



THE ART OF TATTOOING OF PHELUNGER AND SAMPHUR OF SANGTAM TRIBE

Sulila L Mongzar

B.A. History, St. Joseph University, Nagaland.

Abstract: A tattoo is a form of body modification made by inserting tattoo ink, dyes, and / or pigments, either indelible or temporary, into the dermis layer of the skin to form a design. Tattooing was practiced both by man and by woman however; it was more popular and mandatory for women in most of the Naga tribes who followed the practice. The process of tattooing involves a very painful and elaborate process and procedure. Throughout the procedure young girls as young as the age of 10 years would have to go through long hours of excruciating pain, even after completion of tattooing the healing process took a long time to heal. The tattoo was done by hammering a black pigment mixed with water, the procedure in some cases causes fatal infection due to unhygienic means of practice where in some instances they had to amputate their leg or arms.

The Sangtams, Konyak, Yimchangers and Tikhirs are some among the Naga tribes who practice the art of traditional tattooing. Tattoos differ from tribe to tribe. Each community calls it differently for instance the Sangtams calls it as Ngayakh, the Tikhirs calls it as Yiktap, the community living in Phelunger calls it as Yahtah, and the Samphur people calls it as Thükyakh. It had a different meaning and serve different purposes and different pattern. Some had a larger criss-cross, while some had a smaller pattern of crisscross depending on which tribe they belonged. They tattooed them in places like arms, legs, chest, stomach, back, throat, shoulder, calf, and knees and on a facial. They did have one thing in common that is, tattoo served as an important identification mark that played a crucial role in the afterlife. Though the practice of traditional tattooing had disappeared from their daily culture, it functions as an important part of the culture as every patten engraved on the skin has remained as a remembrance to look back for the people of the tribe from their ancestors.

Index Terms—Naga Tattoo, Tattoo of Sangtam, Phelunger, Samphur

I. INTRODUCTION

Tattooing has been in practice among the communities living in Kiphire, Phelunger, and Samphur village. The communities living in Kiphire comprises of Sangtam with the highest population, Tikhir, Yimchunger, and Sümi with the least population. Though the communities living in Phelunger and Samphur are also Sangtam, they have their own dialect respectively known as Phelung and Samphuri dialect. Tattooing among these communities was not just a mere decorative practice but it was an essential aspect of the social ritual and rites. Each community had its own set of unique themes, pattern, colors, sizes, and significance. Tattooing was largely practice by women rather than man, it was consider as crucial for girl's social standing. The art of tattooing was often associated with their beliefs in the natural and supernatural world. In some communities, it was also associated with fertility, protection from evil spirits and so on. The art of tattooing among these communities were important and it was an integral part of their cultural identity. In the past, tattooing and head-hunting were part and parcel that were infused together. the warriors who had brought back head of the enemy to the village from the raids would get a special kind of tattoo which

represented honor and respect. With the beginning of British administration, this practice of headhunting was prohibited and discouraged. The practiced of tattooing started to decline especially among the men. It was in 1960's that the Indian government outlawed the practice of head hunting and even tattooing and since then there has been a sharp decline in traditional tattooing culture. (Krutak, 2009). Even though the prohibition of headhunting led to decline of tattooing it did not stop the people from continuing to mark themselves. Tattooing was a sacred art form, serving as a form of communication and storytelling. The tattoo also functions as a 'divine passport' that would permit a person to enter the afterlife. The art of tattooing has become a dying tradition in these communities now; there is nothing that could be reverse, as they have fully abandoned this practice. However, in present times, there are still artist like Mo Naga who strives to bring back this tradition by incorporating traditional art with modern designs. (Mountain Echo, 2023). Tattooing plays a very crucial role in these communities, it has helped them preserve their cultural heritage, which helps them to understand their past and helps to reconstruct the history for the present generation. The active art of tattooing might have disappeared today with the acceptance of Christ and coming of education but it was very much prevalent and a culture during the past, both man and woman took active participation in the art of tattoo making, it was a mandatory for the women. In the spiritual journey tattoo plays as an important mark of identification that permitted them to enter the afterlife. They also did for beautification, as they did not like to keep their skin bare. (L.Sangtam, 2024) The process of tattooing is a very elaborate procedure, which involves various rituals and practices. Each practice and procedure differ from one community to the other, even the significance differs from one another though the most common belief among each community is that, tattoo play as an important identification mark to enter into the after-life.

II. ORIGIN OF TATTOOING

The genesis of tattooing can be traced back from the time of immigration, the Sangtam believe that their ancestors came to the present place from Burma. The Sangtam was said to be the first who migrated from Maikhel along with the Ao's, Chang, and Phelung people. It is said that upon arrival around the Zungi River, the first group of tribal people saw a large snake lying dead on the sandy surface of the Zungi river, upon approaching the snake, they saw large beautiful patterns on the snake skin with which they were amazed and so in order to preserve that they decided to take the pattern of the snake and make a permanent tattoo out of it. Since the tribal people of Sangtam, Ao, and Chang were among the first to see the snake while it was still fresh it is belief that it was because of this reason that they have bigger pattern of criss-cross tattoos on their arms and legs. While on the other hand the last group of migrators like the Tikhir and Khiamniungan who arrived late saw a dried-up snake on the river banks, so by that time the patterns have already shirked as the snake had already shriveled and so because of this they saw smaller pattern of the snake skin leading them to have smaller patter of criss-cross tattoos as compared to the first group tribe. The forehead and the chin tattoo represent the pattern they saw on the snake's head. (M. Tikhir)

III. PROCEDURE OR STEPS FOLLOWED IN TRADITIONAL TATTOO MAKING

The whole process of tattoo making is a very meticulous and elaborate procedure, which involves various steps. The tattoo would almost only take a day to finish however, in some cases if the tattoo consisted of many patterns, then it would take more than a day to complete. Sometimes it may even take two or three days depending on the pattern of the tattoo. The steps also differ slightly among each communities thought they are almost the same.

