



“The Intersection Of Traditional Governance And Economic Practices In The Tangkhul Of Manipur”

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Abstract: The tribal communities generally have a traditional system of governance that persists to this day, albeit in various forms. The Tangkhul Naga community in Manipur boasts a rich history of traditional governance structures and economic practices that have evolved over centuries. This study explores how conventional governance systems, rooted in customary laws and community-centric leadership, intersect with the contemporary economic activities of the Tangkhul. While traditional practices such as land distribution, resource management, and dispute resolution continue to influence socio-economic behaviour, modern challenges, including urbanization, market expansion, and state policies, have reshaped these dynamics. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and secondary sources, this research examines how these governance structures adapt to changing economic landscapes while maintaining continuity with cultural identity. It highlights the role of village councils, clan-based decision-making, and collective labour systems in sustaining traditional livelihoods such as agriculture and handicrafts. Furthermore, the study investigates the community’s integration into modern economic networks and the tensions between conventional norms and market-driven strategies. This intersectional analysis provides insights into the resilience and adaptability of the Tangkhul community and contributes to broader discourses on indigenous governance, sustainable development, and cultural preservation in the context of rapid socio-economic transformation.

Keywords: Traditional governance, Customary laws, Resource management, Urbanization, Village councils, Traditional livelihoods.

I. Introduction

Indigenous governance systems are rooted in traditional practices characterized by inclusivity and participation. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the rights of Indigenous peoples, including their political, economic, and social systems, as well as their cultural foundations. It highlights the need to protect their rights to lands and resources, as recognized in treaties and agreements. The declaration acknowledges Indigenous communities’ efforts to enhance their well-being while seeking to eliminate discrimination. Moreover, it stresses the crucial role of Indigenous peoples in decision-making processes affecting their lands and resources, which is essential for preserving their cultures and fostering development that meets their needs (United Nations, 2007). In the fields of jurisprudence and the anthropology of law, it is widely accepted that every society or social group consists of multiple legal orders or fragments of legal systems. The

concept of legal pluralism directly opposes the doctrine of legal centralism, which claims that law must be state law-uniform, exclusive, and administered only by state institutions (Snyder, 1981). The coexistence of multiple legal systems is not necessarily a unique phenomenon but serves as a reminder that, from a legal standpoint, no society is truly isolated or homogenous. With the emergence of the modern state, many customary rules remained in place and were recognized, while others faded into obsolescence. Those that endured gained additional legitimacy, transitioning from being enforced solely by public opinion to being upheld by the state through its political authority and institutions. Although unwritten, these rules reflected the community's shared understanding of right and wrong (Zhimo, 2019). Therefore, the study of customary law encompasses a wide range of social behaviours within a community. At its core, such a study reveals the community's fundamental attitudes, values, and worldviews. The rules and customs serve as tangible expressions of these underlying orientations. The Tangkhul Naga community of Manipur, particularly in Kangpokpi district, represents a unique convergence of traditional governance systems and economic practices. Rooted in rich cultural traditions, their socio-economic structures have evolved over centuries while maintaining continuity with their indigenous identity. Traditional governance, emphasising customary laws, clan-based leadership, and collective decision-making, has historically shaped the community's approach to resource management and economic behaviour. However, the advent of modernization, urbanization, and market expansion has introduced new challenges and opportunities, reshaping these traditional systems.

