevolent spirits. Naming children after ancestors was a practice that not only honoured lineage but also provided additional protection.

The "*Pinteng*" held the specific responsibility for the death of individuals whose lives were claimed in head-taking. *Pinteng* influenced the thoughts of those engaged in successful headhunting, also overseeing the brutalities of warfare. This spirit enacted justice for those who unlawfully killed younger tribal members—an act considered highly forbidden within their culture.

6.5.3 Tattooing among the Igorot tribe

The Igorot have a rich cultural heritage of intricate tattoos, with both men and women adorned in these tattoos on their arms and chests. These tattoos held deep religious and social significance, often earned through accomplishing specific tasks or as a rite of passage.

Among the various Igorot tribes, there were distinctions in tattoo styles and placements. Men showcased their strength as warriors with tattoos on their chests and heads, while women displayed detailed patterns on their arms, wrists, and chests. Boys under 10 years old would receive their first tattoos, typically small markings on the cheek or nose.

Tattoos were often associated with achievements such as headhunting raids or attaining a high rank. The Bontoc Igorot men adorned tattoos that represented the count of human heads they had acquired from headhunting raids. For instance, the *chaklag* tattoo displayed an upward design originating from each nipple, curving outward onto the shoulder and upper arms. This tattoo signified the quantity of recently obtained trophy heads from inter-tribal conflicts and battles.

Among the Kalinga Igorot, their warriors received tattoos on their hands and wrists after achieving their first kill. These tattoos became more intricate and expansive as their collection of trophy heads grew. Notably, an Igorot warrior was only allowed to marry after successfully acquiring their initial trophy head.

Tattoo artists were integral to the process, using wooden handles and needles to apply ink made from tree resin and soot. The tattoos were a dull blackish-blue colour, sometimes with a green cast, and often accompanied by ceremonies to activate their spiritual and magical powers.

Tattooing among the Kalinga tribe is a traditional and deeply significant practice that holds cultural, social, and spiritual importance. The Kalinga tribe is an indigenous group in

the Philippines, specifically in the Cordillera region of Luzon island. Tattooing has been a central aspect of their cultural identity for generations and is often referred to as "*batok*."

Kalinga tattoos are intricate and symbolic, featuring geometric patterns, animals, plants, and other culturally relevant imagery. These tattoos are usually hand-tapped into the skin using thorns, bamboo sticks, and other traditional tools. The process is painstaking and requires both skill and precision. The tattoo designs are unique to each individual and often tell stories about their personal achievements, social status, tribal affiliations, and life experiences (Bill Waytowich 2018).

Tattooing among the Kalinga tribe serves various purposes:

- I. **Rite of Passage:** Tattooing is often a rite of passage for Kalinga individuals, symbolizing their transition from childhood to adulthood. It marks their readiness to take on responsibilities within the community.
- II. **Social Status:** The tattoos are a visual representation of an individual's achievements and social status. The more tattoos one has, the higher their status within the tribe. Tattoos can also indicate a person's marital status, with certain patterns denoting married individuals.
- III. **Connection to Ancestors:** Kalinga tattoos connect individuals to their ancestors and tribal heritage. The patterns and motifs used often carry stories and knowledge that are passed down through generations.
- IV. **Protection and Spiritual Beliefs:** Some Kalinga tattoos are believed to provide protection from spirits, illnesses, and negative energies. The tattoos are seen as a form of spiritual armour that safeguards the individual.
- V. **Tattooing Process:** The tattooing process is a communal and ceremonial event. It involves the participation of not only the person being tattooed but also their family, friends, and community members. The process typically takes several sessions to complete due to the intricate nature of the designs and the traditional hand-tapping technique.
- VI. **Challenges and Preservation:** Despite its cultural significance, the practice of traditional Kalinga tattooing has faced challenges due to modernization, changing societal norms, and the influence of Western culture. Some younger generations have opted not to undergo traditional tattooing, leading to concerns about the preservation of this ancient art form. Efforts are being made by both the Kalinga community and external organizations to preserve and promote traditional tattooing. Tattoo festivals,

workshops, and cultural exchange programs have helped raise awareness about the importance of this practice and its role in maintaining the cultural heritage of the Kalinga tribe.

Tattooing among the Kalinga tribe is a rich and multifaceted practice that reflects their cultural values, social structure, and spiritual beliefs. It serves as a way to connect with their roots, tell stories, and honor their ancestors while facing the challenges posed by modernization and globalization.

6.6 Nagas and Southeast Asian Tribes

6.6.1 Nagas and the Igorot tribe

The cultural tapestry of Southeast Asia is a vibrant mix of indigenous practices, art forms, and beliefs. Among the diverse groups that have significantly contributed to this rich heritage are the Naga tribes of Northeast India and the Igorot tribes of the Philippine highlands. These geographically distant groups would have little in common. However, upon closer examination, there is a striking resonance, especially regarding the intricate art of tattooing and the associated beliefs. For both the Naga and the Igorot tribes, tattoos aren't just ornamental. They often serve as badges of honour. For the Nagas, a young warrior's first tattoo was earned after he had taken an enemy's head. Similarly, among the Igorots, tattoos were traditionally symbols of bravery for the men, indicating their prowess in battle or headhunting.

In both cultures, tattoos often symbolize rites of passage. Among the Nagas, various patterns signified different achievements or stages in life, such as adulthood, or prowess in hunting or warfare. The Igorots have similar rites where tattoos are reflective of one's age, social status, or specific milestones. Both Naga and Igorot tattoos feature a heavy use of geometric patterns, including lines, dots, and shapes. These patterns are not random. They often carry deep cultural and symbolic meanings, encapsulating the traditions and stories of the respective tribes.

For both tribes, tattoos are more than skin deep. They are believed to have the power of spiritual protection. The Nagas believe tattoos can protect from evil spirits and ensure safe passage to the afterlife. The Igorots share this sentiment. They believe tattoos protect from evil entities and ensure the wearer's health and well-being.

A tattoo in the Naga and Igorot cultures is a powerful identity marker. It signifies which tribe or clan one belongs to and often provides information about one's lineage, achievements, or status. Such markings instil a sense of belonging and community among tribe members.

There is a profound reverence for ancestors in both the Naga and Igorot cultures. Tattoos are seen as a bridge to these ancestors. The act of tattooing is not just a physical process but a deeply spiritual one, connecting the wearer to generations past. By preserving the art and patterns passed down through generations, both groups believe they are honouring their ancestors and maintaining a spiritual link to them. For both communities, receiving a tattoo is a significant rite of passage. It's a transition from one phase of life to another. The pain endured during the tattooing process is seen as a test of strength and endurance, forging character and resilience.

Both the Naga and Igorot tribes use traditional methods of tattooing. While the tools may differ, the essence remains the same. The act is deeply ritualistic, often accompanied by ceremonies, chants, and specific customs to ensure the sanctity of the process.

6.6.2 Nagas and the Dayak tribe of Borneo

Southeast Asia, with its dense rainforests, sprawling mountains, and vibrant cultures, has been a cradle for numerous indigenous tribes, each with its unique identity and traditions. Among these tribes, the Naga of Northeast India and the Dayak of Borneo stand out for their intricate tattoo art and the deeply spiritual beliefs underpinning these designs. Although separated by vast geographical expanses, these two tribes share striking parallels in their tattooing practices and associated beliefs.

For both the Naga and the Dayak tribes, tattoos are far from merely aesthetic. They are living testimonies of personal achievements and bravery. In the Naga culture, a young warrior often received his first tattoo after showcasing valor in battle, sometimes after taking an enemy's head. Similarly, among the Dayak, tattoos, especially for men, were symbols of their bravery, indicating their success in headhunting or other feats.

Tattoos are often used by both tribes to mark significant milestones in an individual's life. For the Nagas, different patterns or placements can indicate transitions like coming of age, achievements in hunting or warfare, or even marital status. The Dayak too have specific designs or symbols to mark rites of passage, like puberty, marriage, or childbirth.

The artistry of both Naga and Dayak tattoos heavily incorporates geometric designs - lines, dots, and abstract shapes, each with its symbolic meaning. Moreover, both cultures also

derive inspiration from nature. For instance, Dayak tattoos might feature the hornbill or the dog dragon, while Naga designs can incorporate elements from their surrounding landscapes. Both the Naga and Dayak communities deeply believe in the spiritual potency of tattoos. For them, tattoos aren't just designs on the skin; they are powerful talismans. The Nagas believe that tattoos can ward off evil spirits and ensure a smoother journey to the afterlife. The Dayak also view tattoos as protective shields, safeguarding the wearer from malevolent spirits and bringing blessings from benevolent ones.

Tattoos, in both cultures, are a robust marker of identity. They signify not just individual achievements but also clan affiliations, lineage, and ancestry. By looking at a person's tattoos, one can often discern their tribe, familial background, and even personal stories. These markings, thus, foster a profound sense of community and belonging among tribe members. Ancestor worship is integral to both the Naga and Dayak cultures. Tattoos often serve as a tangible connection to ancestors, a way of honoring them and seeking their blessings. This reverence for ancestors, transcribed onto the body in the form of tattoos, symbolises the living individual's bond with those who came before them.

Receiving a tattoo in both tribes isn't a casual affair. It's deeply ritualistic, filled with ceremonies, chants, and customs. The process isn't just about enduring physical pain; it's a spiritual journey, marking transitions and seeking blessings. Despite advances in modern tattooing techniques, both tribes have often clung to traditional methods. The Dayak, for instance, utilize thorns or needles attached to a stick, which is then hit with a mallet to embed the ink. The Nagas too have their indigenous methods, passed down through generations, making the process authentic and unique.

6.6.3 Nagas and the Chin tribe

Southeast Asia is a repository of indigenous cultures, each with its distinct practices, beliefs, and aesthetic expressions. Of these myriad cultures, the Naga tribes from Northeast India and the Chin tribe of Myanmar shine particularly brightly due to their intricate tattoo traditions. Notably, even though these tribes have evolved separately with their unique socio-cultural contexts, they exhibit fascinating parallels in their tattoo art and the beliefs that underline these practices.

For both the Naga and the Chin, tattoos are a reflection of personal valour and societal status. Among the Naga, young warriors often earn their tattoos after showcasing courage in battle. The Chin tribe, especially the women, acquire face tattoos, which once served as a rite

of passage, marking them as part of the community. Tattoos signify significant milestones in life. While Naga men might acquire tattoos marking their bravery in warfare, Naga women might have them to mark adulthood or marital status. Similarly, for the Chin women, facial tattoos were once a rite of passage, indicating the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

The tattoos of both tribes are replete with designs that take inspiration from nature and their environment. Whether it's the intricate geometric patterns favored by the Naga or the spider web designs common among certain Chin women, these motifs are a tribute to their natural surroundings and cosmology. Both the Naga and Chin tribes deeply believe in the protective qualities of tattoos. The Nagas considers them shields against evil spirits and ensuring safe passage to the afterlife. The Chin, too, historically believed that tattoos would ensure protection, with the facial tattoos on women initially serving as a deterrent to invaders and kidnappers.

Tattoos, for both cultures, are powerful markers of identity. They reflect an individual's achievements, their lineage, and the community they belong to. The Chin women's facial tattoos, for example, not only signified their maturity but also established their tribal identity, with different patterns representing different regions. Ancestor veneration is paramount for both the Naga and Chin tribes. Tattoos serve as tangible connections to these ancestors. Wearing these tattoos is not just about personal or communal identity; it's also about honoring the wisdom and traditions of those who came before.

The act of tattooing, for both tribes, is steeped in rituals and customs. It's not just a physical endeavour but a spiritual journey. Amid chants, rituals, and community participation, receiving a tattoo becomes an experience connecting the individual, the tribe, and the divine. Despite modernization, both tribes have, for the most part, retained their traditional tattooing methods. The Chin, for instance, use thorns or bamboo splinters to etch the ink into the skin. The Nagas, too, have time-tested methods handed down through generations, making each tattoo deeply authentic.

6.6.4 Nagas and the Mentawai tribe- Indonesia

The Naga tribes of Northeast India and the Mentawai tribe from the Indonesian archipelago are especially notable for their unique tattooing practices. Despite the geographical and cultural differences between them, these two tribes have woven a fascinating tapestry of tattoo patterns and beliefs that, upon closer examination, share several resonating themes.

Both the Naga and the Mentawai tribes associate tattoos with milestones of bravery and maturity. Among the Naga, young warriors receive tattoos as marks of valor after showcasing exceptional courage, often in battles. On the other hand, in the Mentawai tribe, tattoos, especially for men, symbolize the transition from boyhood to manhood, marking their coming of age and capability to handle responsibilities. In both tribes, tattoos play a vital role in denoting an individual's social status. Among the Nagas, specific tattoo patterns might signify leadership roles or successes in battles. For the Mentawai, extensive tattooing often indicates higher social standing and is particularly revered.

Drawing from their intimate connection with their environments, both tribes integrate motifs from nature into their tattoos. For instance, the Mentawai often incorporate designs inspired by animals, trees, and other elements of their island environment. The Nagas, meanwhile, incorporate symbols influenced by their mountainous landscapes. For both the Naga and the Mentawai, tattoos are not merely for decoration; they are believed to hold spiritual power. The Nagas often see tattoos as safeguards against malevolent spirits and also as guides for the deceased in their journey to the afterlife. Similarly, the Mentawai believe that tattoos harbor protective energies, shielding the wearer from ill-will and misfortunes.

Tattoos serve as potent markers of identity for both tribes. These inked designs are emblematic of the individual's lineage, achievements, and tribal affiliations. In the case of the Mentawai, the act of tattooing is also a communal event, fostering camaraderie and unity among tribe members. Similarly, for the Nagas, tattoos serve as visual narratives, encapsulating tales of valor, heritage, and belonging. Both the Naga and Mentawai tribes have profound respect for their ancestors. Tattoos, in this context, act as a bridge to bygone generations. By donning patterns and symbols that have been passed down through the ages, individuals feel spiritually connected to their predecessors, seeking their blessings and wisdom.

Tattooing, in both cultures, transcends the mere act of inking the skin. It's a profound ritual accompanied by ceremonies, songs, and specific rites. For the Mentawai, the process is deeply spiritual, often propitiated by shamanic rituals. Similarly, the Nagas approach tattooing with reverence, integrating customs and rituals into the process.

Despite the influx of modern tattooing tools, both the Naga and Mentawai tribes predominantly adhere to traditional methods. The Mentawai use thorns or sharpened bone pieces to apply the ink, while the Nagas employ indigenous techniques handed down through generations, ensuring that each tattoo is imbued with authenticity and tradition.

6.6.5 Nagas and the Atayal tribe- Taiwan

Southeast and East Asia are home to a multitude of indigenous tribes, each with its unique traditions and cultural expressions. Among these, the Naga tribes of Northeast India and the Atayal tribe of Taiwan stand out for their deeply rooted tattooing customs. Despite being geographically separated and evolving within different cultural paradigms, these two tribes share striking similarities in their tattooing practices and the beliefs that underpin them.