Firstly, the ink used for tatting the skin was sourced by burning the finest pine wood with high content of pine fuel in it. In order to collect the soot, they burn the pine wood and cover it with a bamboo basket or a clay pot after which the soot produced is collected by scrapping it by a chicken or a bird feather, however a chicken feather was most often used as it was available at all times. The soot that is collected is mix with water and this creates a black ink, which was used for the tattoo making. After the ink is made, the tool that is used to penetrate the skin is made using a cactus thorn, a lemon tree thorn or a buffalo thorn (Ziziphus

mucronate). See fig. 1. The thorn is inserted between the stem of either a Yam stem or Throngki Vah (*Maranta arundinacea*, See fig. 2.) It is tied tightly between it, after which they would wash the body with warm water and let it dry then draw the outline of the tattoo pattern in order to make a precise pattern. The tool is then dip in the ink, with help of a bamboo stick the tattoo artist mostly old female would hammer it following the pattern from up to bottom three to four times continuously so that the ink would penetrate deeper into the skin. This process of getting tattoo is a very long and painful procedure where the child as young as the age of ten years (10) have to go through excruciating pain in order to get it done.



Fig.1. *Ziziphus mucronate* tree and thorn.



Fig.2. Throngki Vah (*Maranta arundinacea*)

At the time of the procedure, due to the excruciating pain, young girls would often scream in pain and it is believed that when the screams are too loud, they are to sacrifice a chicken quickly nearby in order to appease any bad spirit that maybe exacerbating the pain (T. Mongzar, 2024).

IV. SELECTION OF TATTOO ARTIST

The selection of a tattoo artist is an important step, not everyone could make tattoo, within each community, at least there was one tattoo artist. The artist are mostly a hereditary, these skills has pass down from the mother to the daughter. Mostly, the tattoo artist was always a woman who would travel from one khel to another to make tattoos. The tattoo artist was chosen based on their ability and expertise, and the craft was passed down via the female line with the artist teaching it to their daughter who in turn would teach their daughter. Experts were only available in few villages and if there were none in a particular village, they would summon a tattoo artist from the neighboring village to come and tattoo them. Payment was done in kind, the host would feed the tattoo artist with rice, meat and beer, which was a kind of payment to the tattoo artist (T.Mongzar, 2024).

V. RITUALS FOLLOWED DURING THE PROCESS

There were certain rituals followed during the processes of making the tattoo, however some communities had no such. For instance, before the tattoo making commenced the family would either kill a pig or a chicken and serve the tattoo artist, the female artist in some community was restricted to touch any kind of vegetable and maintain a diet fully on meat a week before the tattooing. In some cases, the young child who was supposed to get the tattoo would follow the tattoo artist to the field for a day to work with her. The tattoo artist in the community was regarded with high respect and honor. While on the other hand, there were certain rules and rituals to be followed by the young girl as well. For instance, the young girl after tattooing was not allowed to eat or touch meat for up to 3-4 days in order to prevent any kind of infection. In some cases, the young girl who had gotten tattoo would feel feverish due to weak health and because of the loss of blood in high amount. In this scenario, the father would sacrifice a cow for the well-being of the child. But this often happens to weaker children and not everyone (T. Mongzar, 2024).

VI. SIGNIFICANCE AND PATTERN

Tattoo is an integral part of the Naga life; it had various significance and purpose which differed slightly from one tribe to the other. Despite the difference in interpretation, they all had one thing in similar and that was, tattoo for all tribes practicing the art, acted as something from which their forefathers will be able to identify them when they arrive in the afterlife. For the communities reconciling their soul with their fellow

forefathers were of utmost importance and so getting tattoo was of necessity. It was through the tattoos that the forefathers were able to recognize their own people and take them in. if they did not have a tattoo, the forefathers in the afterlife refused to take them in because they regarded them as outsider and not their own children. The tattoos in many cases were done by both man and woman, however in some communities only the female was permitted to have tattoo. The purpose of female tattoo mainly had to do with identity and to pronounce the coming of age. The woman had got their tattoos done when they reached the age of 15 or in some cases early as 10 years. They also had their tattoos done in order to beautify themselves. They got their tattoos done in places like faces and knees for beauty spots. In some tribal communities, the girls got their tattoos done during marriages. Girls who had faithful marriages without any fault play would get their tattoos tatted up to their thigh but for those who elope or have fault play in their marriages would only have tattoos up to their knees. The man on the other hand had their tattoos if they had taken heads or won in wars. However, tattoos in man were not so common among these hill tribal people.