II. Study area

The Tangkhul Nagas are an indigenous ethnic group located in north-eastern India and north-western Myanmar. Among them, the Tangkhul is one of the sub-tribes predominantly found in the state of Manipur, which lies on the Indo-Myanmar border and is recognized as a biodiversity hotspot. The people of Manipur can be broadly categorized into two groups: the valley people and the hill people or tribal communities. The government recognizes a total of 33 tribes as Scheduled Tribes in Manipur, with the Tangkhul being a significant sub-tribe. The valley inhabitants, known as Meiteis or Manipuris, reside in the valley regions, while the tribal communities live in the hilly areas. The socio-ecological frameworks regarding land management, land use, agricultural systems, and institutional arrangements differ significantly between the hills and the valley. Kangpokpi district is located between 25°07'60.00"N latitude and 93°57'59.99"E longitude. The district headquarters is in Kangpokpi town, which sits at an altitude of 992 meters above sea level and is approximately 45 kilometers from Imphal, the state capital. This district is home to a diverse population that includes various ethnic groups, primarily the indigenous Kukis, Nagas, Nepalis, and Meiteis, each with their own socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The administration of Kangpokpi district is led by the Deputy Commissioner. It is situated in the northern part of Manipur state and is bordered to the south by Tengnoupal, Thoubal, and Imphal East districts, to the east by Ukhrul and Kamjong districts, to the west by Imphal West and Senapati districts, and the north by Senapati district. The present study is conducted in three sample villages, Tangkhul Khullen, Sada Lungthar, and Irong Tangkhul which are located in the Island sub-division of Kangpokpi district, Manipur. Tangkhul Khullen is situated 72 km south of the district headquarters in Kangpokpi, Sada Lungthar is 108 km south, and Irong Tangkhul is 76 km south. All three villages fall under the Island development block.

III. Methodology

This research is grounded in extensive fieldwork conducted among the Tangkhul Naga community residing in Kangpokpi District, Manipur. Before the commencement of the main study, formal approval was obtained from the respective village authorities. Following this, a pilot survey was carried out to assess the feasibility of the research design and to fine-tune the methodological tools for the subsequent data collection process. The data collection process employed a combination of primary and secondary research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Primary data were gathered through a household census survey, which provided baseline demographic and economic information, as well as through semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants, including village chiefs, pastors, and respected elders. These interviews offered valuable insights into the social and economic structures of the community. In addition, observational techniques were employed to document everyday activities, particularly focusing on agricultural practices, land use patterns, and the local landholding system.

To complement the primary data, secondary sources were extensively consulted. These included scholarly literature on tribal economies, with a specific emphasis on studies related to the Tangkhul community. The qualitative nature of the research was particularly suited to exploring the complex interplay between traditional systems of governance and prevailing economic practices. Ethnographic fieldwork formed a core component of the methodology, involving not only interviews with a diverse range of community members but also the collection of oral histories. These narratives played a crucial role in tracing the evolution of land distribution mechanisms and the management of communal resources within the community. Secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journals, and archival materials, were instrumental in conducting a historical analysis of the Tangkhul community's socio-economic development. For this study, three villages—Sada Lungthar, Tangkhul Khullen, and Irong Village—were purposefully selected based on their strong dependence on agriculture and the continued presence of traditional governance systems. Although these villages are located relatively close to one another, they exhibit distinct variations in landholding arrangements, patterns of community organization, and socio-political dynamics. These contrasts offer a nuanced understanding of the diversity within Tangkhul livelihoods. The selection of these villages was also influenced by considerations of accessibility and logistical convenience. Located approximately 84.6 km, 75.9 km, and 76.6 km, respectively, from the Kangpokpi district headquarters, the villages were within a manageable distance for conducting sustained and in-depth fieldwork. This geographical proximity facilitated regular visits, prolonged engagement with community members, and the collection of rich qualitative data. Together, these villages serve as critical sites for examining how the Tangkhul community navigates contemporary challenges posed by urbanization, the expansion of market economies, and the increasing influence of state-driven development policies. Their experiences shed light on both the resilience and adaptability of indigenous systems in the face of socio-economic transformation.