Both the Naga and the Atayal tribes regard tattoos as badges of honor. Among the Nagas, warriors earn tattoos as marks of courage, often after proving themselves in battle. The Atayal tribe's tattoos, especially for men, are also indicative of bravery. Historically, a man received tattoos after demonstrating prowess in headhunting.

Tattoos in both tribes play a crucial role in social delineation. They signify one's achievements, age, and role within the community. For the Atayal, facial tattoos denote the transition from childhood to adulthood. Similarly, Naga tattoos can signify a person's accomplishments, age, or standing within the tribe. The close relationship both tribes share with their environment is evident in their tattoo motifs. While the Atayal often have geometric patterns resembling the eyes of the ancestral spirit or motifs inspired by their environment, the Nagas' designs echo the landscapes, flora, and fauna of their homeland.

Tattoos, for both the Naga and Atayal tribes, are more than skin-deep – they are seen as spiritual protectors. The Nagas often view tattoos as shields, guarding them from malevolent spirits. Similarly, the Atayal believe that tattoos please ancestral spirits, ensuring protection in life and a safe passage to the afterlife. For both tribes, tattoos serve as potent visual narratives that express identity and lineage. They're reflective of the individual's heritage, achievements, and community ties. The Atayal's facial tattoos, for instance, not only denote maturity but also serve as an indelible mark of tribal identity, distinguishing them from other groups.

A common thread binding the Naga and Atayal tribes is their profound respect for ancestors. Tattoos act as a connection to these forebears. By bearing these inked symbols, members of both tribes honor traditions, invoke the wisdom of ancestors, and ensure their continued blessings. The act of tattooing is steeped in ritual and reverence in both cultures. For the Atayal, the tattooing process involves specific ceremonies, often led by elders or recognized tattoo artists. The Nagas also approach tattooing with a deep sense of sanctity, often incorporating traditional songs, rituals, and ceremonies into the process. Even with modern tattooing tools and techniques, the Naga and Atayal tribes remain largely anchored to traditional methods. The Atayal use thorns or sharpened bamboo to introduce ink into the

skin, while the Nagas utilize tools and methods that have been handed down through generations, ensuring that each tattoo is a genuine reflection of tradition.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Tattooing practices among the different Naga tribes

In the Naga tribes, the practice of tattooing transcends mere artistic expression, serving as a deeply ingrained cultural tradition, a milestone in life's journey, and a reflection of each tribe's distinct heritage and values. The diverse ways in which these tribes approach tattooing offer a compelling glimpse into their social and cultural norms, highlighting the intricate relationship between tradition, personal identity, and communal bonds.

Tattooing goes beyond mere body art; it is an external representation of a person's internal qualities, achievements, or spiritual state. In the case of Naga tribes, tattoos are deeply symbolic. They might signify the transition from adolescence to adulthood for women, or for men, they might mark accomplishments in battle. Thus, even though the designs are similar, the exact positioning can change the tattoo's meaning, contextualising it within the unique narratives, rites, and ceremonies of each tribe.

Tribal communities have often stood out for their deep-rooted traditions and rituals. This document throws light on the tattooing traditions of these tribal communities: Chang, Phom, Ao, Konyak, Khiamniungan, Yimkhiong, Pochury, Tikhir, Sangtam. These tattooing rites are not mere aesthetic pursuits but deeply embedded symbolic representations of transition, bravery, identity, and spiritual belief.

Across all these tribes, the act of tattooing transcends the physical pain and enters the realm of symbolic endurance. Each tribe, while different in its customs, converges on the significance of tattoos as markers of identity, bravery, transition, and tradition. The physical act of tattooing becomes a gateway to understanding these tribes' deep cultural fabrics.

The art of tattooing among these tribal communities is a rich tapestry woven with stories of growth, bravery, and communal values. Whether it's the Chang tribe's winter rituals, the Phom men's war exploits, the Ao girls' patient journey into adulthood, or the Konyak's grand celebrations, each tells a tale of personal growth set against a backdrop of collective cultural heritage. Far from being mere body art, these tattoos are, in essence, stories etched in ink, resonating the legacy of generations and the promise of many more to come.

The democratisation of the art form in certain tribes is particularly noteworthy. Apart from the Konyaks, tattooing is not confined to specific clans or lineages. Instead, the art is open to anyone with the passion, dedication, and skill to master it. This egalitarian approach starkly contrasts many other traditional practices worldwide, where lineage often dictates who can practice an art form. By making tattooing accessible to all, these tribes are sending a powerful message about the value they place on individual merit and dedication.

Yet, the Konyak tribe, in an intriguing divergence, ties the art of tattooing to royalty. The unique tradition of reserving the role of the tattoo artist solely for the Queen and, subsequently, her daughters adds layers of exclusivity and reverence to the practice. The act of tattooing here is not just about the art itself. Still, it is also deeply symbolic of the tribe's hierarchical structures and the significance of preserving traditions within the royal lineage.

Historically, for the Nagas, tattoos were more than aesthetic embellishments; they were markers of community identity, status, achievements, and rites of passage. The intricate patterns etched on the skin held deep meanings, often representing milestones in an individual's life or societal roles. For women across various Naga tribes, there was a striking similarity in patterns, especially in tattoos found on foreheads and legs. Variations were minimal, suggesting a shared cultural essence. Some have posited that certain patterns might be influenced by practical items like bamboo basket weaving or even shin guards used by men during raids and dances.

For men, especially in tribes like Yimkhiong, the tattooing process serves as a testament to their valour. The esteemed headhunter's tattoo, awarded post-successful raids, is not just a mark but a symbol of unparalleled bravery. This tattoo, demanding the most seasoned artists, becomes a revered badge of honour. However, among the Tikhir, men's tattoos showcase an alternate paradigm. The headhunter tattoo, symbolic of a warrior bringing an enemy's head, becomes a public spectacle. For Konyak men, it's the battlefield that paves their way to the tattoo artist's table. Their facial and chest tattoos echo tales of courage, crafted painstakingly over several days.

Among the Phom tribe, while women receive tattoos to symbolise their transition into adulthood, their counterparts, the men, have a different initiation. Tattoos for Phom men are badges of honor, earned not by age but by brave deeds. The headhunter's tattoo, for instance, is a testament to a man's valor in battle.

Another commonality is the multi-functionality of tattoos. Beyond serving as rites of passage, they also act as markers of social status, spiritual beliefs, and even clan identity, as

seen in the Chang tribe. For instance, in the Konyak tribe, additional tattoos are received by those of elevated social standing, signalling their societal prominence.

Despite these common threads, each tribe and even sub-groups within tribes have their unique variations. For example, the chin tattoo in the Tikhir tribe, known as *Mukhouyak*, features an 'X' with a nested 'x,' which could symbolise the duality of life. In contrast, the Phelungre community within the Sangtam tribe has a complex chin tattoo called *Ninghkangyak*, featuring a large 'X' with a horizontal line and a smaller 'X' inside. These nuanced differences in design and symbolism reflect these communities' rich diversity of cultural expression.

The designs themselves are often intricate and carry deep symbolic meanings, which may be unique to each tribe or share similarities across tribes. For example, the 'X' shape is a recurring motif across several tribes but carries different meanings. In the Tikhir tribe, it may symbolise the balance between tradition and innovation, while in the Konyak tribe, it could signify societal prominence. With their nuanced variations, these recurring motifs offer fascinating insights into shared cultural narratives or ancestral influences.

Moreover, the art form displays regional variances even within the same tribe, as seen in the Khiamniungan tribe, where the village of Noklak has a forehead tattoo known as *Khalao*, similar to the "evil eye" motif of the Chang women. In contrast, Pangsha village offers an alternative take on the traditional chin tattoo, where women exhibit seven vertical lines instead of the conventional three. These regional nuances highlight the tribe's diverse cultural fabric, illustrating how traditions can adapt and evolve even within closely connected communities.

The cultural practice of tattooing across the tribes of Pochury, Sangtam, Yimkhiong, Tikhir, Khiamniungan, Phom, Ao, and Konyak serves as a fascinating lens through which to view their shared values and unique traditions. One of the most striking similarities among these tribes is the barter system employed to compensate tattoo artists. Rather than relying on cash transactions, these communities offer goods that hold significant cultural and practical value, such as rice, pork, and rice beer. This form of compensation is deeply rooted in tradition and respect, serving as a token of gratitude for the artist's skill and expertise.

Another commonality is the emphasis on inclusivity. Each tribe has mechanisms in place to ensure that all members can participate in the ritual of tattooing, regardless of their economic standing. For those who cannot afford the traditional offerings, labour is accepted as an alternative form of compensation. This practice underscores the community's commitment to social cohesion and equal access to cultural traditions.

Another compelling narrative thread is the interconnectedness and camaraderie among these tribes. The spirit of community shines through in instances where a village lacks its resident tattoo artist. Instead of seeing this as an insurmountable challenge, it becomes an opportunity for collaboration. Villages seamlessly invite artists from neighbouring communities, embodying the values of unity, mutual support, and shared resources. Such practices emphasise the idea that tattooing is not an individual or isolated event; it's a communal experience that binds the tribe together.

However, there are also distinct differences that set each tribe apart. For instance, the Phom tribe incorporates a spiritual element by offering a cock as a symbol of sacrifice, respect, and gratitude. This stands in contrast to other tribes, where the focus is more on sustenance and communal values. The Ao tribe, meanwhile, prepares for the tattooing ritual as a rite of passage, saving up resources over time. This long-term preparation highlights the significance of the tattoo as a marker of identity and maturity, a nuance not explicitly mentioned in the practices of the other tribes.

The Konyak community adds another layer of complexity by situating the tattoo artist within the esteemed premises of the Angh's house, thereby elevating the ritual's social and cultural importance. In the Khiamniungan tribe, the focus is on sustaining ancient traditions for future generations, ensuring that the art of tattooing remains alive and valued. Moreover, the act of tattooing in these tribes isn't merely a mechanical process. It's a deeply spiritual and transformative journey. While the Pochury tribe stands out for its simplicity, devoid of preceding rituals, other tribes infuse the process with spiritual, cultural, and historical significance. Each stroke of the needle, each drop of ink, and each pattern etched on the skin carries with it the weight of centuries of tradition. The hands of the tattoo artists, especially the women, become the bridge between the past and the present, ensuring that the tribe's stories, legends, and traditions are indelibly marked on the next generation.

While the act of tattooing serves as a unifying cultural practice among the Naga tribes, each tribe adds its own unique traditions and beliefs to this shared ritual. From the materials and methods used to the social and spiritual significance attached to the tattoos, these practices offer a rich, multi-layered insight into the complex interplay between individual and collective identities in these communities. Therefore, the physical act of tattooing serves as a gateway to understanding the deep cultural fabrics that make each tribe distinct yet interconnected in their shared values and traditions.

7.2 Rites of Passage

One of the most striking similarities across the tribes is the role of tattoos as rites of passage, particularly for women. From the Ao to the Konyak tribes, tattoos serve as milestones that mark significant life stages. For instance, the Ao Naga tribes use tattoos to signify a girl's transition into womanhood. The tattooing process unfolds gradually, much like the slow blossoming of a flower. Starting at puberty, the process is marked by various symbolic rituals like the sacrificing of a pristine rooster. Multiple sessions follow, with the girl's body slowly being adorned with symbolic patterns representing her journey from a child to a woman. Notably, there's a fusion of art and holistic healing, with the tribe emphasizing post-tattooing practices like exposure to morning dew and dietary restrictions. Interestingly, the tribe's beliefs resonate even after death. If a girl's tattoos remain incomplete at her time of departure, the unfinished patterns would be symbolically completed, underscoring the art's profound significance.

Tattoos, for many of Naga tribes, are profound markers of life's transitions. For girls, they denote the journey from childhood to adulthood, evolving from chin and forehead tattoos to more intricate designs over years. It's a testament to the gradual evolution of identity, intertwined with personal growth and cultural norms.

For the Chang tribe, tattooing is a rite of passage marking a girl's entry into womanhood. It's an event orchestrated during the winter, considering the healing benefits of the cooler months and reduced physical activities that might disturb the tattoo. Hygiene is paramount in the process, with the intended area being meticulously cleaned before being punctured with *Jen* thorns. The ink, made from soot of burned pine wood, ensures the tattoo's longevity.

In contrast, in the Phom tribe, tattoos are received around the age of twenty, marking a later stage of maturity. Similarly, in the Pochury tribe, tattoos serve as preconditions for marriage and are believed to have spiritual currency in the afterlife.

The role of community is another area where differences emerge. In the Konyak tribe, the girl's transition to womanhood is celebrated with a grand feast, making it a community event. Here, the girl's transition to womanhood is celebrated with a grand feast. Her first tattoo, '*Chithumhu*', becomes a testament to her maturity. In contrast, the Ao tribe emphasises holistic healing and spiritual beliefs, even extending these beliefs to after death, where unfinished tattoo patterns would be symbolically completed. This universal function of tattoos as rites of passage underscores their importance in the social fabric of these communities.

7.3 The Role of Gender in the Art of Tattooing

A recurring theme in many tribes is women's pivotal role in this art form. In the Pochury, Sangtam, Yimkhiung, Tikhir, Khiamniungan, Chang, Ao, and Konyak tribes, women predominantly dominate the tattooing scene. This choice is not arbitrary; it underscores women's pivotal role in safeguarding the tribe's traditions. These tribes, by entrusting women with the needle and ink, are making a profound statement about their importance as the bearers and preservers of cultural memory.

Interestingly, the Phom tribe introduces a nuanced differentiation. Instead of a female-dominated domain, tattooing is bifurcated based on the recipient's gender, indicating the tribe's deep-rooted beliefs in the sanctity of gender roles. The differentiation between male and female tattoo artists in the Phom tribe isn't merely practical; it's symbolic. By emphasising gender-specific experiences and the spiritual journey that comes with each tattoo, the tribe weaves a rich tapestry of shared experiences and mutual respect. The juxtaposition of women's private tattoo sessions with the public nature of men's sessions sheds light on societal norms and gender dynamics.

The Ao tribe, exemplifies the multi-faceted significance of tattooing. While the act is a rite of passage, it's also a powerful testament to the tribe's gender roles, values, and community connections. The taboo against men even learning the art showcases the distinct cultural spaces men and women occupy in the tribe. The select elderly women, who are revered as master tattoo artists, embody the depth of skill and experience that the art demands, making them vital cultural custodians. "This work is absolutely forbidden for man. A semi-educated Christian Ao, who found the environment of his own village cramping, went off to Calcutta to make his fortune. He soon came back, without the fortune but with ideas, set up as a tattoo artist. His business came to an abrupt end when I found that his instruments consisted chiefly of rusty needles and that he charged Rs 10 per operation and guaranteed no sores. He died of tuberculosis in 1922, but his death was commonly attributed to the fact that he had broken the 'tabu' and done woman's work". (Mills, 2003, p. 31)

The gender-based norms associated with the tattooing process in these tribes are intriguing. For instance, in some tribes, the prohibition of male members from witnessing female tattooing can be interpreted in various ways. It might emphasise respect, ensuring comfort and privacy. Alternatively, it underlines the intimate nature of the event. The act of family members and friends physically and emotionally supporting the person being tattooed elevates the process from a mere individual pain to a collective experience.