The patterns and symbol of a tattoo also differed from one tribe to the other. Patterns mostly consist of geometrical shapes and criss-cross patterns. For some tribal community the criss-cross pattern is smaller and for some it is large. They also have triangle or diamond shape symbol on their head. These patterns were inspired from the pattern that we see on a snakeskin and its head. These patterns were for woman, on the other hand for the man warriors they would get tattoos of a man figure on their calf and they had chest tattoo in V-shape. The V-shaped pattern consists of two lines, which would start from their shoulder running down until their navel. These patterns were only for the warriors' other males were not permitted to have them.

VII. TATTOO PATTERN AND ILLUSTRATION

A. SANGTAM TRIBE

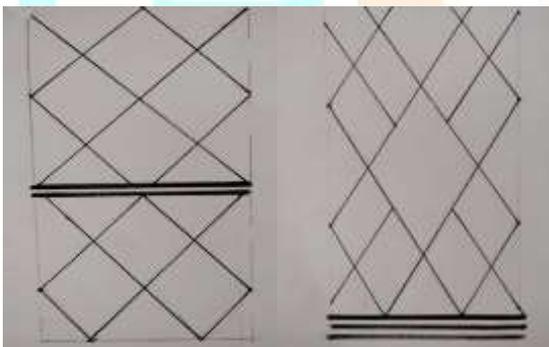


Fig.3. Sangtam hand tattoo / leg tattoo pattern

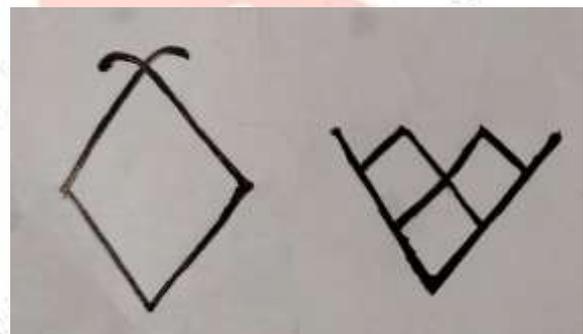


Fig.4. Sangtam forehead tattoo / chin tattoo pattern

B. PHELUNGER VILLAGE

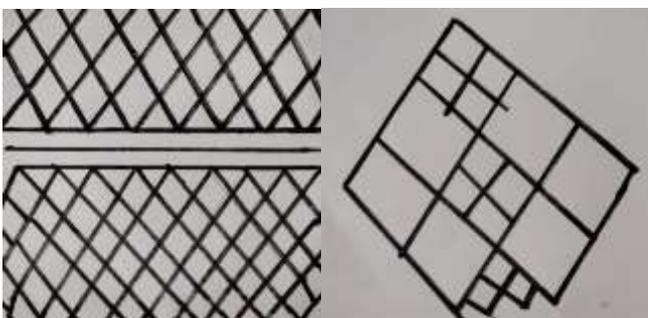


Fig.5. leg tattoo pattern / hand tattoo pattern

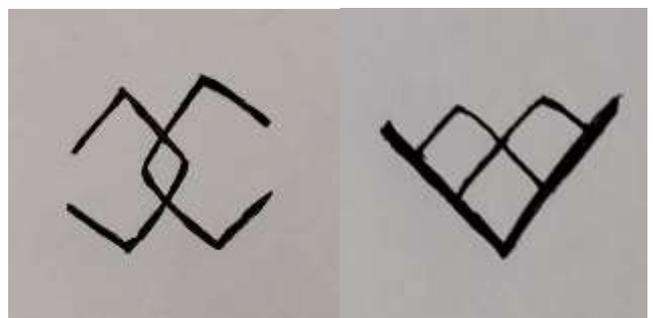


Fig.6. Forehead tattoo pattern / chin tattoo

C.SAMPHUR VILLAGE

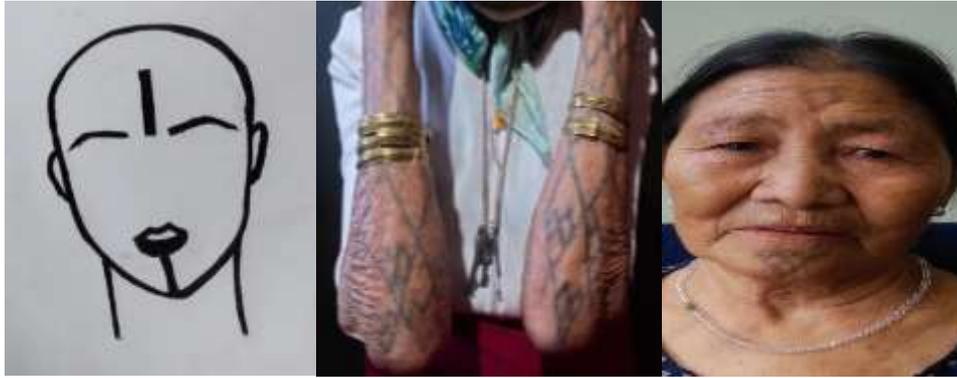


Fig.7. Forehead tattoo. Fig.8. Tattoo for Women on Hand and Facial

VIII. REASONS FOR TATTOOING

Every tattoo was done for a reason and each community had a different but similar reason for getting the tattoos. For instance, they had their tattoos done in place of real ornaments; there was also distinction between the rich and the poor. The rich were able to effort ornament while on the other hand the poor they were unable to effort ornament and so tattoo was their only means to beautify themselves. The other reasons were for the purpose of marriage, most children were married of at the age of 14 to 15 and so poor parents who cannot effort ornaments for their Children's would beautify them with tattoos instead of ornaments. See Fig.8.