IV. Traditional governance structure

Traditional governance among the Tangkhul is deeply entrenched in their customary laws and communal values, reflecting a system that emphasizes collective decision-making and social harmony. At the core of this governance structure are the village councils, known as *Hangva*, which serve as vital institutions in managing the affairs of the community. These councils oversee a wide range of responsibilities, including the equitable distribution of land, resolving disputes, maintaining peace, and upholding cultural traditions. Among the Tangkhul, the village council is the basis for governance and is represented through a clan system under the village chief or headman. The system of representation is hereditary following permanent membership. Today it is still practiced and remains relevant in most of the villages inhabited by the Tangkhul (Somingam, 2017). Typically composed of village elders and representatives from various clans, the councils function on the principles of consensus and equity, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and just. Leadership within the Tangkhul community is inherently clan-based, with prominent roles assigned to chieftains or headmen, referred to as *Awunga*. The village chief held a dual role within the community, encompassing both religious and secular responsibilities. Religious duties were shared between the chief and the village priests. While the priests conducted activities such as ceremonial sacrifices and religious worship, the chief's presence was essential at all religious ceremonies. He presided over religious festivals and played a key role in initiating communal activities. No individual in the village could undertake such tasks until the chief had ritually inaugurated them on behalf of the community. The chief was the first to sow, plant, pluck, and harvest, symbolizing his leadership in all religious rites and festivals to ensure the village's prosperity. As the secular leader, his home also served as the village court. His responsibilities were extensive, overseeing various aspects of village life to promote the welfare of the community (Ngalengnam, 2014). These leaders are entrusted with the dual responsibilities of being the custodians of customary laws and mediators in disputes, embodying the values of fairness, wisdom, and integrity. Their authority is not only derived from their position but also from the respect and trust they command within the community, reinforcing the Tangkhul strong sense of unity and collective identity. The village chief holds significant administrative powers, and as a result, the people regard his words as law. However, the Tangkhul community practices a democratic form of governance, which prevents the chief from becoming a despot or dictator. He consults his councillors (*Hangva*) on all matters, and decisions are made according to the wishes of the people (Horam, 2019). The village councils served as guardians and protectors of the forest, responsible for the conservation of natural resources to ensure that village forests and other ecosystems were properly managed. Each year, they would designate specific areas for jhum cultivation. To allow the land to regain its fertility, these areas were left

as fallow land, where villagers were not permitted to cultivate for at least four or five years. The Tangkhul people believe that land cannot be used continuously without losing its productivity; therefore, they allow it to rest and recover its fertility (Shimray, 2014). According to Shimreipam (2022), unlike the modern state structure, village political organization lacks a systematic separation of powers among the judiciary, executive, and legislature. Instead, village administration operates differently.

V. Economic Practices and Traditional Livelihoods

The Tangkhul people, like many other tribal groups, primarily rely on agriculture for their economy. In Naga society, land use is central to all social and economic activities. The main agricultural practice is called Jhum, also known as slash-and-burn, swidden agriculture, or shifting cultivation. In the north-eastern region of India, this method is popularly referred to as jhum (Shimray, 2004). The Tangkhul community engages in two primary forms of agricultural practices: wet rice cultivation and jhum cultivation. Wet rice cultivation involves preparing flat fields in lowland plains or valley areas to facilitate the efficient cultivation of rice. These fields are typically flooded with water, which plays a crucial role in promoting healthy rice growth by maintaining soil fertility, preventing weeds, and ensuring a consistent water supply. This method is well-suited for regions with abundant water resources and flat terrain, enabling higher productivity compared to other farming techniques. On the other hand, jhum cultivation, also known as shifting cultivation, involves clearing a patch of forest land for farming, using it temporarily, and then allowing it to regenerate over time. These traditional methods reflect the community's adaptive strategies for farming in hilly terrains. Rice serves as the staple food for the Tangkhul, forming the core of their diet. Alongside rice, they cultivate a variety of other crops that contribute to their sustenance and economic activities. These include maize, millet, and Job's tears, as well as spices and vegetables such as ginger, onion, pumpkin, cucumber, tobacco, chilli, and a range of other seasonal vegetables. The cultivation of these crops takes place both in open agricultural fields and within homestead gardens, ensuring a diverse and self-sufficient approach to food production (Shimray, 2001). From a very early age, knowledge of cultivation was imparted to the youth in their institution known as *Longshim*, which served as a dormitory hall. Other economic activities, such as animal rearing, crafting, blacksmithing, and hunting, were also practiced and learned for domestic production and consumption (Maheishang, 2014). *Longshim* was the epicentre of Tangkhul social, economic, political, military, cultural, and religious life. It was the institution where young people, both boys and girls, received training, discipline, and instruction in all aspects of their lives (Shimray & Khashimwo, 2024).