7.4 Process of Tattooing

The very procedure of tattooing reveals a balance of artistry and precision. From sketching designs using a bamboo stick dipped in soot, to the rhythmic dance of the needle crafted from thorns, each step is drenched in tradition and meticulousness. Additionally, the inclusion of an apprentice underscores the community's dedication to perpetuating its traditions. This handover of skills is a testament to the tribes' reverence for their past and hope for their future.

The tools used for tattooing, often rudimentary yet effective, are also a reflection of the tribes' ingenuity. Using thorns bound together or plant-based needles showcases a minimalistic yet functional approach, revealing that simplicity can be as effective as modern complexity.

Each tribe, with its unique method of ink preparation, showcases the diverse ways in which natural resources can be harnessed. Pinewood, sap, indigo, and various plant extracts are not merely ingredients but embodiments of nature's gift to these tribes. This knowledge, passed down through generations, represents a sustainable approach to resource use, something modern societies can learn from.

Furthermore, the sanctity and secrecy associated with some of these processes underline the spiritual and ceremonial importance of tattooing. For many tribes, tattoos are not just decorative marks but symbols of identity, rites of passage, or representations of personal and communal histories. By keeping the preparation process sacred and exclusive, the tribes ensure that the art remains pure, both in intent and execution.

The setting for the tattooing process, the *Machang* or an outdoor balcony, serves dual purposes. From a practical viewpoint, it offers optimal lighting and ventilation, prerequisites for a procedure that demands precision. Symbolically, it reinforces the communal aspect of the procedure. The *Machang* transitions into an arena, a space that witnesses the metamorphosis of individuals, be it their journey into adulthood, their testament to bravery, or their celebration of cultural heritage. The tattooing narratives also underscore the shared values of community trust and safety. Tattooing multiple girls in a single session, even in unfamiliar houses, is a testament to the community's cohesion.

Another commonality is the meticulous attention to detail and preparation involved in tattooing. From the Chang tribe's use of *Jen* thorns and soot from burned pine wood to the Ao tribe's symbolic rituals like sacrificing a pristine rooster, each tribe employs specific materials and rituals to ensure the tattoo's longevity and significance. This meticulousness extends to

the choice of setting and timing. Opting to tattoo during winter is not a mere climatic decision but arises from a space of wisdom, underscoring the significance of health, healing, and longevity. The cold weather, with its reduced bacterial activity, ensures minimal risk of infections. This mindful consideration speaks to the larger essence of tattooing – it's not just about aesthetics but also wellbeing.

7.5 Tattoos as a Marker of Identity in Naga Society

The intricate practice of tattooing among the Naga tribes offers invaluable insights into their culture, history, and identity complexities. Importantly, the varying degrees to which different Naga tribes engage in tattooing are not mere idiosyncrasies, but rather, they serve as illustrative markers for broader socio-historical narratives. For instance, tribes such as Angami, Lotha, Sumi, Zeliang, Rengma, and Chakeshang, which refrain from tattooing, share a common point of origin in Khezhakeno. This shared geographical and cultural genesis manifests itself in the form of common migration folktales and, intriguingly, a collective abstention from tattooing practices.

The abstention from tattooing among these tribes can be interpreted as an embodied mnemonic—a cultural indicator that serves to recall their shared history and traditions. Such embodied mnemonics are not uncommon in tribal and indigenous cultures, often serving as a form of non-written historical record or collective memory. In this case, the absence of tattooing functions as a tactile and visible reminder of a shared cultural lineage and common ancestral homeland. It acts as a silent but ever-present archive, facilitating the maintenance of cultural integrity and continuity across generations.

The varied landscape of tattooing practices among the Naga tribes highlights another layer of complexity when we consider tribes like the Aos, who hold Autochthonous origins. In stark contrast to tribes like the Angamis and Lothas, whose abstention from tattooing is correlated with shared migration stories from Khezhakeno, the Aos and other tattooing tribes often trace their lineage to different, specific geographical locations. The Aos, for example, believe they originated from Longtrok, which translates to 'six stones,' a significant site located in the Tuensang district.

This Autochthonous narrative carries considerable weight, as it not only establishes a unique point of origin for the tribe but also lends itself to the practice of tattooing. The tattoos in this context can be viewed as more than mere decorative art; they are, in essence, cultural

imprints that signify a distinct history and worldview. They serve as a visual language, encoding a set of values, beliefs, and historical narratives onto the skin of tribe members.

The Autochthonous narratives among the tattooing tribes contribute to the theory that the migration of Naga tribes was not a singular, unified movement but occurred in multiple phases. Each phase brought along its unique cultural markers, of which tattooing is a significant one. The practice of tattooing may well have been adopted or adapted in line with the distinct phases of migration and settlement, adding another layer of meaning to the already multifaceted Naga culture.

The divergent practices surrounding tattooing among the Naga tribes serve as an invaluable ethnographic resource, providing layers of insights into the complex dynamics of migration, history, and cultural identity. In this context, the tattoos or their absence function as a form of "living text," inscribed not on paper but on the human body itself. It is a text that is continually being written, edited, and interpreted, with each generation potentially adding new layers of meaning.

The tattoos become a living document that can be read to understand not just individual tribal cultures but the broader tapestry of Naga history. Each marking may tell a story about where a person comes from, their social roles, or what rites of passage they have undergone. Thus, they are not merely aesthetic ornaments but identity markers that carry a historical resonance. They serve as a form of cultural cartography that maps out the intricate routes of ancestral migrations.

The absence of tattoos among certain tribes, such as those originating from Khezhakeno, equally provides meaningful data. Here, the lack of tattooing could signify a unified cultural decision, which itself may have roots in specific historical experiences or collective memories tied to their migration folklore.

Further academic inquiry into these variations offers a fertile ground for a multi-disciplinary exploration, inviting scholars from fields as diverse as anthropology, folklore studies, history, archaeology, linguistics and even geography. Such research could illuminate other aspects of socio-cultural practices, including language dialects, ritualistic behaviours, and even conflict resolution methods among the tribes. This could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted realities that make up the Naga tribes, as each custom and practice could be seen as a piece of a larger puzzle that is shaped by the intricate interplay of history, geography, and cultural identity.

7.6 Nagas and South East Asian tribes

The rich tapestry of Southeast Asia's indigenous cultures offers a fascinating study in diversity and similarity, particularly in the realm of tattooing practices. Among the various tribes that have contributed to this vibrant cultural landscape, the Naga tribes of Northeast India stand out for their intricate tattoo art and the deeply spiritual beliefs that underpin these designs. The resonating themes in tattooing practices and associated beliefs among the Naga tribe and various Southeast Asian tribes such as the Igorot, Dayak, Chin, Mentawai, and Atayal.

The Naga tribe shares striking similarities with various Southeast Asian tribes in their tattooing practices and associated beliefs despite geographical and cultural differences. These resonating themes—from the symbolism of tattoos to the beliefs underpinning them—highlight the interconnectedness of indigenous cultures across Southeast Asia and Northeast India. This interconnectedness serves as a testament to the enduring power of tradition and spirituality in shaping cultural expressions like tattooing.

The act of tattooing is deeply ritualistic across these tribes, filled with ceremonies, chants, and customs. Despite advances in modern tattooing techniques, traditional methods are often retained, making each tattoo deeply authentic.

For the Naga, Igorot, Dayak, and Atayal tribes, tattoos serve as badges of honour, often earned after showcasing valour in battle or headhunting. In contrast, the Nagas, Chin and Mentawai tribes associate tattoos with rites of passage, marking transitions like coming of age or marital status. The artistry of Naga tattoos heavily incorporates geometric designs similar to the Igorot, Dayak, and Atayal tribes. Moreover, the Naga, Dayak, and Mentawai tribes also derive inspiration from nature. The belief in the spiritual potency of tattoos is a common thread among the Naga, Igorot, Dayak, Chin, Mentawai, and Atayal tribes. These tattoos are considered powerful talismans that can ward off evil spirits and ensure a smoother journey to the afterlife. Tattoos serve as robust markers of identity across these tribes. They signify not just individual achievements but also clan affiliations, lineage, and ancestry. Ancestor worship is integral to the Naga, Igorot, Dayak, Chin, Mentawai, and Atayal cultures. Tattoos serve as a tangible connection to ancestors, a way of honouring them and seeking their blessings.

7.7 Influence of Christianity

The introduction of Christianity to the Naga tribes in northeastern India during the 19th and early 20th centuries brought about profound changes to the region's long-standing cultural

traditions, notably impacting the indigenous practice of tattooing. This examines the influence of Christianity on Naga's deeply ingrained tattooing culture, outlining the changes, adaptations, and shifts in meaning that emerged in the wake of religious conversion.

For centuries, tattooing was a cornerstone of the Naga culture, symbolising rites of passage, social status, warrior valour, and spiritual beliefs. Various Naga tribes had intricate tattooing traditions, reflecting their deeply ingrained beliefs about identity, the afterlife, and the spirit world. The tattooing patterns were similar but not identical, and the distinct placements served different purposes within each tribe. But with the advent of British colonial rule and the subsequent spread of Christianity, this age-old cultural practice began to decline.

The American missionaries who came to convert the Naga tribes to Christianity initially faced strong resistance. Over time, however, the new faith gained acceptance. Churches were built, local languages were transcribed into the Roman alphabet, and the Bible was translated. As the Naga tribes gradually embraced Christianity, they started to distance themselves from what the new religion considered "pagan" or "heathen" practices, including tattooing.

As Christianity spread, it often supplanted or syncretised indigenous belief systems. The traditional Naga spirituality, which was deeply rooted in nature, spirits, and ancestral worship, faced erosion. Tattooing, once a symbolic representation of a person's spiritual and social status, started to lose its significance. Christianity introduced new symbols and rituals that often conflicted with indigenous practices. The cross replaced traditional symbols, and baptism supplanted native rites of passage.

The new religious doctrine explicitly or implicitly discouraged the practice of tattooing, viewing it as a form of idolatry or spiritual pollution. This led to a decline in traditional tattooing practices, especially among the younger generation who were educated in Christian schools. Many Christian Nagas began to view tattoos as "ungodly," contributing to the stigmatisation and decline of this ancient art form.

The shift in religious belief also impacted gender roles and rituals. For Naga women, tattoos were often associated with rites of passage, fertility, and protection. The adoption of Christian beliefs related to womanhood and modesty added new layers of complexity to the understanding of tattoos. What was once seen as a mark of honour or transition to womanhood came to be viewed through a lens tinted by Christian modesty norms. Similarly, men's warrior tattoos lost their status-enhancing roles as the new faith promoted pacifism and spiritual, rather than physical, valour.

The art of tattooing, a once integral aspect of Naga culture, underwent a significant evolution from the 20th century onward. This change can be broadly categorized into three phases: traditional tattoo practices, the decline post-Christian influence, and the resurgence in modern times. This transformation of tattoo culture among the Nagas reflects broader societal shifts, balancing heritage with modern influences.

However, as with many indigenous practices globally, the advent of Christianity in Naga society led to a decline in traditional tattoos. The religion, bringing with it new sets of beliefs and values, marked a stark shift from traditional practices, considering them 'pagan' or 'un-Christian'. Tattoos, which once held deep cultural significance, were viewed with scepticism, leading to their decline in the community.

7.8 Cultural Diffusion

Cultural diffusion is a phenomenon where cultural beliefs, practices, and symbols spread from one group to another, usually resulting from interactions like trade, migration, or conquest. In the context of the Naga tribes and their tattooing traditions, cultural diffusion serves as a plausible explanation for the striking similarities seen in the tattoo designs across various tribes. These similarities, which are often exact or closely related, suggest a shared cultural or spiritual heritage among the Naga tribes. This not only reflects the interconnectedness of the tribes but also hints at the possibility of a unified set of cultural meanings or interpretations for these markings.

Yet, while the patterns themselves are similar, the distinct placements of these tattoos in each tribe can serve different purposes, often steeped in deeply ingrained societal roles, rites of passage, or spiritual beliefs. For example, a similar tattoo design on the chest in one tribe might be associated with warrior status, while the same design on the leg in another tribe could signify a different form of social or spiritual maturity. The precise localisation of these tattoo placements allows each tribe to maintain its unique identity and interpretation of what would otherwise be a common design. This lends itself to the fascinating paradox of unity within diversity, a hallmark of complex cultural systems.

Furthermore, it is also possible that the placement of these similar or identical designs serves specific functional purposes. For instance, tattoos on the chest of warriors might be more visible and thus more easily recognised during combat or social events, thereby quickly signifying the wearer's prowess or status. In contrast, similar designs placed on less visible

parts of the body in other tribes could serve more esoteric or spiritual functions known only to members of that particular community.

While the notion of cultural diffusion could be considered a "melting pot" of shared traditions and beliefs, it also poses intriguing questions for anthropologists and cultural historians. To what extent have these tattoos and their meanings evolved over time within each tribe? Are these tattoos retaining their original symbolism, or are they being continually reinterpreted in light of new cultural or spiritual developments? Such questions underscore the dynamism inherent in any living tradition as it navigates the complex interplay between preservation and change.

Therefore, the similarities in tattoo designs among the Naga tribes likely point to a form of cultural diffusion rooted in historical interactions and shared heritage. However, the unique placement of these designs in each tribe reveals a layer of cultural complexity. It highlights the tribe-specific meanings, functions, and interpretations contributing to Naga cultural identity's rich tapestry. Understanding the nuanced roles these tattoos play, both shared and unique, offers a window into the complex social and spiritual worlds of the Naga tribes.

7.9 Neo- Naga Tattoo

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a dramatic shift in global culture. The rise of individualism, catalysed by the explosion of global media, meant that the youth were now exposed to diverse cultural symbols and philosophies. For the Nagas, the 80s and 90s saw a tattoo resurgence. This new wave, however, differed vastly from the past. No longer were tattoos solely about community or rites of passage; they had become a medium of self-expression.

The latter half of the 20th century marked a period of immense globalisation. Technologies evolved, borders blurred, and the world grew more interconnected than ever. A direct outcome of this interconnectedness was the permeation of global media into every nook and cranny of the world. For many indigenous communities, such as the Nagas, this meant exposure to a plethora of new symbols, philosophies, and expressions. Music, television, and films became powerful tools that carried with them an ocean of cultural nuances, influencing the thought processes of the Naga youth.