A typical Sangtam tattoo consists mostly of geographical pattern on the arms, legs, calves, and face. Unlike the other communities, the patterns of the Sangtam community were larger and it did not have any meaning behind the pattern but it was mainly done for the beautification and the only significance it held was as a mark of identification, which was required to enter in the afterlife. It was through the markings that the ancestors were able to recognize their own people and so they felt the utmost importance to get it done when they were alive. The Sangtam believe that tattoo was the "asol jmüh jingki" which means original fore-father garment. It was through the tattoos that others were able to differentiate the Sangtam from the others.

The picture in the fig. 8. Represent a hand and facial tattoo of a Sangtam women that she acquires when she reaches the age of ten (10) the facial tattoo consists of triangular shape with crisscross pattern inside the half triangle and a lozenge shaped tattoo on the forehead. The art of tattoo making was very elaborate and, in some cases, it took more than a day to finish. The process of making tattoo included the careful making of the ink and the tool and also the laying out of the outline of the lines. After that, only the artist would proceed with the tatting. The Sangtams called tattoo as Ngayakh which has its derivation from two-word Ngazing which is the thorn (buffalo thorn) and Ayakh meaning mark. Since the tattoo was made using Ngazing it was called Ngayakh. (P. Sangtam, 2024).



Fig.9. Arm tattoo pattern / Front and Backleg tattoo

IX. PROCESS OF PREPARTION

i. *The Procedure Of Ink Making:*

The procedure of tattoo making among the Sangtams begin with the burning of Tsi-singh (pine wood) with high content of fuel in it. They always made sure to use the finest Tsi Singh because the

ones with lower concentration of pine fuel in it had less pigment in the soot produced. The tattoo artist was responsible for making the ink. Then the tattoo artist would proceed to burn the wood and cover it either with a bamboo basket or Ali fu (clay pot) to collect the soot released during the burning. After which the soot from the surface is collected by scrapping it using a chicken feather. The collected soot is then mixed with water to form a black ink which will be used for tattooing the skin.

ii. **The Process Of Tool Making:**

After the ink is made it is kept aside for making the tool which will be used to tattoo the skin. The tool that is used for puncturing the skin was a thorn called Ngazing, a buffalo thorn that we find in the jungle. The Sangtam use two thorn which gets inserted between two stems of Throngki Vah (Maranta arundinacea). The thorn is tied tightly between the two stems using a natural fiber or a jute rope after which for sterilization they would soak the tip of the thorn in lukewarm water and by dipping the tool in the ink they would tattoo the skin with the help of a bamboo stick by striking on it.

iii. **The Procedure Of Tattoo Making:**

Since only the girls were allowed to have tattoos in the Sangtam community the girls as young as age 10 were dragged unwillingly most of the time as it was a painful procedure. Their body was washed and patted dry with a cloth after which they were made to lie down in a sleeping position and held down by two to three people. The pattern of the tattoo was first drawn on the skin by the tattoo artist who were mostly old women after that the tool which was made will be dipped in the ink and the artist would strike the outline of the pattern three or four times, up and down continuously with the help of a bamboo stick so that the ink will penetrate further into the skin dermis. The tattoo artist always had two to three assistants who would hold down the girl and the other would stretch the skin for her as she continued with the tattooing. Another would rub away the blood with a cloth soaked in some medicinal leaf paste that aided to the healing processes. After all the tattooing is completed, she would take the remaining ink and smear it all over the freshly tattooed skin to help with the healing process. The process of tattoo making was a very long procedure and sometimes it even took days to complete.

X. ARTIST AND THE RITUALS

The tattoo artist was always a woman and they were chosen based on their skills and expertise. The art of tattooing was to be done with utmost care and precision, in order to avoid any kind of error in the pattern it was done carefully. Only the most expert were permitted to proceed with the tattoo making. Most skillful tattoo artists were available only in few villages and they had to travel from one village to the other during the months of November to January. Since the availability of tattoo artists was less in number, if a particular village had no tattoo artist they would summon her from a neighboring village. The making of a tattoo was not free, the payment was done in kind. The host would feed the tattoo artist meat, rice, and beer and after which she would be sent off home with meat. It was a skill that was passed down from the mother to the daughter at all times. The tattoo artist in the Sangtam community was regarded with high respect and honor. Before the commencement of tattoo making, the tattoo artist had to follow certain rules and customs. Of which the Sangtam believe that the artist was to eat only meat a week ahead to prepare for the process of tattooing. Another ritual they had was that the parents of the girl were to kill a pig or a chicken and were to feed the tattoo artist before and after the process. In the Sangtam community the girl child who was supposed to get the tattoo would have to go to the field with the tattoo artist for a day's work in her field and eat together this was done to bring them close together. After the long and painful process of tattoo making in some cases due to huge amount of blood loss the young child becomes weak and becomes feverish and if this happens the father would kill a cow as a sacrifice to the forefathers for the wellbeing of his child.