The Tangkhul community's feasts and festivals were deeply intertwined with their agricultural calendar and the changing seasons, reflecting their close relationship with nature. These communal events marked significant milestones in the agricultural cycle, such as planting, harvesting, and other critical farming activities. Each celebration was a time for collective participation, reinforcing social bonds and cultural traditions tied to their agrarian lifestyle. In the absence of modern calendars, the traditional Tangkhul relied on natural indicators to measure time and organize their lives. They observed the movement of the sun and the shadows it cast to determine the time of day. This practical method allowed them to track daily activities in harmony with their environment. For longer durations, they counted months based on the lunar cycle (Shimray, 2014; Ellen, 2023). The changing shapes of the moon served as a natural clock, with each month named following agricultural activities or the transformation of natural vegetation during that period. This practice helped align their schedules with seasonal shifts, ensuring their farming tasks coincided with optimal conditions. Seasons were identified through noticeable climatic changes, such as temperature variations, rainfall, or the blooming of specific plants. A year was measured not in numerical terms but as the duration spanning from the beginning of one agricultural operation to the start of the next. This organic method of timekeeping highlights the Tangkhul deep connection to their land and the cyclical rhythm of nature (Shimray, 2014).

After the harvest season, the Tangkhuls engage in various non-agricultural activities, including handicrafts, weaving, pottery, hunting, and fishing. However, hunting and setting traps are forbidden during the breeding seasons of animals and birds. The Tangkhuls hunt animals for meat, but it is considered an offense to kill any animal during its mating period. Additionally, it is taboo for them to kill an animal while it is sleeping, as this is seen as a time for all beings to rest. Instead, they would wait until the animal wakes up or, if necessary, lightly throw a small stone to rouse it (Shimray, 2014). While occupational specialization was not a common feature among the Tangkhuls, certain villages were renowned for their

expertise in specific crafts or industries. For example, weaving—a widespread activity undertaken by nearly all married and unmarried women—was particularly advanced in a cluster of Tangkhul villages. Hodson (1911) identified six villages—Ukhrul, Toloi, Naimu, Sandang, Toinem, and Phadang—as especially notable for their cloth-weaving industry. Similarly, Johnstone (1896) observed that certain Tangkhul villages had a high concentration of cloth manufacturers who catered to diverse tribal patterns, tailoring designs to suit their customers' preferences. Raw materials for weaving were historically sourced from Manipuri women in the Sena Kaithel or Royal Bazaar, the primary commercial hub of Manipur.

In addition to weaving, specific villages developed expertise in other crafts. For instance, Hundung and Nungbi were known for producing earthenware, utilizing clay deposits located near their villages (Hodson, 1911). During inter-village travel or festivals, Tangkhuls often identified themselves through their specialized crafts. The Raphei (northern Tangkhuls), for example, were highly skilled in pottery and salt-making, while the Kharao (western Tangkhuls) excelled in weaving and were historically the sole producers of woven textiles. Likewise, the Kamo (southern Tangkhuls) specialized in crafting various types of baskets and mats (Horam, 1939). Although the Tangkhuls did not establish large-scale industries, handicrafts and small-scale manufacturing—such as basketry, pottery, blacksmithing, weaving, and salt production—were well-developed across their villages. These products were primarily for local use rather than for widespread trade. However, trade and commerce involving select items occurred with neighbouring Tangkhul villages, other Naga tribes, the Meitei, and the Burmese. Before the adoption of a monetary economy, cattle and iron pieces served as units of value among the Tangkhuls (Shimray, 2001). Trade connections extended as far as Homalin in Myanmar, which was a day's journey on foot from Chatric, an eastern Tangkhul village. Tangkhuls from this region traded maize, cotton, and forest products in exchange for iron, which was critical for local blacksmiths. Since metal ores were not available locally, the blacksmithing industry depended heavily on imported materials, often sourced from traders in the Manipur valley (Hodson, 1911). Salt production was another significant industry concentrated in the north-eastern Tangkhul villages. Hodson (1911) reported that brine wells, located near riverbeds, were tapped for salt production, with their discovery often aided by observing the behaviour of cattle, which have a natural affinity for salt. These industries highlight the Tangkhul ingenuity and the integration of their economic activities with the natural environment and regional trade networks.