One can hardly underestimate the impact of rock and roll music on global youth culture. Its themes of rebellion, freedom, and individuality resonated profoundly. Television

shows and films, with their array of iconic characters, narratives, and imagery, further molded the psyche of the Naga youth. These global media touchpoints encouraged self-expression, leading many among the youth to embrace tattooing as a medium to etch their contemporary worldviews onto their skin. The canvas of their bodies bore symbols from Hollywood, quotes from rock anthems, and images of globally recognized icons.

However, beneath these modern layers lay an unyielding tether to their roots. There's an adage that states, "You can take a person out of their culture, but you cannot take the culture out of the person." The Nagas, while soaking in the global vibes, felt an intrinsic need to reconnect and reidentify with their ancestral lineage. And so, there arose a fascinating interplay of the global and the local, giving birth to what can be aptly termed as the 'Neo Naga' tattoo style.

Neo Naga tattoos are intriguing in their design philosophy. While they might not mirror the intricate traditional patterns directly, the essence of Naga culture is palpable. Elements familiar to the Nagas, such as shawl motifs symbolising various tribes, designs inspired by the *morungs* (traditional communal houses), and other tribal symbols, found their way into these tattoos. These designs, blended with contemporary aesthetics, resulted in tattoos that were not merely decorative. Instead, they became emblematic symbols of a generation's dual identity—grounded in their indigenous past but with eyes set on the global present (*Plate 195, 196, 197, 198 & 199*).

This Neo Naga tattoo trend isn't isolated. It mirrors a larger global movement. Across continents, from the Maoris in New Zealand to the Celts in Europe, indigenous cultures are experiencing a revival. In an age where homogenisation often threatens local identities, there is a counter-movement where the youth, despite their global outlook, yearn to reconnect with their ancestral stories. They are revitalising traditions, but with a twist, ensuring these practices resonate with the contemporary milieu.

The trajectory of Naga tattoos is a testament to the incredible adaptability and resilience of human cultures. It's a journey from purely traditional symbols, deeply rooted in community and ritual, to modern interpretations influenced by global media. And now, it has come to a beautiful blend of the two, capturing the best of both worlds. This evolution underscores a larger narrative about the fluidity of traditions. As the world changes, traditions don't just fade away; they morph, adapt, and integrate newer elements to stay relevant.

While the waves of globalisation have washed over them, altering some of their practices, the essence remains. The Neo Naga tattoos are a testament to this balance between preservation and evolution. In a world that's in perennial flux, the Nagas have demonstrated

that it's possible to reimagine traditions without compromising their core. Their tattoos, once deeply community-oriented, then individualistic, now beautifully encapsulate a blend of both, ensuring the vibrancy of their rich heritage in today's globalised world.



PLATE 1: Pine Grove



PLATE 2: Traditional *Machang*



PLATE 3



PLATE 4

PLATE 3: An attempt was made to recreate the traditional tattooing process

PLATE 4: Collection of soot after burning pine wood



PLATE 5: Citrus thorn used as a needle for tattooing



PLATE 6: a. A traditional basket used for measuring rice for the payment after tattooing



PLATE 7: *Neplaotao*, wild thorns for tattooing



PLATE 8

PLATE 8: A plant used as a mallet for tattooing (name unknown)



PLATE 9

PLATE 9: Cane thorn used for tattooing

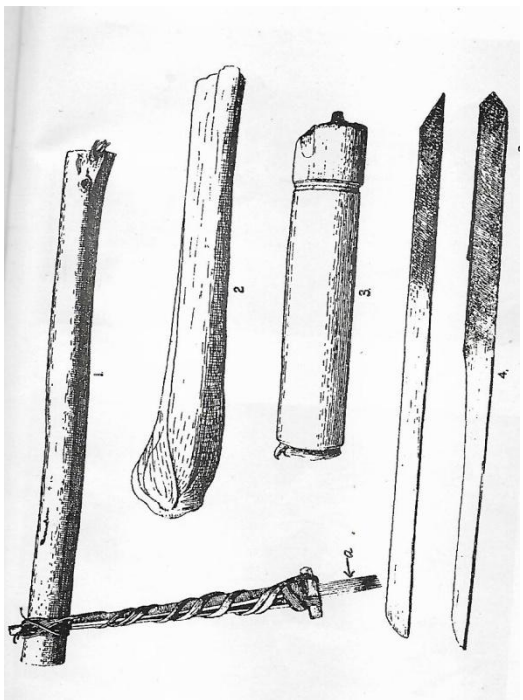


PLATE 10

PLATE 10: A sketch of tattooing tools drawn by J.P. Mills (The Ao Nagas)

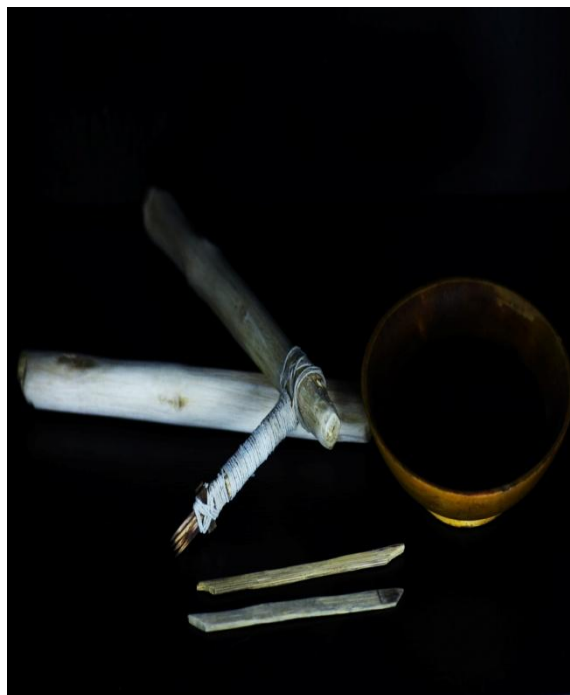


PLATE 11

PLATE 11: A replica of traditional tattooing tools



PLATE 12: A replica of traditional tattooing tools



PLATE 13



PLATE 14

PLATE 13: A similar platform like that of the *Sunglang*

PLATE 14: Jeo tree (*Coccothrinax barbadensis*)



PLATE 15

PLATE 15: An attempt was made to replicate the traditional tattooing process



PLATE 16

PLATE 16: Wild thorn used for tattooing



PLATE 17

PLATE 17: Wild creeper thorn used as a needle



PLATE 18

PLATE 18: Thorn used in tattooing



PLATE 19: Chin tattoo from Changtongya Village



PLATE 20

PLATE 20: Chin tattoo from Changtongya Village



PLATE 21

PLATE 21: Chin tattoo from Changtongya Village



PLATE 22

PLATE 22: Chin tattoo from Chuchuyimlang Village



PLATE 23

PLATE 23: Chin tattoo from Chuchuyimlang Village



PLATE 24

PLATE 24: Chain of lozenges tattoo of the *Chungli* woman



PLATE 25

PLATE 25: Chain of lozenges tattoo from Changtongya Village

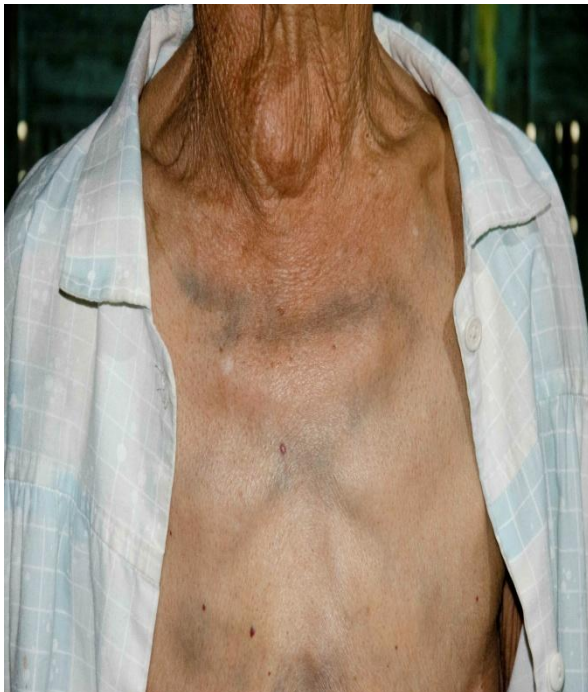


PLATE 26

PLATE 26: Chain of lozenges tattoo from Changtongya Village



PLATE 27

PLATE 27: Chain of lozenges tattoo from Chuchuyimlang Village



PLATE 28: Inverted 'V' tattoo on a Khar woman



PLATE 29

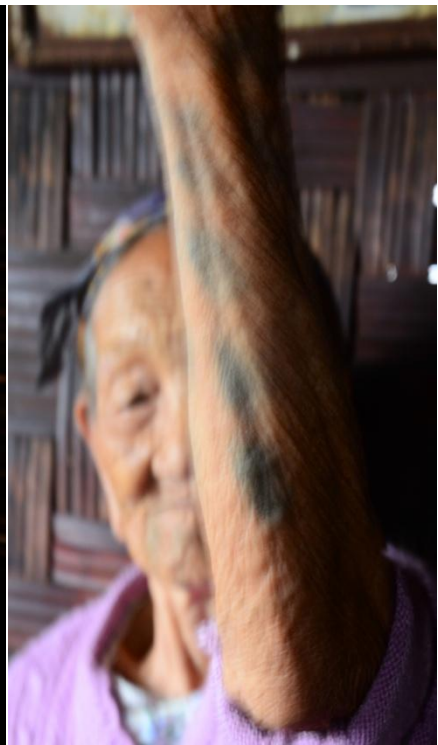


PLATE 30

PLATE 29: Forearm tattoo on an Ungma woman

PLATE 30: Forearm tattoo on an Ungma woman



PLATE 31: Leg tattoo from Changtongya Village



PLATE 32: Leg tattoo from Merangkong Village



PLATE 33: Leg tattoo from Khar Village



PLATE 34: Leg tattoo from Chuchuyimlang Village



PLATE 35: Leg tattoo from Sungratsu Village



PLATE 36: Leg tattoo from Chungtia Village



PLATE 37

PLATE 37: Chin tattoo from Mopungchuket Village



PLATE 38

PLATE 38: Chin tattoo from Sungratsu Village



PLATE 39

PLATE 39: Chin tattoo from Mopungchuket Village



PLATE 40

PLATE 40: A depiction of tattoo in a statue from the museum of Mopungchuket Village



PLATE 41

PLATE 41: Chest tattoo from Mopungchuket Village



PLATE 42

PLATE 42: Chest tattoo from Sungratsu Village

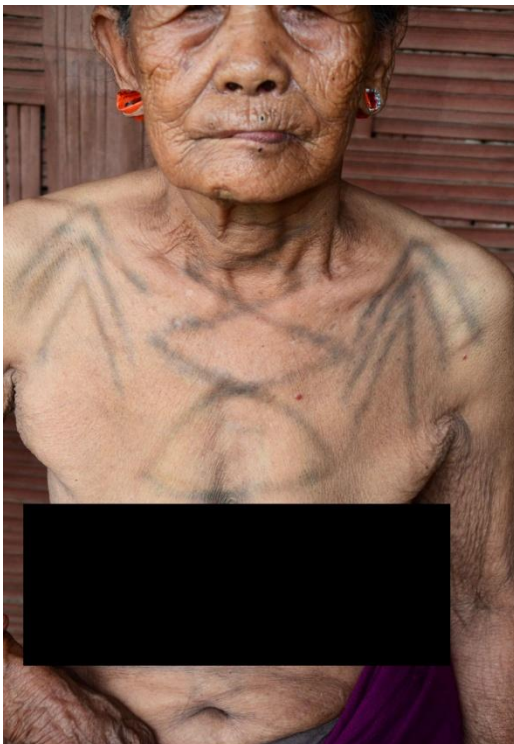


PLATE 43

PLATE 43: Chest tattoo from Khar Village



PLATE 44

PLATE 44: Chest tattoo from Khensa Village



PLATE 45: Leg tattoo from Chungtia Village



PLATE 46: Leg tattoo from Khar Village



PLATE 47: Leg tattoo from Khensa Village



PLATE 48: Leg tattoo from Longkhum Village



PLATE 49: Leg tattoo from Sungratsu Village



PLATE 50: Leg tattoo from Longkhum Village



PLATE 51: A sketch of a Changki woman drawn by Dr. Hutton (The Ao Nagas, J.P. Mills)