XI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TATTOO

The tattooing patterns among the Sangtam were bigger as compared to the Tikhir. They had larger criss-cross patterns on their legs and arms and larger diamond shaped tattoos on their foreheads. The art of tattooing among the Sangtam were not merely for beautification but it holds important significance. Only the girls

was allowed to get tattoo among the Sangtam community. They had it done at a very young age because they believe that it acts as a mark of identification that is need to enter the afterlife. The Sangtam believe that it is through the tattoos that their forefathers were able to recognized them. The aftercare was of utmost importance in order to prevent the wounds from getting infection. They had to choose the month carefully in which they were going to proceed with the tattooing for if they did it during hot weather or hot months the healing process of the wounds took longer, and it was more prone to infections. If it was done during the cold month of November to December, the healing was much quicker and less painful. Therefore, the cold months were much more preferred for tattooing. After they get a fresh tatted skin, they were to avoid heat at all cost until the healing, which could take up to months.

(P. Sangtam, 2024)

XII. TATTOOING IN PHELUNGER AND SAMPHUR VILLAGE

The communities living in Samphur and Phelunger village are Sangtam people however, they do not speak the Sangtam dialect they both have their own separate dialect. These two villages are among the oldest villages under Kiphire district and both village practice the art of traditional tattooing as well.



Fig. 10. The art of tattooing in Phelunger village



Fig.11. Knee and a leg tattoo of a Phelung woman

A. PHELUNGER VILLAGE

The Art of tattooing in Phelunger village is very much prevalent, though they are a part of the Sangtam community they have their own dialect and also, they are among the only Sangtam tribe that allows man to have tattoos. Not only woman but also man is allowed to tatted their skin. The man who gets the tattoo are mostly warriors and man who had gone to tribal war. Similarly to the Tikhirs the man folk would get a chest tattoo or even a tattoo on their leg as a mark that he is a warrior. The people in phelunger village call tattoo as yahdah. Likewise, with the Sangtam community in Kiphiri they follow similar pattern of the tattoo making and follow the same customs and rituals. Tattoo also plays as an important mark of identification for them which was of utmost importance for them. It was through the tattoos that their forefathers were able to recognize them in the afterlife'

- i. ***Pattern:*** The patterns were also similar to that of the Sangtam community living in Kiphire. They both had larger criss-cross patterns however the community in phelunger village had one unique marking and that was the knee tattoo which was not done by the people living in Kiphiri. The keen tattoo was done only on female folks, they had it done because they belief that when the keen folds it did not look very good and so in order to make it attractive, they tatted a diamond shape tattoo on their knees. Another belief was that, according to the villagers if the girl has no keen tattoo, she would trip a lot and so in order to not make her fall they had their knee tattoo (T. Sangtam,2024).See fig 11.
- ii. ***Significance Of The Pattern :*** The tattoo pattern of the Phelung people were large and they also had tattoos on their knees and the man folk usually got tattoos of outlines of man warrior or the structure of a 'V' like line. The main purpose for the tatting was because they believed that the tattoo acted as a divine passport and a mark of identification through which the forefathers were able to identify their clan from. They also had knee tattoos which were done mainly for women,

they had it done because they believe that when they sit the knees did not look very attractive and so they got the tattoo to beautify their knees and also another reason for the knee tattoo was to prevent the young girl from falling too much. Because they believe that without the knee tattoo, one would always trip and fall.

- iii. **Precautionary Measures After Tattooing:** After care was very important as the fresh tatted skin was exposed to many infections. After the tattooing process was done the remaining ink was smeared all over the tatted area to help with the healing process. Heat was to be avoided at all cost and so they had their tattoos done during winters. If it was infected by chance it could lead to them losing their arms or legs.

B. SAMPHUR VILLAGE

The community living in the Samphur village are also Sangtam but they speak different dialect like the people in phelunger village. Samphur village is the united Sangtam heritage village. Its origin is hard to trace because there are no written records and only oral history is there but they are not much reliable because misinterpretation is also there. According to the oral tradition it is said that the village existed from time immemorial. The Samphuri people believe that their village existed from the time Babylon existed. According to the oral stories it is believed that three persons lived in different Khel\colony and thus the name of the village in siphil dialect 'san' which means three and 'pur' which means scattered in different places. Samphur village is known for their rock salt and ancient salt springs. In present there are about 650 household (PT. Sangtam, 2024). The communities living in Samphur village differs slightly from the other Sangtam communities in the art of tattoo making. Despite the differences, they share similar significance of tattoo. Like the rest of the communities, tattoo plays an important role of identification mark, However, they mostly focus on tattoos that are relates to marital purposes. The leg tattoo represents what type of marriage the girl had. It is through the patterns that one can identify if a girl has married with or without any fault play.

A woman with the consent of her parent and someone who marries for real without any fault play she gets a tattoo up to her thighs, on the other hand a woman who marries with a fault play, i.e. elope, without parents' consent in their marriage she gets her tattoo till below her knees. They also have song that accompany the bride as she marries and goes away. For the marriage done without fault the woman fold would sing for her a song in which she is referred to as "saetsase" and the one with the unfaithful marriage will have a song referring to her as "tsasela". Unlike the other tattoos from other community with facial tattoo that have triangular or diamond shaped tatt the community in Samphur village have only a single line on their forehead and their chin. Samphur people did not have tattoos for man it was only for woman. The tattoos of Samphur area are similar to what te general practices of sangtam. See Fig.3,4,7.