VI. Challenges of Modernization

The British established their administration in Manipur following the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, which resulted in the defeat of the Manipur kingdom and the creation of the Manipur State Durbar in 1907 (Singh, 2018; Dangmei, 2021). Although the British directly controlled the valley of Manipur, they implemented an indirect rule system for the hill tribes, predominantly inhabited by the Nagas and Kukis. The Political Agent oversaw judicial administration in these hill areas during the colonial period (Dangmei, 2021). Specifically, the British administration in the Tangkhul region began in 1891 and continued until Indian independence in 1947 (Shimray, 2001). During this period, both executive and judicial functions in Manipur were administered through the Political Agent. To facilitate governance, Manipur was divided into three distinct administrative zones: the British Reserve Area, the Valley Area, and the Hill Areas. This administrative division, aligned along communal lines, reflected the British colonial strategy of divide and rule, a policy that persisted throughout the colonial era (Singh, 2018; Dangmei, 2021).

In the early colonial period, hill house taxes were collected by British officials with assistance from village chiefs, who received a commission of one anna per rupee. However, by 1894, for efficient tax collection, the hill tracts were organized into five territorial zones or *lam*: Moa *lam* in the north, Tangkhul *lam* in the northeast, Tammu *lam* in the south, Moirang *lam* in the southwest, and Kabui *lam* in the west of the valley (Devi, 2018). Each *lam* was placed under a Meitei *lam subedar*, with seven *lambus* assigned to each subedar. Subedars were compensated with a salary of fifteen rupees, while *lambus* received seven rupees (Devi, 2018). Before the colonial period, the Tangkhul region lacked centralized political authority, as each village maintained political autonomy and had minimal interaction with communities outside their own (Maheishang, 2014). However, significant changes emerged with the arrival of Christian missionaries, the introduction of Western education, and a new political system. Ellen (2023) notes that Western education replaced the traditional dormitory system (*longshim*), while Christianity marked a shift from animistic beliefs to Christian doctrines. Dangmei (2021) similarly highlights that social and cultural changes among hill tribes, including the Tangkhul, were catalyzed by their conversion to Christianity. Somingam (2014)

highlights the transformative impact of Christianity on Tangkhul society, noting that with the arrival of William Pettigrew in 1896 at Hunphun village, Ukhrul District, significant changes occurred over the next four to five decades. The Tangkhul population became divided into Christians and non-Christians, as foreign missionaries taught the new converts to reject traditional folk practices, viewing them as incompatible with Christian principles. This led to a loss of cultural heritage, as the converts struggled to distinguish between their religion and culture. The arrival of missionaries not only introduced Christianity but also Western education. Rituals and worship among the Tangkhul people persisted but were redirected toward the Christian God. Christianity and education exposed the Tangkhul to the broader world, connecting previously isolated villages and transforming their worldview (Joy, 2014). Changes permeated their socio-cultural, political, and economic spheres as Tangkhul communities experienced increasing and continuous interaction with external influences. However, the impact of colonial administration was mixed. While the Tangkhul were introduced to education and Christianity, freeing them from perceived bondage to animistic beliefs, developmental progress remained minimal. There were no motorable roads, and villagers were often forced to carry British officials in a litter from village to village (Shimray, 2001).