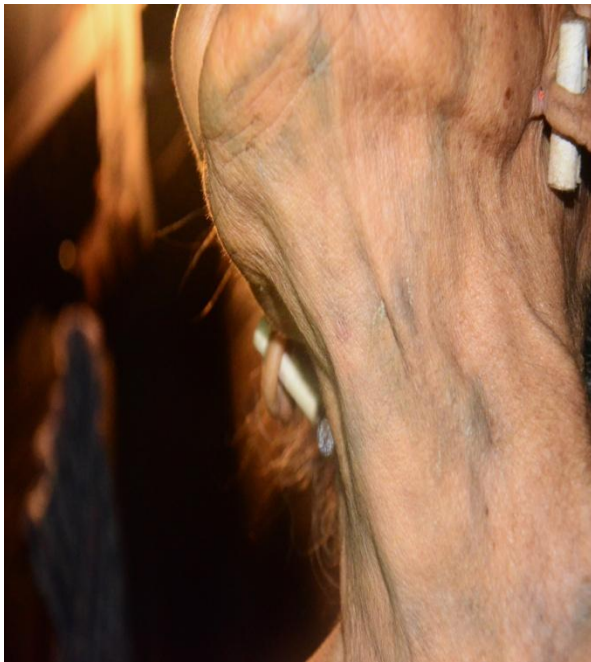


PLATE 54

PLATE 52: Nokpu throat tattoo

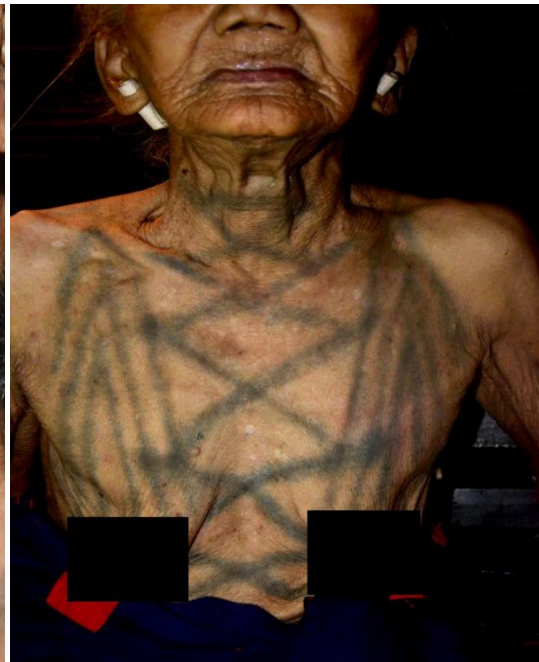


PLATE 53

PLATE 53: A chain of lozenges tattoo on Nokpu woman



PLATE 54

PLATE 54: Back leg tattoo patterns of a Nokpu woman



PLATE 55

PLATE 55: Front leg tattoo of Nokpu woman

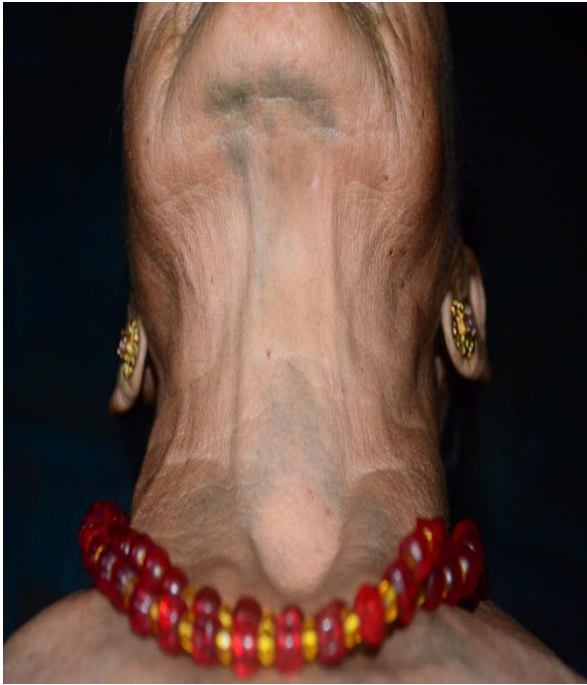


PLATE 56

PLATE 56: Throat tattoo of a Chungtia woman

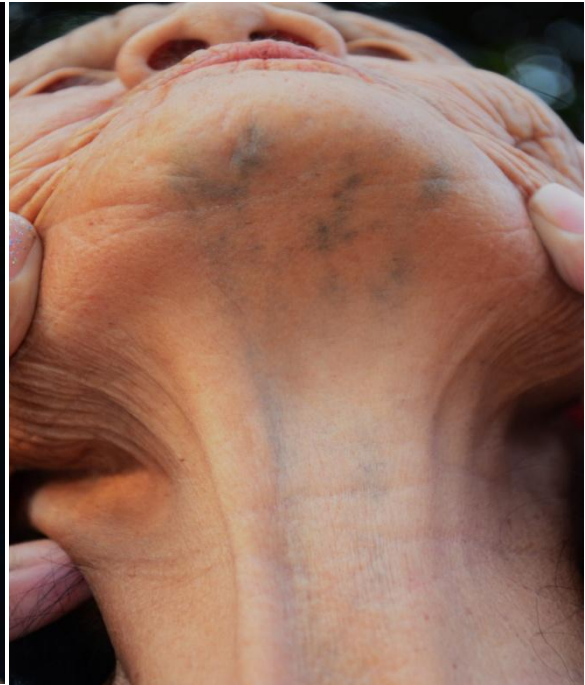


PLATE 57

PLATE 57: Throat tattoo of a Khensa woman



PLATE 58

PLATE 58: Throat tattoo of a Khar woman



PLATE 59

PLATE 59: Throat tattoo of a Khar woman



PLATE 60: Throat tattoo of a Khar woman



PLATE 61

PLATE 61: Singular vertical line starting from the chest to the navel from Chungtia Village



PLATE 62

PLATE 62: 'W' shaped sima pattern of a Changki women found in the Chungtia village



PLATE 63



PLATE 64

PLATE 63: Old village gate of Chuchuyimlang depicting the head hunters motif

PLATE 64: New village gate of Chuchuyimlang depicting the head hunters motif



PLATE 65



PLATE 66

PLATE 65: Village gate of Changki depicting the head hunters motif

PLATE 66: A traditional Ao shield depicting the head hunters motif

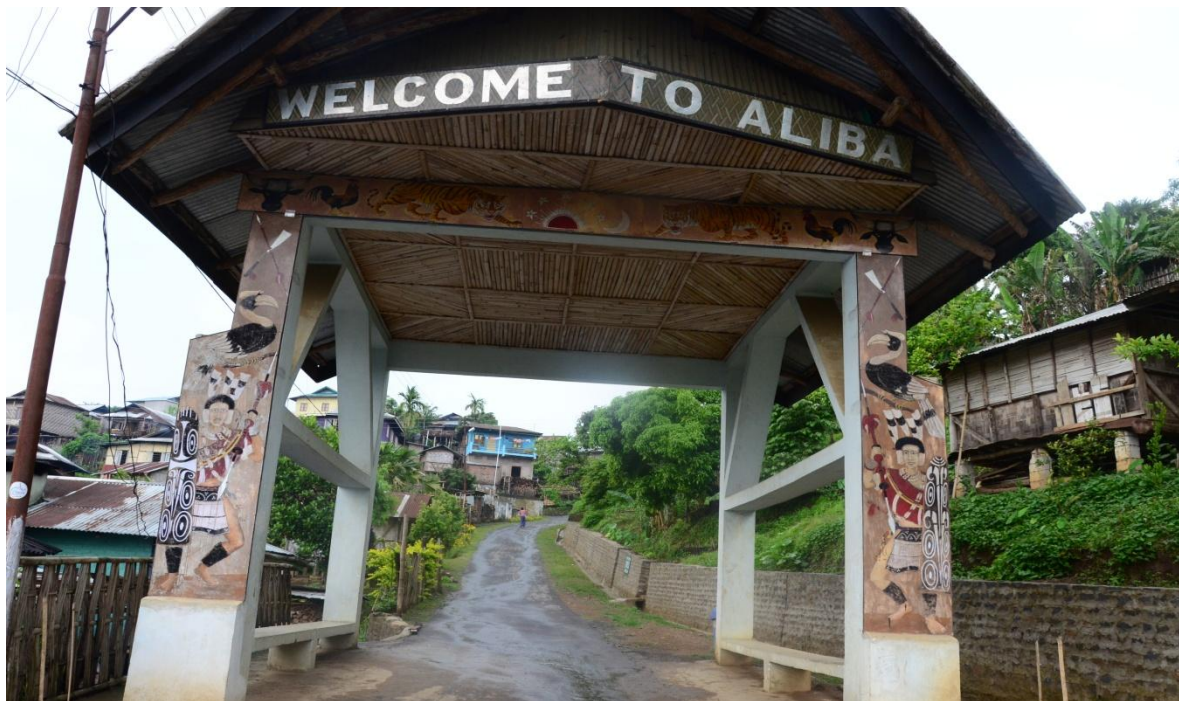


PLATE 67: Village gate of Aliba depicting the warriors



PLATE 68

PLATE 68: A warrior depicted on a village gate with the shield having the motif of head hunters tattoo