In Samphur village the art of tattooing came to an end when Tsangthsimong now a retired primary teacher came back after getting education. However, even after that some people got it done in secret. But slowly with the coming of Christianity and acceptance of Christ they completely abandoned the practice. (T Sangtam, 2024).

- i. **Procedure:** The process of tattoo making The art of tattoo making in Samphur village mostly had its relation with marriage. But at the same time, it also acted as a mark of identification. Only the woman was allowed to tatt their skin and the tattoo acted like an ornament, which was also use to make one beautiful. The processes of tattoo making starts with the preparation of ink, which was made from the soot of burning, pine wood. The tool used for puncturing the skin was made similarly to the Sangtam. The tattoo artist is chosen according to her skills and after that the outline pattern is drawn to proceed with the tatting. The Samphur woman folks had their tattoos done during marriages to signify that they were married. And the practices for the tattooing differed according to the situation of the marriage.

- ii. **Pattern:** Their patterns were also similar to that of the Sangtam community living in Kiphire however it slightly differed. The crisscross pattern was similar but unlike the Sangtam community in Kiphire the facial tattoo of the Samphur woman folk is different. Their facial tattoo consists of one single line on the forehead and the chin. Unlike the Sangtam in Kiphire who had their tattoos done in one go they Samphur people had their tattoos done at different times. For instance, a girl had her first tattoo at the age of 10-14 to mark the coming of age and the second was done during marriage. Fig.11. shows an illustration of a line tattoo that was done by a Samphuri woman that was obtain as a mark of beautification and also represents as a mark of coming of age.



Fig.12. An illustration of a Samphur woman tattoo

- iii. **Tattooing During Marriage:** The tattooing during the marriage was an important mark that signified that one was married. It was through the tattoo that people were able to tell if she had a faithful or unfaithful marriage. The first tattoo was done during the age of 10-14 to celebrate the coming of age and it was done till below the knee and the second was done during marriage which was on the thigh. However, the thighs tattoo was done only by people who had faithful marriages. For the marriage with just and no fault the woman who was marrying was taken to her husband's place by her friends and family. A particular song was sung for her as they went to the husband's house in which in which she is referred to as "saetsase" and the one with the unfaithful marriage will have a song referring to her as "tsasela". The tattooing was then done in the presence of her husband and her family. The marking was like a seal that closed the marriage. The song sung during the marriage.

Eh eh eh eh mülong khang soo hae hae

Hae eh hae

Eh tso singh tsi hae hae ehh

Mülong khang soo aee hae ehh.

(Song extracted from interview of T Sangtam, 2024).

XII. DISAPPEARANCE OF TATTOOING CULTURE

Factors responsible for the disappearance of tattooing culture among the Sangtam communities living in Kiphire, Phelunger, Samphur, and Tikhir are multi-faceted. Firstly, the influence of modernization and globalization has led to a shift of societal values towards more westernized ideas, causing traditional practices of tattooing to be viewed as outdated or even a taboo. Additionally with modernization, urbanization, and the increase of modern technology, younger generations are less inclined to participate in the labour intensive and painful process of traditional tattooing. Moreover, the introduction of Christianity has played a significant role in discouraging the practice of tattooing, as it is often perceived as conflicting with Christian's beliefs. As a result, the younger generation of these communities is increasingly opting for westernized style tattoos or abandoning the practice all together, leading to the extinction of this traditional art form. The introduction of western fashion trends and the rise of social media have further accelerated this decline, with many opting for the western contemporary form of body art. Additionally, the availability of

modern tattooing equipment and techniques has made it easier for individual to get tattoos that are quicker to apply and more aesthetically pleasing according to prevailing standard of beauty (J Schultz,2015).

XIII. MPACT OF CHRISTIANITY

The influence of Christianity played a significant role in the decline of tattooing among the Sangtam community living in Kiphire, Samphur, Phelunger, and Tikhir Nagas. With the advent of Christianity in their region, the missionaries discouraged and actively discouraged traditional practices, including tattooing as they were often associated with animistic beliefs. As a result, many Sangtam communities and Tikhir Nagas began to abandon their tattooing traditions in favor of embracing Christianity. This shift in religious beliefs leads to the gradual decline in the practice among these communities. The introduction of Christianity brought about changes in social norms and values, leading to the erosion of cultural practices that were deemed incompatible with Christianity teachings (L Lankithonger, 2024)

XIV. PRESERVATION EFFORTS AND REVIVAL OF TATTOOING CULTURE

Preservation efforts and the revival of tattooing culture among the Sangtam communities and the Tikhir nagas have gained momentum in recent years. Recognizing the importance of preserving their unique culture heritage, community leaders, artists, and researchers have collaborated to document traditional tattoo designs, techniques, and meanings. By engaging with younger generations and nurturing a sense of pride in their cultural identity, these efforts are essential in ensuring the survival and continued relevance of tattooing culture among these communities (N Sangtam, 2020). In recent times tattoo artist like Mo Naga and various other artist that are coming up are playing an effective role in preserving the art of tattoo culture by incorporating modern designs with the traditional art and taking a modern approach, to educate the youths about its intricate and beautiful patterns while at the same time by doing this they are keeping the art alive. Tattooing has long held a significant cultural and social importance among the Sangtam and the Tikhir Nagas and also among the communities living in the Phelunger and Samphur village, serving as a means of personal and communal identity. The genesis of the Naga tattoo can be trace back since time immemorial. It has always been an integral part of the society; it has helps in reconstructing the past for the present generation. Tattooing has long been considered a cultural tradition among the Sangtam, the Tikhir and the communities of Phelunger and Samphur village.