The traditional governance and economic systems of the Tangkhul are facing increasing pressures from external influences. Urbanization, coupled with the expansion of market-oriented economies, has disrupted the long-standing communal landholding patterns that have historically ensured equitable access to resources and social harmony. The shift from collective to individual ownership, often driven by urban expansion and infrastructural development, has introduced competition for land and resources, creating tension within the community. Due to increased market integration, traditional labour practices have been replaced by daily wage agricultural workers—an arrangement that lacks social and cultural significance. This shift in labour arrangements among shifting cultivators has been observed in various parts of the world. Traditionally, labour exchange served as both a means of mobilizing labour and as a way to foster social gatherings. However, it has largely been replaced by paid labourers. This change is primarily a consequence of commercialization and market integration (Grogan et al., 2012; Keishing, 2019a). Furthermore, state-led initiatives, such as the implementation of formal land registration systems, frequently conflict with indigenous practices of land management. These policies, while aimed at modernization, have inadvertently caused disputes over land ownership and tenure. For many within the community, these changes foster a sense of marginalization, as traditional systems are side-lined in favour of formal legal frameworks that often overlook local contexts and customs.

Market-driven economic strategies have further influenced traditional livelihoods, altering the way resources are utilized and managed. For instance, in the present study villages, the increasing emphasis on the commercialization of agriculture has encouraged a shift toward the cultivation of cash crops like ginger, fish mint, perilla, pineapple, turmeric, and green beans. While this transition has opened avenues for increased household income and integration into larger economic networks, it has also come with significant challenges. The focus on cash crops often leads to the neglect of subsistence farming, potentially undermining food security at the local level. Additionally, reliance on market-driven agriculture exposes farmers to external vulnerabilities, such as fluctuating commodity prices, unstable demand, and dependency on external inputs like chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds. These factors can strain the community's economic resilience, leaving them susceptible to market dynamics beyond their control. The growing tension between traditional and modern systems is not limited to the economic sphere but also extends to cultural and social dimensions. The erosion of communal practices, coupled with the increasing influence of external markets and governance structures, poses a challenge to the Tangkhul ability to maintain their unique identity and self-sufficiency in the face of modernization.

VII. Adapting to Change: Resilience and Continuity

In the face of mounting challenges brought by modernization, the Tangkhul have displayed remarkable resilience, demonstrating an ability to adapt their traditional systems to align with contemporary realities while preserving their cultural ethos. Village councils, which have historically been the cornerstone of Tangkhul governance, continue to play a vital role in addressing issues arising from land use changes. In the post-independence period, the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 was enacted and implemented in 1957 as part of efforts to integrate a democratic framework in the tribal hill areas. This Act provided for the establishment of Village Authorities (VAs) in every village within the hill regions. For the first time, it introduced the election of VA members through adult franchise, while

designating the village chief as the ex-officio chairman of the VA. The Act aimed to accommodate traditional authority within the VA structure by recognizing the role and position of the village chief, while simultaneously creating a democratic space for the election of its members (Shimreipam, 2022; Horam, 2023). These councils mediate disputes within the community and serve as intermediaries in negotiations with external authorities, ensuring that local voices are heard in the context of state-driven development policies. Similarly, clan-based decision-making structures, another foundational aspect of Tangkhul society, have undergone significant evolution. These traditional systems have successfully integrated modern legal frameworks, allowing the community to navigate complex state regulations without compromising their cultural identity. The clan acts as a foundation of social security, where members offer mutual support, including mental, physical, and economic assistance (Ruivah, 1993). Additionally, the clan system serves as the backbone of the structural framework, shaping the body politic, directing the socio-economic system, and influencing social and cultural values (Shirmray, 2004).