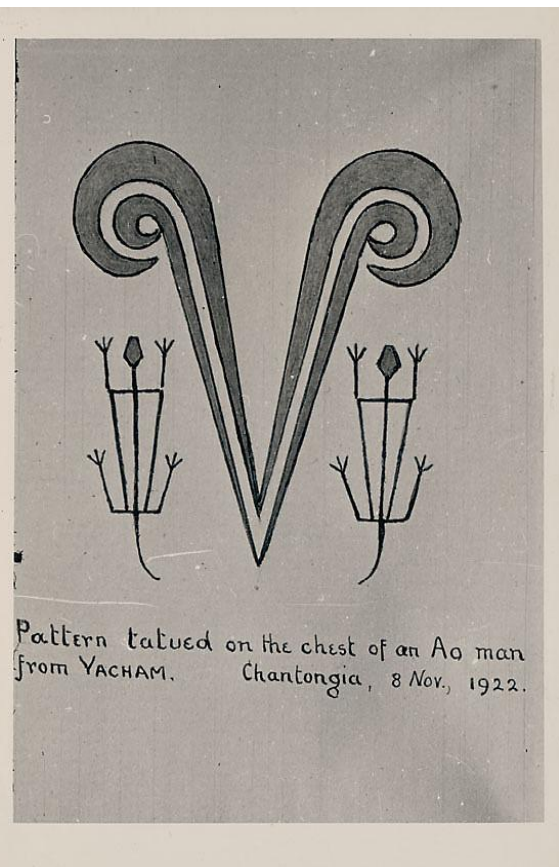


PLATE 69

PLATE 69: A sketch drawn in 1922 by Henry Belfour



PLATE 70: Akhewago men chest tattoo



PLATE 71: Chin and forehead tattoo of Akhewago woman



PLATE 72: Arm tattoo of Akhewago woman

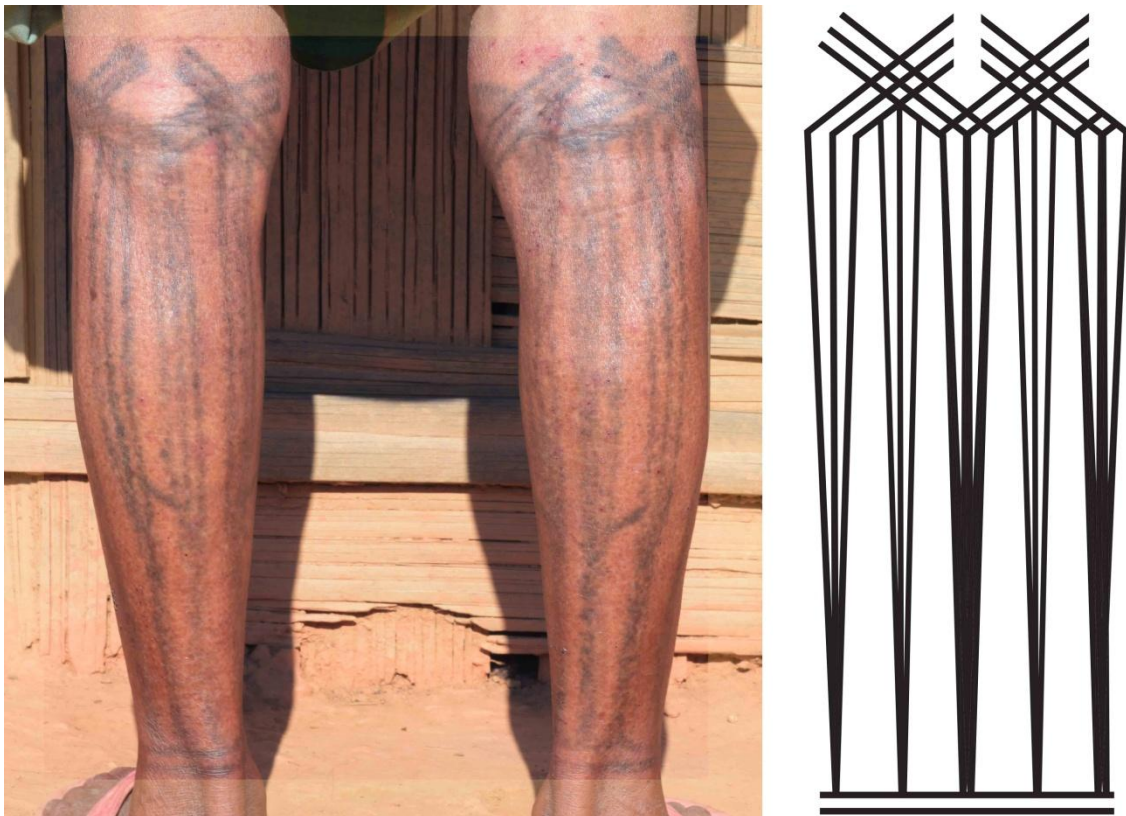


PLATE 73: Leg tattoo of a Akhewago woman

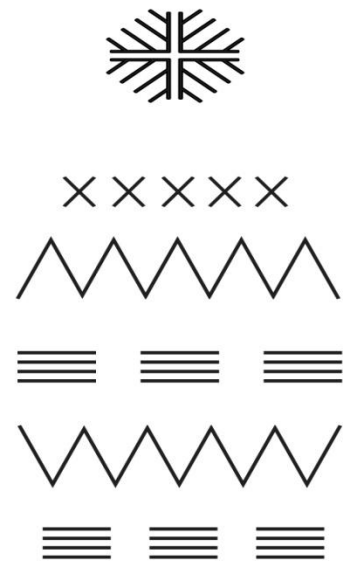


PLATE 74: Arm tattoo of a Laruri woman

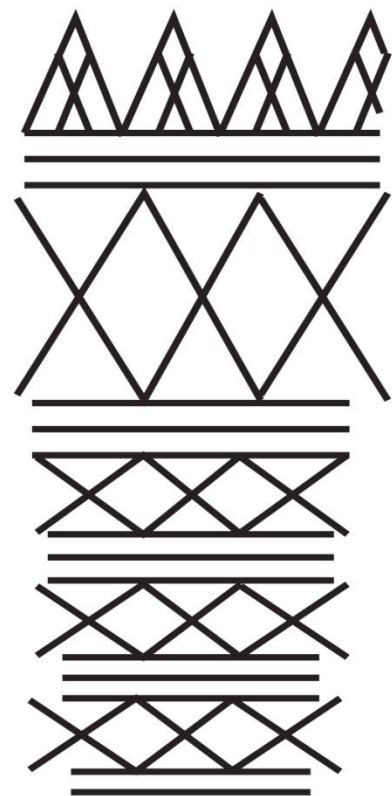


PLATE 75: Leg tattoo of a Laruri woman



PLATE 76: Leg tattoo of a Hutsu woman



PLATE 77: Front and back leg tattoo pattern of a Hutsu woman

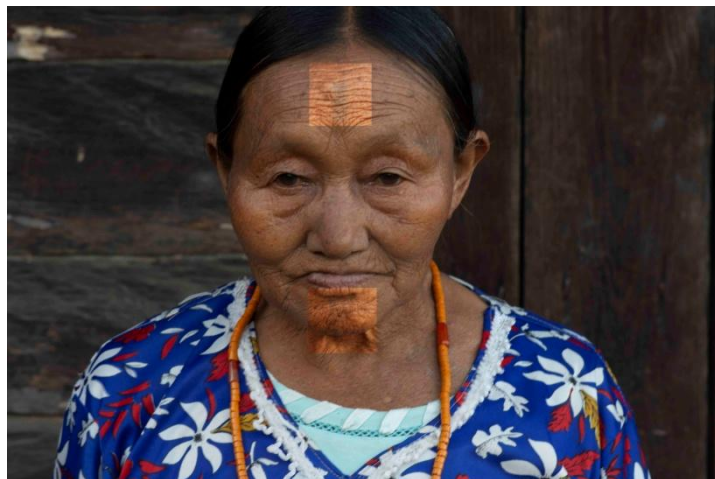


PLATE 78: Chin and forehead tattoo of a Hutsu woman



PLATE 79

PLATE 79: Arm tattoo of a Hutsu woman



PLATE 80

PLATE 80: Arm tattoo of a Hutsu woman



PLATE 81: Both right and left arm tattoo of a Hutsu woman

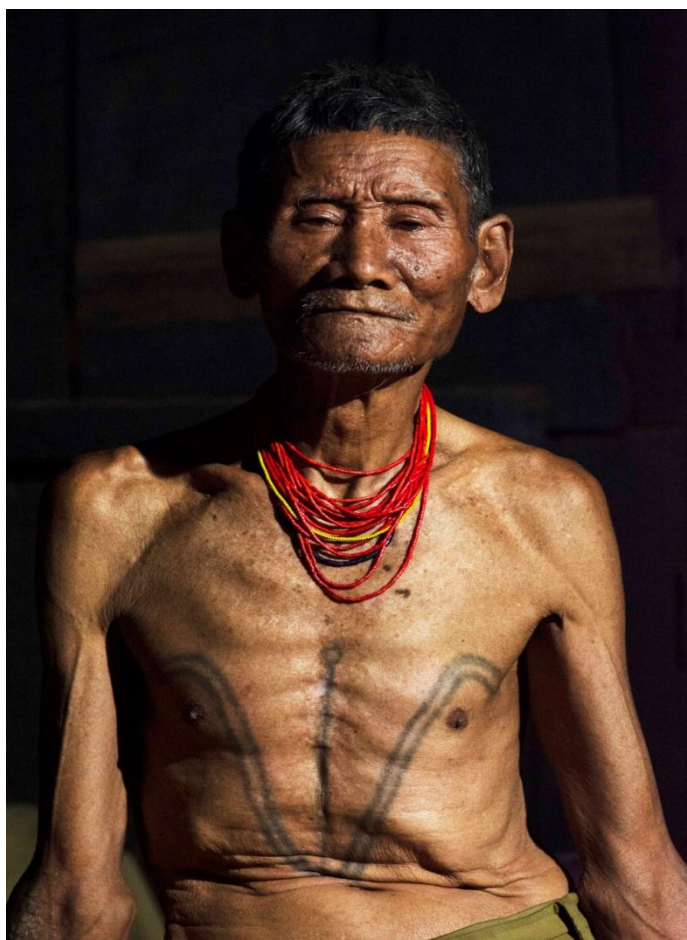


PLATE 82: Phelungre head hunters tattoo

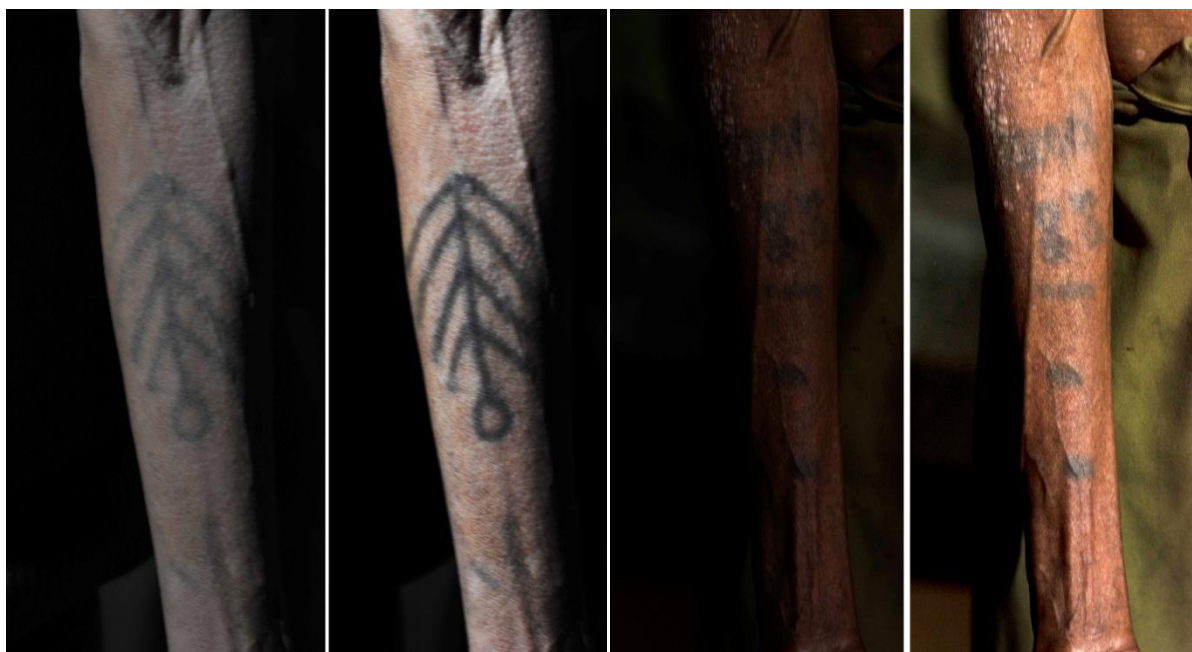


PLATE 83

PLATE 83: Right arm tattoo of a Phelungre man

PLATE 84

PLATE 84: Left arm tattoo of a Phelungre man



PLATE 85: Chin and fore head tattoo of a Phelungre woman



PLATE 86: Leg tattoo pattern of a Phelungre woman



PLATE 87: Arm tattoo pattern of a Phelungre woman

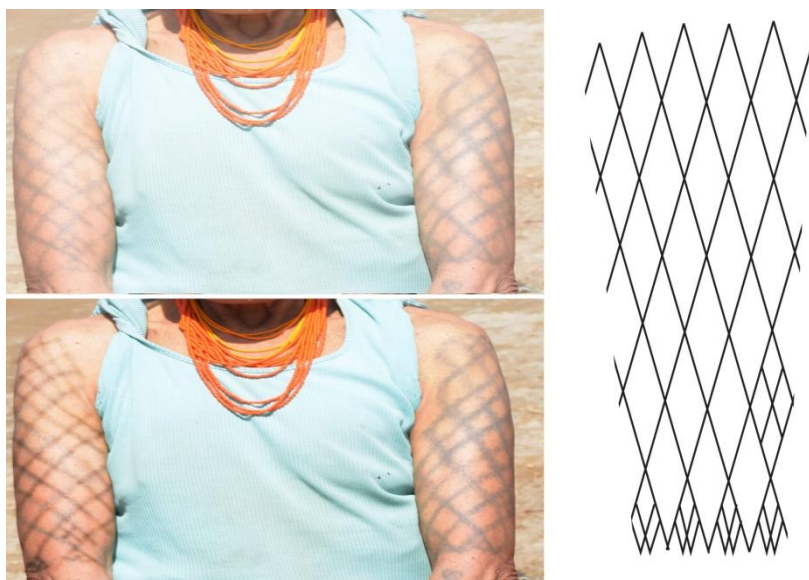


PLATE 88: Arm tattoo pattern of a Phelungre woman

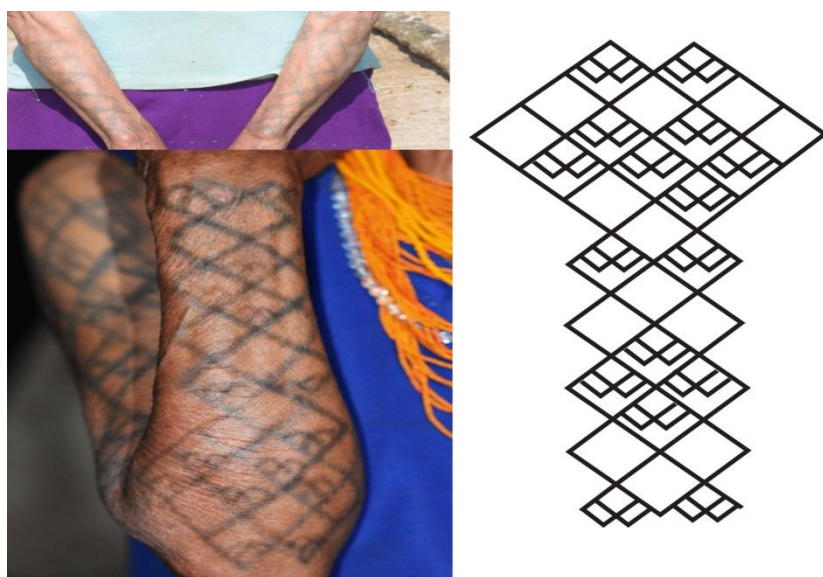


PLATE 89: Forearm tattoo pattern of a Phelungre woman



PLATE 90: Forearm tattoo pattern of a Phelungre woman

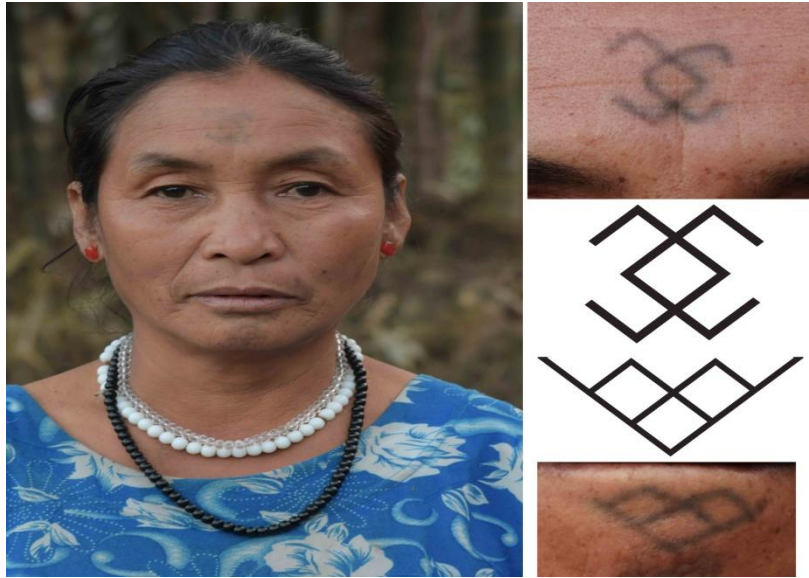


PLATE 91: Chin and forehead tattoo of a women from Kiphire Village

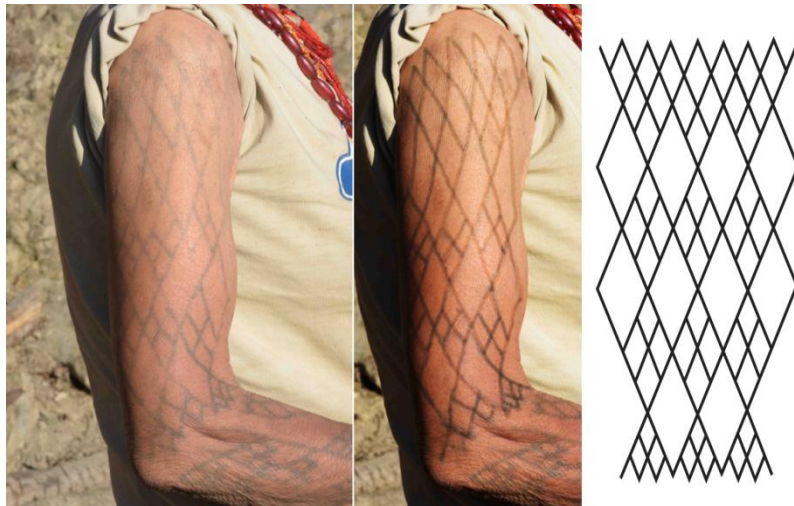


PLATE 92: Upper arm tattoo of a woman from Kiphire Village

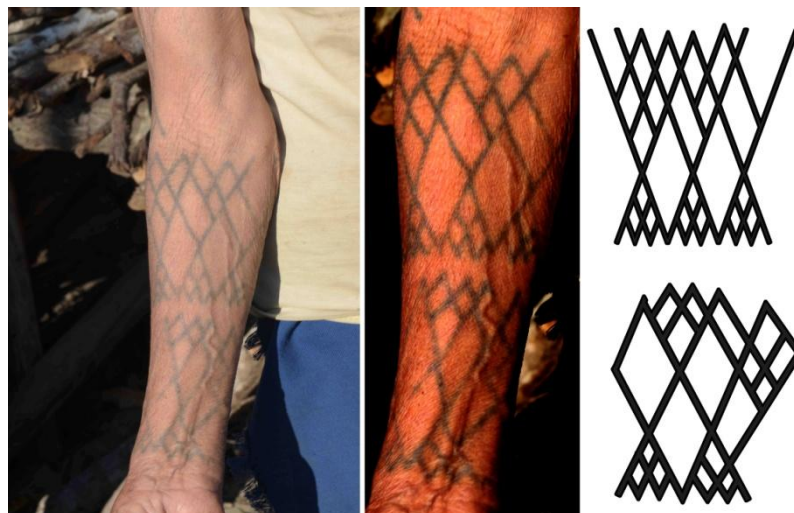


PLATE 93: Forearm tattoo of a woman from Kiphire Village

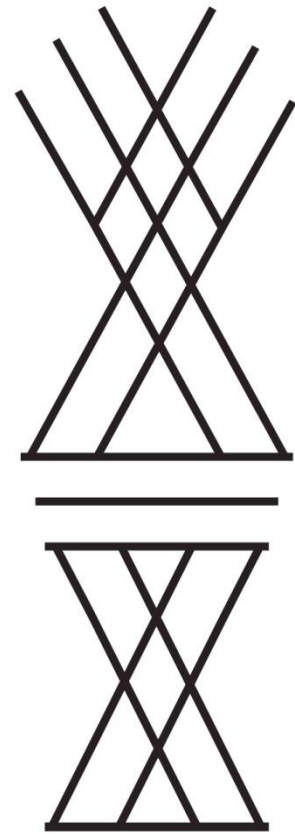


PLATE 94: Leg tattoo of a woman from Kiphire Village

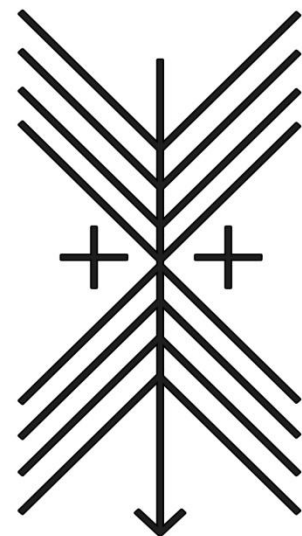


PLATE 95: Rite of passage tattoo of a man from Kiphire Village



PLATE 96

PLATE 97

PLATE 96: Chin and fore head tattoo of a Sanphure Village

PLATE 97: Leg tattoo pattern from Sanphure Village

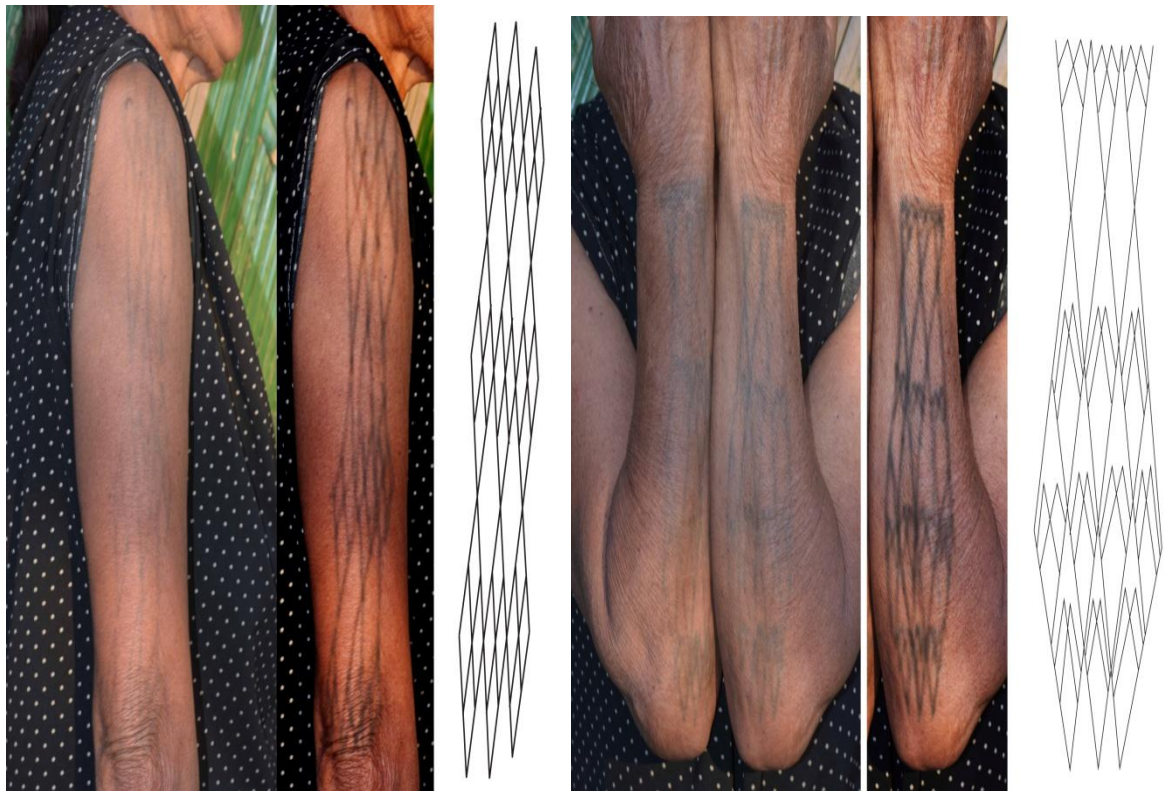


PLATE 98

PLATE 99

PLATE 98: Upper arm tattoo of a Sanphure Village

PLATE 99: Hand tattoo from Sanphure Village



PLATE 100: Forearm tattoo from Sanphure Village



PLATE 101

PLATE 102

PLATE 101: Thigh tattoo of Sanphure Village

PLATE 102: Thigh tattoo of Sanphure Village



PLATE 103

PLATE 103: Forearm tattoo of a Pungro Man



PLATE 104

PLATE 104: Chin and forehead tattoo of Pungro woman



PLATE 105

PLATE 105: Arm tattoo of Pungro woman



PLATE 106

PLATE 106: Leg tattoo pattern of a Pungro woman



PLATE 107

PLATE 107: Forearm tattoo of a Phykyu Village



PLATE 108

PLATE 108: Forearm tattoo of a Phykyu Village



PLATE 109

PLATE 109: Forearm tattoo of a Phykyu Village



PLATE 110

PLATE 110: Forearm tattoo of a Phykyu Village



PLATE 111