The practice and culture of tattooing was very much prevalent in the tribal communities of the Sangtam, Tikhir, Samphuri, and Phelungri. However, in the present times it has disappeared and they have abandoned the art of tattooing due to the coming of Christianity and modern education The art of tattooing differed from one tribe to the other, each tribe and community had their own unique pattern and significance. For instance, the pattern of the Sangtam community living in Kiphire and Phelunger village has bigger criss-cross pattern as compared to the Tikhir tribe who has smaller pattern.

CONCLUSION

The tattoos were done to mark the coming of age or for matrimonial purpose and many other reasons. The art of tattooing was not just for a mere decoration but also served as an important mark of identification among the tribal communities. The processes of tattooing included the making of ink and tool after which it is followed by the making of outline pattern by the artist and only after that the tatting is done by hammering the ink into the skin dermis. The art of tattooing was a very elaborated process and a painful one, it took long hours to complete and, in some cases, it even took days. They had their tattoos done in places like the arms, chest, legs, faces, calf, and the knees. Both man and woman actively did the art of tattooing. however, in some communities it was strictly only for woman folk. For example, the Sangtam and the community living in Samphur village had tattoos only for girls but for the Tikhir and Phelunger people the tattoos were worn by both genders for different purpose.

The choosing of the artist was also very important, they had to choose the best one in order to avoid any kind of error. The tattoo artist was always a woman and the skills of this tattoo art was passed down from

the mother to her daughter. They were required to have very steady hands and good eyes for this and they were chosen based on their expertise and years of experience. The tattoo artist would travel from one village to the other during the colder months of December to January to tattoo. Since not every village had a skillful artist, they would summon a tattoo artist from a nearby neighboring village to get the work done. Since tattooing was not for free, the host would pay the artist by providing her shelter and food for the time she is working and upon living they would prepare for her meat and beer to take it home with her. During the processes of tattooing some rituals and customs were followed, one particular and most common ritual was that of the sacrifice of animal. But not every community had practices like that for some they just had it done without any elaborate customs and practices like the Tikhir and some Sangtam. To follow the rituals or not was total upon the family. But for some they had rituals and customs which they followed for example, in some cases the young girl had to follow the tattoo artist to her filed for one day to work and the artist had to follow a full meat diet before the process of tattooing. The also sacrificed chicken nearby during the process of tattooing to chase away any bad evil or prevent bad things from happening. They also sacrificed a cow for their child if she became sick and weak after the tattooing to make her feel better.

The art of tattooing was a very painful process and the pain lasted for a very long time and adding to that the healing of tattoo took a long time too. Therefore,, in order to speed up the healing they did their tattoos done during the colder months and also had to follow a strict diet of eating only vegetables and protecting the freshly tatted skin from dust and bacteria to prevent them from getting infected. In a worst-case scenario if it was infected, they had to cut of their arms or legs. The tattoos were mostly geometrical in shapes; it had patterns like triangle and diamond shapes and crisscross patterns for the woman. However, for the man they had symbols and motifs of man and other animal motifs on their calf and chest. A 'V' shaped like pattern too was made on the chest for man.

The art of tattooing played a very crucial role and was an integral part of the Sangtam living in Kiphire, Samphur, and Phelunger and the Tikhir. Each community has practices, which slightly differed from one another however, the tattoo for each of them acted as a heavenly pass which permitted them to enter the afterlife. It was through their tattoos that their ancestors were able to recognize them and take them in. if one did not have tattoo markings she was not accepted into the afterlife by her ancestors because she was considered as an outsider. In the recent time the art of traditional tattooing has disappeared due to the coming of Christianity and the acceptance of Christ. With the coming of Christianity, the American missionaries brought with them education and modernity and they preached against the art of tattooing which was considered as a demonic practice. As a Christian one was supposed to keep oneself clean and out of markings as the body was considered as the temple of God and marking it was considered a sinful activity.

Now the art of tattooing has become a dying art and has rapidly declined in this modern day for many reasons. For one such reason as the new introduction of modern temporary tattoos and body art stickers, this had immensely contributed, to the decline of traditional tattooing. These types of modern alternative have provided the people to experience with different designs without permanence and temporary expression and tattoos with empty meanings. The modern generations have totally forgotten about the significance and power a tattoo carried due to the lack of in-depth research studies and knowledge about the traditional art of tattooing. As younger generations become more influenced by western culture and adopt western ideologies, the practice of tattooing will gradually lose its relevance and significance.

While some may say that the disappearance of traditional tattooing is a part of the evolution of cultural change, it is important and essential to recognize, preserve, and document these unique culture practices for the future generations. By understanding the historical, social, and cultural significance of tattooing among the Sangtam communities in Kiphire, Samphur, Phelunger and the Tikhir, efforts can be made to reawaken and sustain this valuable aspect of their culture heritage. Ultimately, by taking the steps to preserve the rich culture of tattooing tradition it can help maintain the rich tapestry of diversity that defines the cultural landscape of these communities.