In traditional Tangkhul Naga society, cooperative approaches to agricultural work are a prominent and enduring feature that reflects the community's collective ethos and interdependent social structure. Among the various systems of labour organization, the practice of labour exchange holds a position of significant importance. This system, deeply embedded in Tangkhul Naga culture, enables members of the community to mutually support one another in agricultural activities, ensuring that critical tasks such as sowing, weeding, and harvesting are carried out efficiently and promptly. As noted by Keishing (2019b), the exchange of labour is not merely an economic practice but also a social mechanism that fosters community solidarity, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and upholds traditional values of reciprocity and cooperation. Through this organized yet informal exchange, the Tangkhul Naga can navigate the challenges of subsistence agriculture while preserving their cultural heritage. The Tangkhul people in the present study use the term *Alom Yao or Khulang* to such cooperation in their agricultural practices. This communal system fosters collaboration, where community members unite to assist one another during crucial phases of farming, such as planting crops, weeding fields, and harvesting produce. The spirit of mutual aid is at the heart of *Alom Yao*, ensuring that no family shoulders the burden of agricultural work alone. In return for the labour provided by fellow villagers, the host family extends hospitality by offering food and drinks to the participants. This act of providing sustenance is not merely a gesture of gratitude, but an integral part of the reciprocal relationship embedded within the system. By supporting one another in this way, *Alom Yao or Khulang* strengthens social bonds, promotes a sense of belonging, and ensures that agricultural tasks are completed efficiently through collective effort. The practice not only enhances agricultural productivity but also sustains the cultural values of cooperation and community support among the Tangkhul people.

In addition to agricultural cooperation, the Tangkhul community extends its collective labour system to other significant social occasions that require considerable manpower. Events such as wedding ceremonies, feasts, and various cultural or religious celebrations benefit from this communal support. Villagers come together to assist the host family in organizing and managing the event, ensuring that it runs smoothly and successfully. During weddings, for instance, community members may help with tasks such as setting up venues, preparing food, serving guests, and handling logistics, which greatly reduces the burden on the host family. Similarly, when a feast is held, whether to mark a personal milestone or a cultural festival, the entire village pitches in to contribute labour, resources, and expertise. This form of cooperation not only eases the workload for the hosts but also reinforces social cohesion and mutual responsibility within the community. By working together, the villagers ensure that important events are celebrated in a spirit of unity and shared joy, reflecting the deeply ingrained values of solidarity and collective welfare in the Tangkhul society. By blending customary laws with formal governance practices, the Tangkhul maintain a sense of continuity while adapting to the demands of a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape.

VIII. Integration into Modern Economic Networks

Economic development is a crucial foundation for progress in social, political, and other spheres of society. However, the economic transformation of the Tangkhuls differed significantly from the industrial revolution in the West, where human labour was largely replaced by machines. For the Tangkhul, modernization primarily involved a shift from traditional agricultural occupations to non-agricultural professions. This transformation is somewhat analogous to the historical shift of serfs becoming industrial workers and feudal lords evolving into merchant guilds. Similarly, the Tangkhul transitioned from being predominantly cultivators to engaging in professions such as teaching, missionary work, and administrative