PLATE 111: Headhunters tattoo of a Phykyu man.

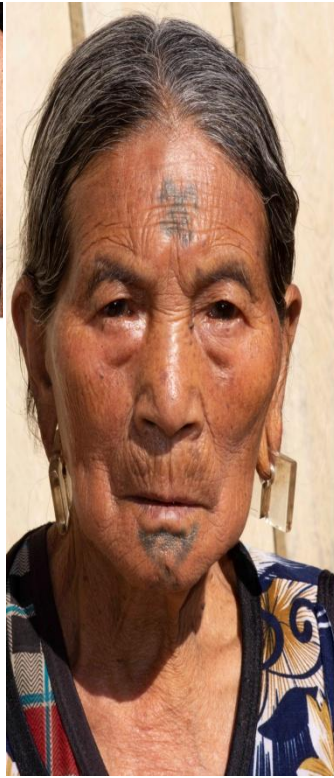


PLATE 112

PLATE 112: Forehead and the Chin tattoo of a Phykyu woman



PLATE 113

PLATE 113: Forehead and the Chin tattoo of a Phykyu woman



PLATE 114

PLATE 114: Hand tattoo of a Phykyu woman



PLATE 115

PLATE 116

PLATE 115: Upper arm tattoo of a Phykyu woman

PLATE 116: Leg tattoo pattern of a Phykyu woman



PLATE 117: Thigh tattoo of a Phykyu woman



PLATE 118

PLATE 118: Forearm tattoo of a man from Shalomi Village



PLATE 119

PLATE 119: Tattoo on the thigh of a Man from Shalomi Village



PLATE 120: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Shalomi Village



PLATE 121

PLATE 121: Upper arm tattoo of a Shalomi Village woman



PLATE 122

PLATE 122: Forearm tattoo of a woman from Shalomi Village



PLATE 123: Leg tattoo pattern on a Shalomi Village woman



PLATE 124: Upper arm and forearm tattoo of a Zanger Village man



PLATE 125

PLATE 126

PLATE 125: Chin and Forehead tattoo on a Zanger woman

PLATE 126: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Zanger Village



PLATE 127: Upper arm and forearm tattoo of a woman from Zanger Village



PLATE 128: Leg tattoo pattern of a Zanger Village woman



PLATE 129

PLATE 130

PLATE 129: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Mimi Village

PLATE 130: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Mimi Village



PLATE 131: Upper arm tattoo of a woman from Mimi Village



PLATE 132

PLATE 132: Hand tattoo of a woman from Mimi Village



PLATE 133

PLATE 133: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Mimi Village



PLATE 134: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Mimi Village



PLATE 135

PLATE 135: Heahdunters tattoo of a man from Zhimkiur Village



PLATE 136

PLATE 136: Forearm tattoo of a man from Zhimkiur Village



PLATE 137: Forearm tattoo of a man from Zhimkiur Village



PLATE 138

PLATE 138: Headhunters tattoo from Kuisam Village



PLATE 139

PLATE 139: Upper arm tattoo of a man from Kuisam Village



PLATE 140

PLATE 140: Forearm tattoo of a man from Kuisam Village



PLATE 141

PLATE 141: Chin and Forehead tattoo of a woman from Phokpur Village



PLATE 142

PLATE 143

PLATE 142: Chin and Forehead tattoo of a woman from Phokpur Village

PLATE 143: Upper arm tattoo of a woman from Phokpur Village



PLATE 144

PLATE 145

PLATE 144: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Phokpur Village

PLATE 145: A Tikhir woman in traditional attire



PLATE 146

PLATE 146: Chang woman tattoo from Tuensang Village



PLATE 147

PLATE 147: Chin and forehead tattoo of a Chang woman



PLATE 148

PLATE 148: Chin and forehead tattoo of a Chang woman



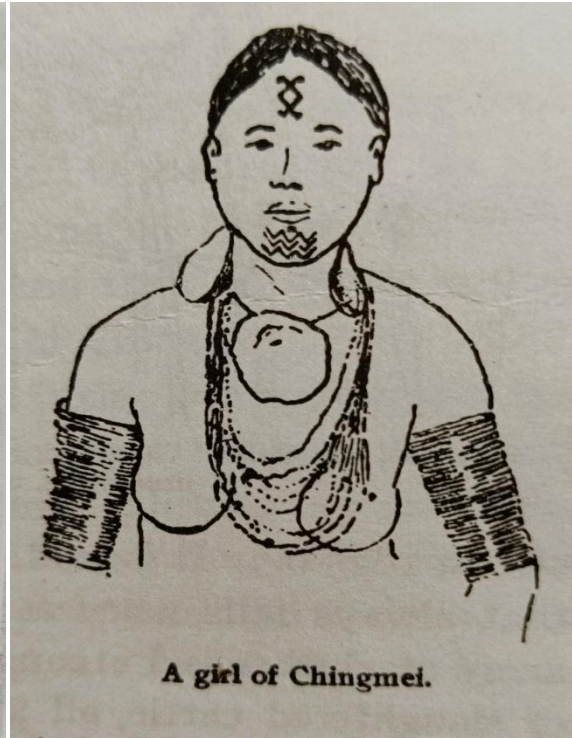
PLATE 149

PLATE 149: Chin and forehead tattoo of a Chang woman



PLATE 150

PLATE 150: Chin and forehead tattoo of a Chang woman photographed by Dr Hutton



A girl of Chingmei.

PLATE 151

PLATE 151: Chingmei tattoo of a woman sketched by Dr Hutton.