REFERENCES:

- [1]. Easterine Kire (2019). *Walking The Roadless Road: Exploring the Tribes of Nagaland.*, Aleph Book Company.
- [2]. Payel Dutta Chowdhury (2019). *The Nagas: Social and Cultural identity- Text and Context*, Heritage Publisher.
- [3]. Nohochem Sangtam (2020). *The Naga Society: Case Study on Sangtam society and its impact on Westernization*. Independently.
- [4]. Jakob Schultz (2015). *The New old school: Exploring the modern renaissance of old school and neo traditional tattooing*, Schiffer Publishing.
- [5]. Julian Jacobs (2012). *The nagas second edition: heal peoples of northeast India*, Thames and Hudson.
- [6]. Business Standard. (n.d.). Seeking to Revive Naga Tattoo Culture. Retrieved from <https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/seeking-to-revive-naga-tattoo-culture-art->
- [7]. Explore Verve. (n.d.). Tattoo Art of the Naga Tribes. Retrieved from <https://exploreverve.com/tattoo-art-of-the-naga-tribes>
- [8]. Homegrown. (n.d.). A Look at India's Tribes and Its Traditions of Tattoos. Retrieved from <https://homegrown.co.in/homegrown-voices/a-look-at-indias-tribes-and-its-traditions-of-tattoos>
- [9]. Indigenous Peoples Network., Mythologies of the Sangtam Tribe. Retrieved from <https://indigenouspeoplenet.wordpress.com/2023/04/29/mythologies-of-the-sangtam-tribe/>
- [10]. Jamir, T. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://tiajamir.wordpress.com/tag/naga-tattoo/>
- [11]. Krutak, L. (n.d.). India: Land of Eternal Ink. Retrieved from <https://www.larskrutak.com/india-land-of-eternal-ink/>
- [12]. Kiphire District. (n.d.). About District. Retrieved from <https://kiphire.nic.in/about-district/>
- [13]. Lars Krutak. (n.d.). India: Land of Eternal Ink. Retrieved from <https://www.larskrutak.com/india-land-of-eternal-ink/>
- [14]. Nagabusiness.com. (n.d.). Tattoo as a Fading Tradition of Nagaland. Retrieved from <https://nagabusiness.com/tattoo-as-a-fading-tradition-of-nagaland>
- [15]. Nagaland Tribune. (n.d.). The Journey of the Dew People to Hornbill Festival 2023. Retrieved from <https://nagalandtribune.in/the-journey-of-the-dew-people-to-hornbill-festival-2023/>
- [16]. Oxford University. (n.d.). Naga Tattooing Tools. Retrieved from <https://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/bodyarts/index.php/permanent-bodyarts/tattooing>
- [17]. Pitt Rivers Museum. (n.d.). Naga Tattooing Tools. Retrieved from <https://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/bodyarts/index.php/permanent-body-arts/tattooing/169-naga-tattooing-tools.html>
- [18]. Tuensang District. (n.d.). Sangtam. Retrieved from <https://tuensang.nic.in/sangtam>
- [19]. [22]. Retrospect Journal. (2022, March 27). The Origins of Tattooing: A Brief Overview. Retrieved from <https://retrospectjournal.com/2022/03/27/the-origins-of-tattooing-a-brief-overview/>
- [20]. The Hindu. (n.d.). Meet Some of India's Indigenous Tattoo Artists Fiercely Protecting Traditional Designs. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/meet-some-of-indias-indigenous-tattoo-artists-fiercely-protecting-traditional-designs>
- [21]. Times of India. (n.d.). Tales in Fading Ink: The Last Tattooed Tribals of the Northeast. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/tales-in-fading-ink-the-last-tattooed-tribals-of-the-northeast>
- [22]. Wikipedia. (n.d.). Tattoo. Retrieved from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tattoo>
- [23]. Indigenous Peoples Network. (2023, April 29). Mythologies of the Sangtam Tribe. Retrieved from <https://indigenouspeoplenet.wordpress.com>.
- [24]. Institute of Journal of Multidisciplinary Research. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2023/4/4325.pdf>

- [25]. International Journal of Fashion & Market Research. (2023). Tattoo: A Cultural Heritage. Retrieved from <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2023/4/4325.pdf>
- [26]. Iris Odyuo, IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science. (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol9-issue4/C0941322.pdf?id=6146>
- [27]. Tikhir church silver jubilee Kiphire town (2008).
- [28]. Interviewed Mrs.Tsurila Mongzar, a tattooed individual on 10/01/24.
- [29]. Interviewed Mrs. Piola Sangtam, a tattooed individual on 11/01/24.
- [30]. Interviewed Mr. Mermong Tikhir, Dobashi Kiphiri district on 12/01/24.
- [31]. Interviewed Mrs. Lichola Sangtam, a tattooed individual on 12/01/24.
- [32]. Interviewed Mr. Tsangthsimong Sangtam, a retired teacher on 13/01/24
- [33]. Interviewed Mr. P Tsaseto Sangtam, Head GB Phelunger village on 14/01/24.
- [34]. Interviewed Mrs. Tsakiuchi Sangtam, a tattooed individual on 14/01/24.
- [35]. Interviewed Mr. Lichomong Lankithonger, former deacon Sangtam Baptist church Kiphire town on 15/01/24.