roles like *Lambus*, reflecting their unique path to modernization (Maheishang, 2014). The Tangkhul of Kangpokpi district has increasingly embraced regional and global economic systems, demonstrating a remarkable ability to blend their rich traditional practices with emerging modern economic opportunities. This dynamic integration is particularly evident in their approach to the marketing of handicrafts and agricultural products. Traditional handicrafts, which embody their cultural heritage and artistic expertise, have found a growing market not only within the region but also beyond, contributing significantly to the local economy. Similarly, their agricultural products are now being marketed to generate cash income, which helps meet their daily expenses and improve their overall standard of living. In agriculture, the Tangkhul have adopted modern technologies to enhance productivity and efficiency. Tools such as power tillers and water-pumping machines have revolutionized traditional farming methods, enabling farmers to cultivate larger areas and ensure better irrigation. The use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides has further boosted crop yields, ensuring better food security and surplus production for sale in markets. Alongside these advancements, there has been a noticeable increase in migration among the Tangkhul to urban centres. Many individuals are moving to the state capital, Imphal, as well as major metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and others across the country. This migration is driven by the pursuit of better job opportunities, educational advancements, and a desire for economic stability. While this shift introduces new challenges, it also serves as a testament to the community's resilience and adaptability in navigating the complexities of a rapidly evolving economic landscape. According to Amaladoss and Francis (2020), among the Tangkhul there has been a significant transformation in socio-economic conditions, marked by upward mobility in status and a growing migration of Indigenous youth to urban cities. Urban migration has emerged as a primary avenue for survival and livelihood, offering prospects and challenges alike. These urban centres serve as points of connection between origin and host states, characterized by vulnerabilities and opportunities. Additionally, they provide avenues for both skilled and unskilled labour in the neoliberal Indian market. Despite these complexities, the Tangkhul of Kangpokpi has demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience in integrating into modern economic networks. By leveraging their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and community-based systems, they have positioned themselves to harness contemporary opportunities while striving to preserve their cultural essence. This dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity reflects the ingenuity of the Tangkhul community as they navigate the challenges and possibilities of a globalized economic landscape.

In addition to governance, the village authorities serve as a vital link between the government and the villagers. They disseminate information about various welfare schemes and programs, ensuring that the benefits reach the intended recipients. These schemes include the supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), the Public Distribution System (PDS) for essential commodities, and opportunities under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides wage employment for rural households. Beyond administrative and welfare duties, the village authorities are actively involved in fostering the cultural and social life of the community. They organize festivals and other traditional celebrations, which serve to strengthen communal bonds and preserve the cultural heritage of the village. The financial resources of the village authorities primarily come from the sustainable utilization of local natural resources. They generate income by selling firewood, timber, and stone boulders, which are abundant in the area. This revenue supports their administrative activities and the development initiatives they undertake for the betterment of the village. Through these multifaceted roles, the village authorities ensure the smooth functioning, welfare, and cultural vitality of the community.

IX. Conclusion

The intersection of traditional governance and economic practices among the Tangkhuls in Kangpokpi district provides a compelling illustration of a complex, adaptive system that strives to balance cultural continuity with the demands of socio-economic change. Rooted in customary laws and collective values, the traditional governance structures of the Tangkhul remain integral to shaping economic behaviour and resource management. These structures centred on village councils and clan-based decision-making systems, continue to provide a framework for equitable resource distribution, conflict resolution, and community cohesion, even as modernization introduces new challenges and opportunities into their economic landscape. This study highlights the critical role that indigenous governance systems play in promoting sustainable development and cultural resilience. Traditional practices, far from being static relics of the past, are dynamic and adaptable, enabling communities like the Tangkhul to engage with modern economic networks without entirely compromising their cultural identity. The integration of these

systems into contemporary governance and economic models offers valuable insights into how indigenous knowledge and practices can complement, rather than conflict with, broader developmental agendas. By examining the Tangkhul experiences, broader lessons can be drawn for Indigenous communities worldwide. These lessons emphasize the importance of policy frameworks that respect and integrate traditional governance and economic systems. Such policies should aim to empower communities by supporting their efforts to adapt to modern realities while preserving their unique cultural and social identities. The Tangkhul case demonstrates that cultural preservation and economic progress are not inherently mutually exclusive. Instead, they can coexist and thrive through deliberate adaptive strategies, community agency, and innovative approaches that leverage tradition as a foundation for modernity. Ultimately, the Tangkhul ability to navigate the complexities of modernization while maintaining a strong connection to their heritage serves as a powerful example of resilience. Their experiences underscore the potential for Indigenous communities to achieve sustainable development by combining traditional values with modern opportunities, offering a model of balance and continuity that is both locally rooted and globally relevant.

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