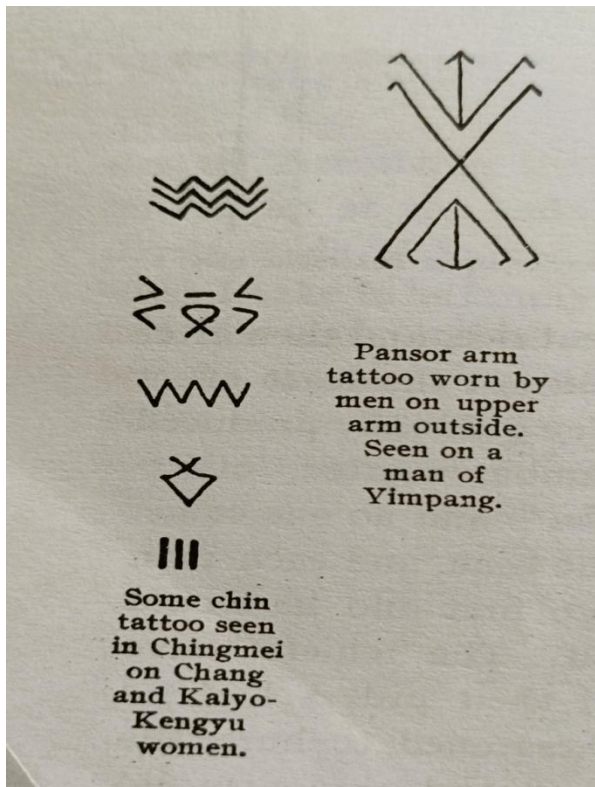


PLATE 152

PLATE 152: Different chin tattoo documented and sketched by Dr Hutton

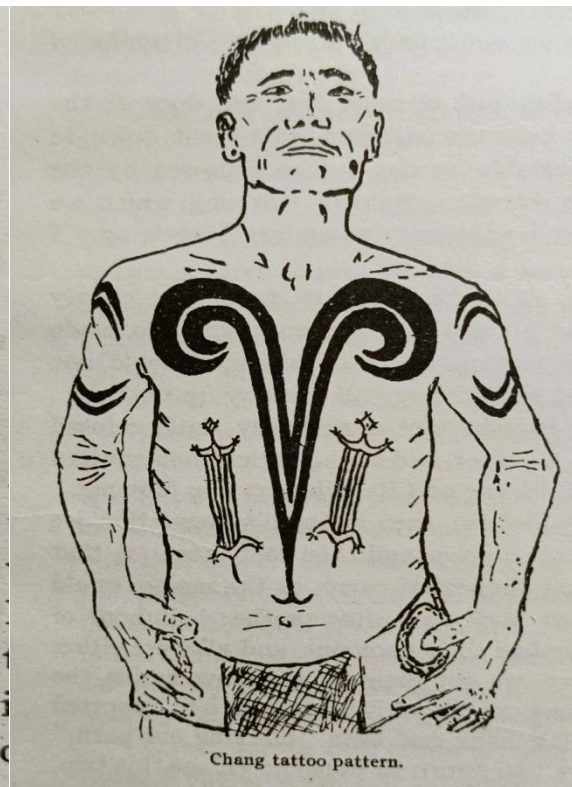


PLATE 153

PLATE 153: Chang headhunters tattoo sketched by Dr Hutton



PLATE 154

PLATE 154: Fading Shin tattoo pattern of a Phom women



PLATE 155

PLATE 155: Shin tattoo of a Phom women



PLATE 156

PLATE156: Calf tattoo pattern of a Phom woman



PLATE157

PLATE157: An elderly woman showing her leg tattoo patterns



PLATE158

PLATE158: Phom leg tattoo pattern of a woman



PLATE 159

PLATE 159: V shaped chest tattoo of a man from Wui Village



PLATE 160

PLATE160: Headhunters tattoo of a man from Nokhu Village

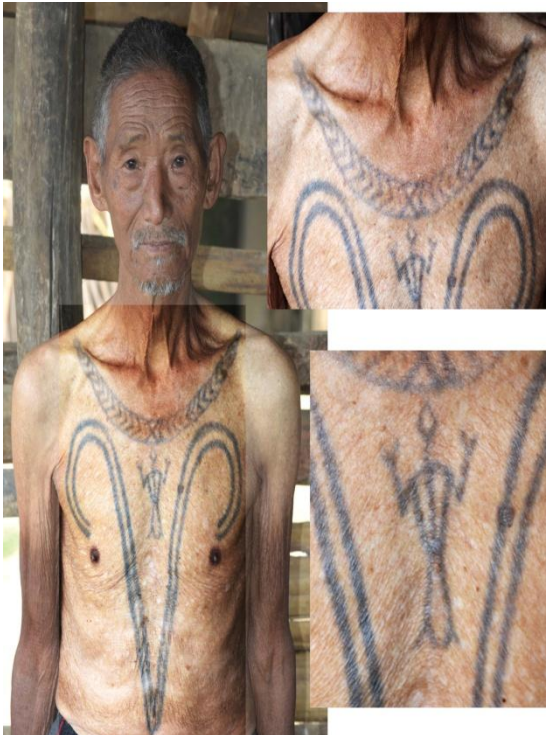


PLATE161

PLATE161: Tiger spirit tattoo of a man from Nokyan Village



PLATE162

PLATE162: Headhunters tattoo with an outline of a man from Nokyan Village



PLATE163: Arm tattoo of one of the bravest Warrior from Noklak Village



PLATE164

PLATE164: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Noklak Village



PLATE165

PLATE165: Chin and forehead tattoo of a woman from Pangsha Village



PLATE166

PLATE166: Upper arm tattoo of a woman from Pangsha Village



PLATE167

PLATE167: Shoulder tattoo of a woman from Peshu Village



PLATE 168

PLATE 168: shoulder tattoo of a woman from Kingniu Village



PLATE 169

PLATE 169: Shoulder tattoo of a woman from Nokhu Village



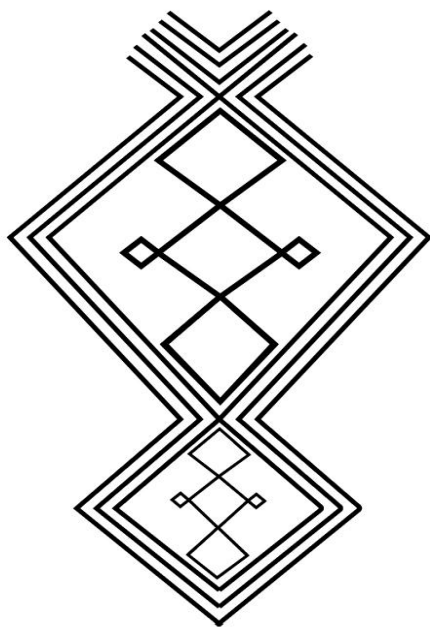


PLATE 170: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Noklak Village



PLATE 171

PLATE 172

PLATE 173

PLATE 171: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Peshu Village

PLATE 172: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Sanglao Village

PLATE 173: Leg tattoo pattern of a woman from Kingniu



PLATE 174

PLATE 174: Upper arm tattoo of a man from Jaboka Village



PLATE 175

PLATE 175: Chest tattoo of a Sangsha man



PLATE 176

PLATE 176: Facial tattoo of a Sangsha man



PLATE 177

PLATE 177: Facial tattoo of a man from Longwa Village



PLATE178: A warrior showing his facial and chest tattoo from Longwa

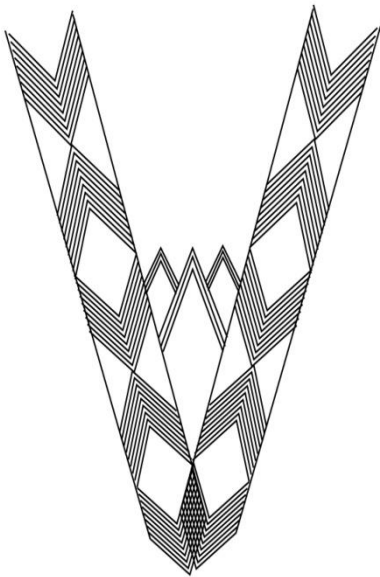


PLATE179: Headhunters tattoo from Longwa village



PLATE180: Facial tattoo of a man from Tangnu Village



PLATE181: Unique back tattoo of a warrior from Tangnu Village



PLATE182

PLATE182: Headhunters tattoo from Wakching village



PLATE183

PLATE183: Upper arm tattoo of a man from Yangnu Village

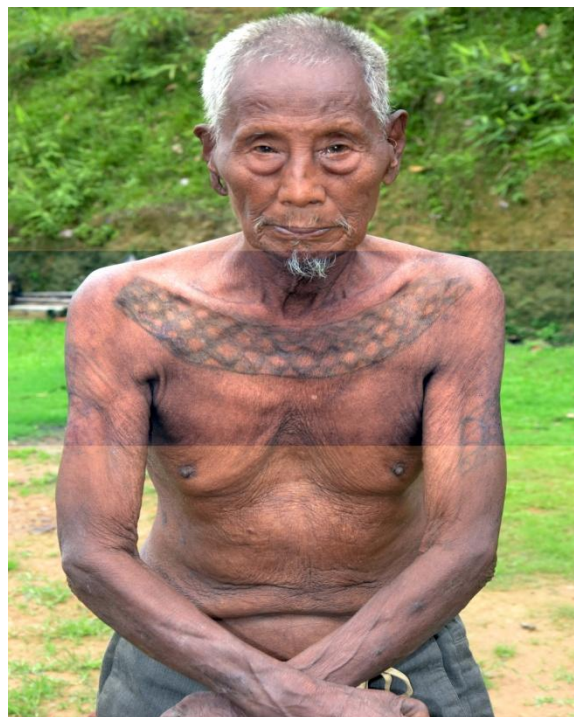


PLATE 184: Collar bone tattoo of a man from Yangnu Village



PLATE 185: Leg tattoo pattern of a Konyak woman

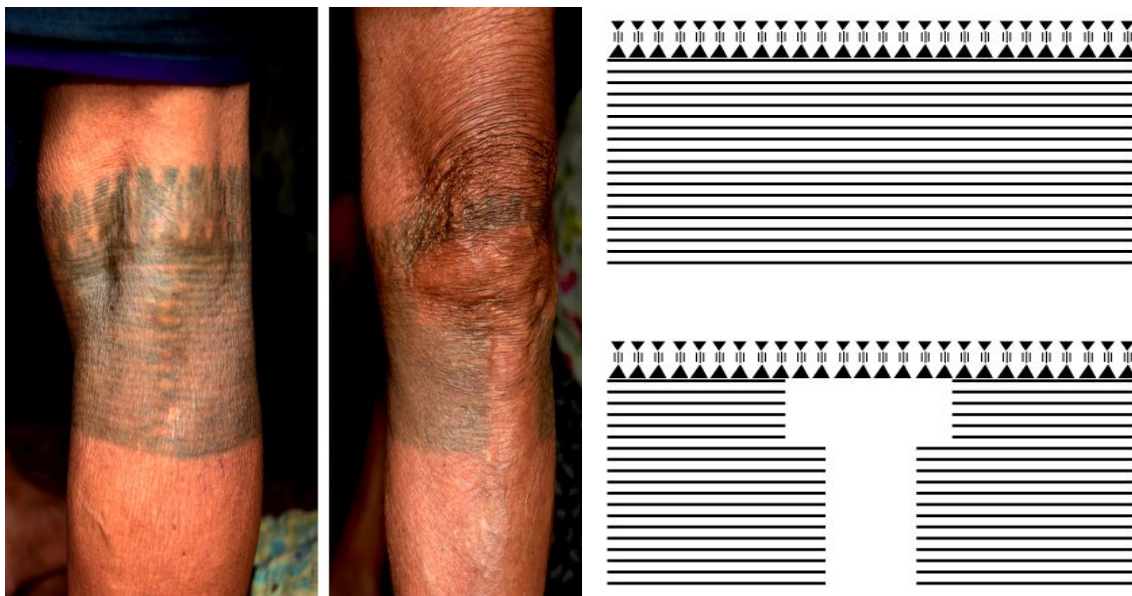


PLATE 186: Leg tattoo pattern of a Konyak woman



PLATE 187

PLATE 187: Shoulder tattoo of a Konyak woman



PLATE 188

PLATE 188: Shoulder tattoo of a Konyak woman



PLATE 189

PLATE 189: Hand and knee tattoo of a Konyak woman

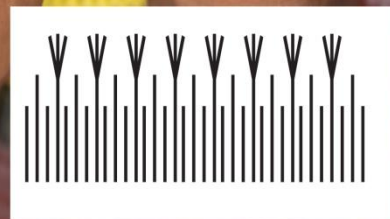


PLATE 190

PLATE190: Knee tattoo of a Konyak woman



PLATE191

PLATE191: The Collar bone tattoo of Konyak woman



PLATE192

PLATE192: Arm tattoo of Anghs daughter



PLATE193

PLATE193: Forearm tattoo of a woman from Wakching Village

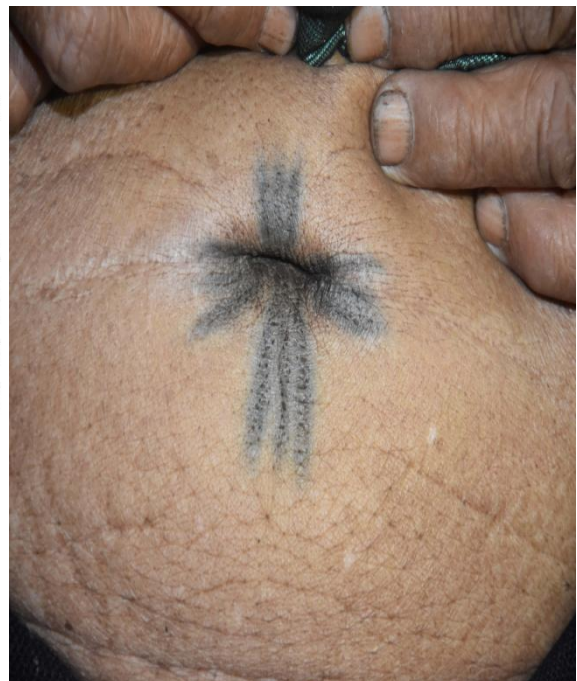


PLATE194

PLATE194: Navel tattoo of a Konyak woman



PLATE195

PLATE195: Miss Anungla with her facial tattoo of an Ao woman.



PLATE196

PLATE196: Mr Niloto with a tattoo of a headgear of a Sumi tribe



PLATE197

PLATE197: Mr Mapu with upper arm tattoo depicting the Longsa heritage of the Aos



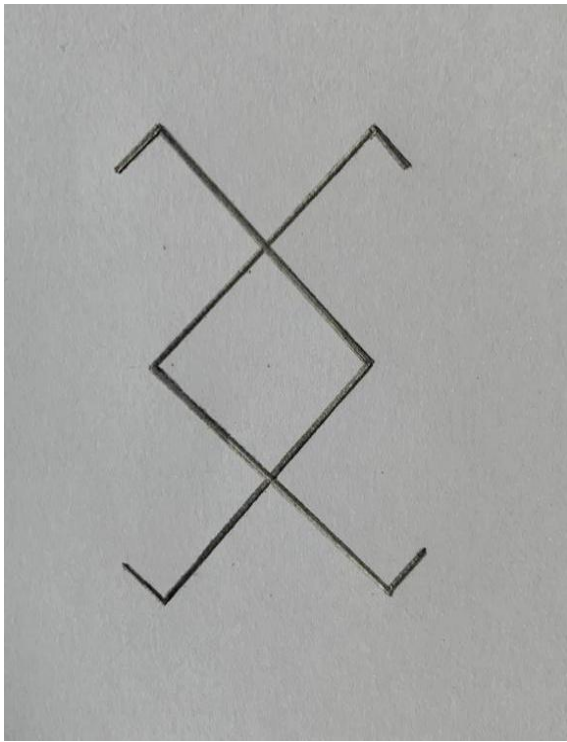
PLATE198

PLATE198: Mo Naga creation of Neo Naga tattoo

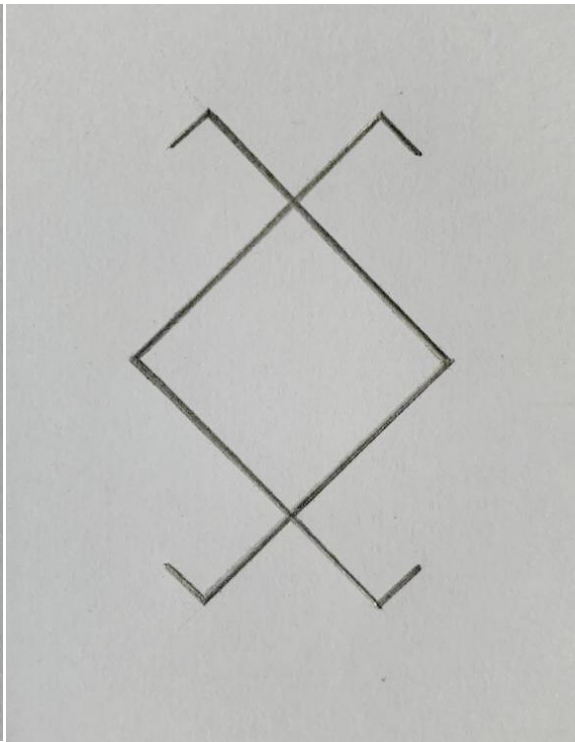


PLATE199

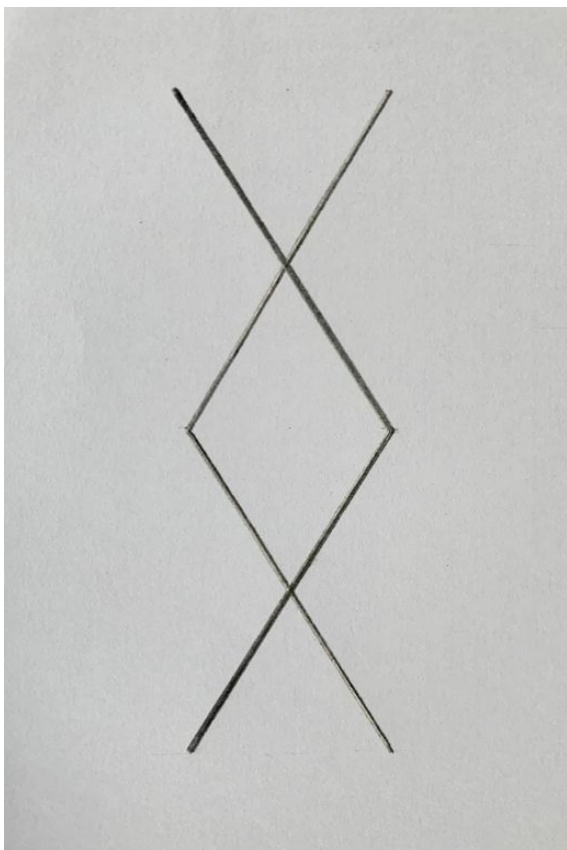
PLATE199: Mo Naga Creation of Neo Naga Tattoo



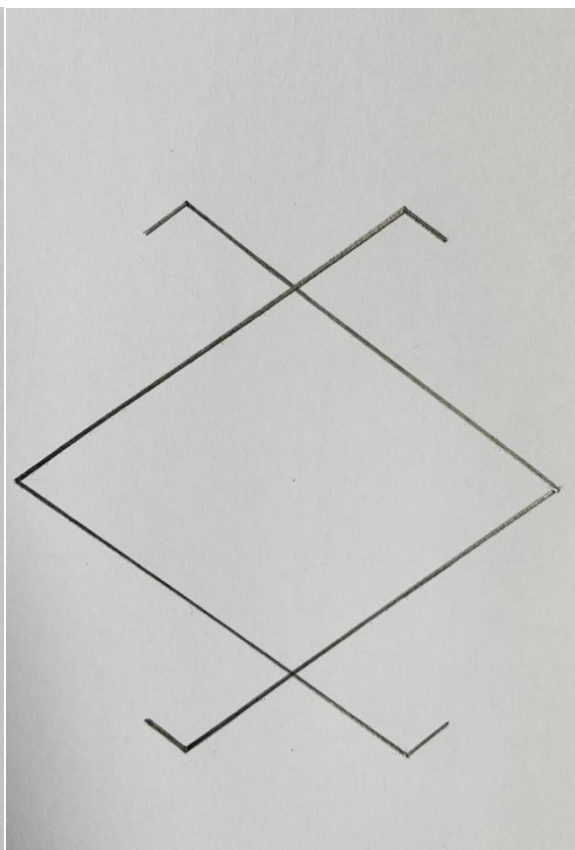
Sangtam



Chang



Yimkhiung



Khamniungam

PLATE 200: Forehead tattoo of different Naga tribes

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