

Project Report submitted by

Natural and cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative (NCHCI)

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to

Sangeet Natak Academy

on the topic

Folk Music of Tangkhul Naga

Under the Scheme for

Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) & Diverse Cultural Traditions of India-regarding (2014-15)

Brief introduction of the project

The Tangkhuls are one of the Naga tribes situated in the contiguous frontier areas of North-East India and North-West Myanmar. They belong to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. The bulk of the Tangkhuls are situated on the Indian side of the Indo-Myanmar border. The Tangkhuls on the Indian side are concentrated in Ukhrul district of Manipur state. The Tangkhuls are also found in the contiguous areas of Senapati district and Thoubal district. There are 205 Tangkhul villages in Ukhrul district.

This project confined to the Tangkhuls living in the Ukhrul district of Manipur. Ukhrul district the main concentrated homeland of the Tangkhuls is bounded by North Western Myanmar in the East Senapati district in the West Imphal East district in the North West, Chandel district in the South and Phek district of Nagaland state in the North. The population of the district as per Census 2011 is 183,998 of which 82.35% are in the rural area and the remaining being largely confined to the urban area of Ukhrul, the district headquarters.

The rich cultural heritage of the Nagas have gone sea change with their encountered with the Christian missionaries and latter with the globalization. This project attempt to understand the nature and function of the Tangkhul Naga music, in the course of this project documentation of the relatively disappearing folk songs of the Tangkhul are done.

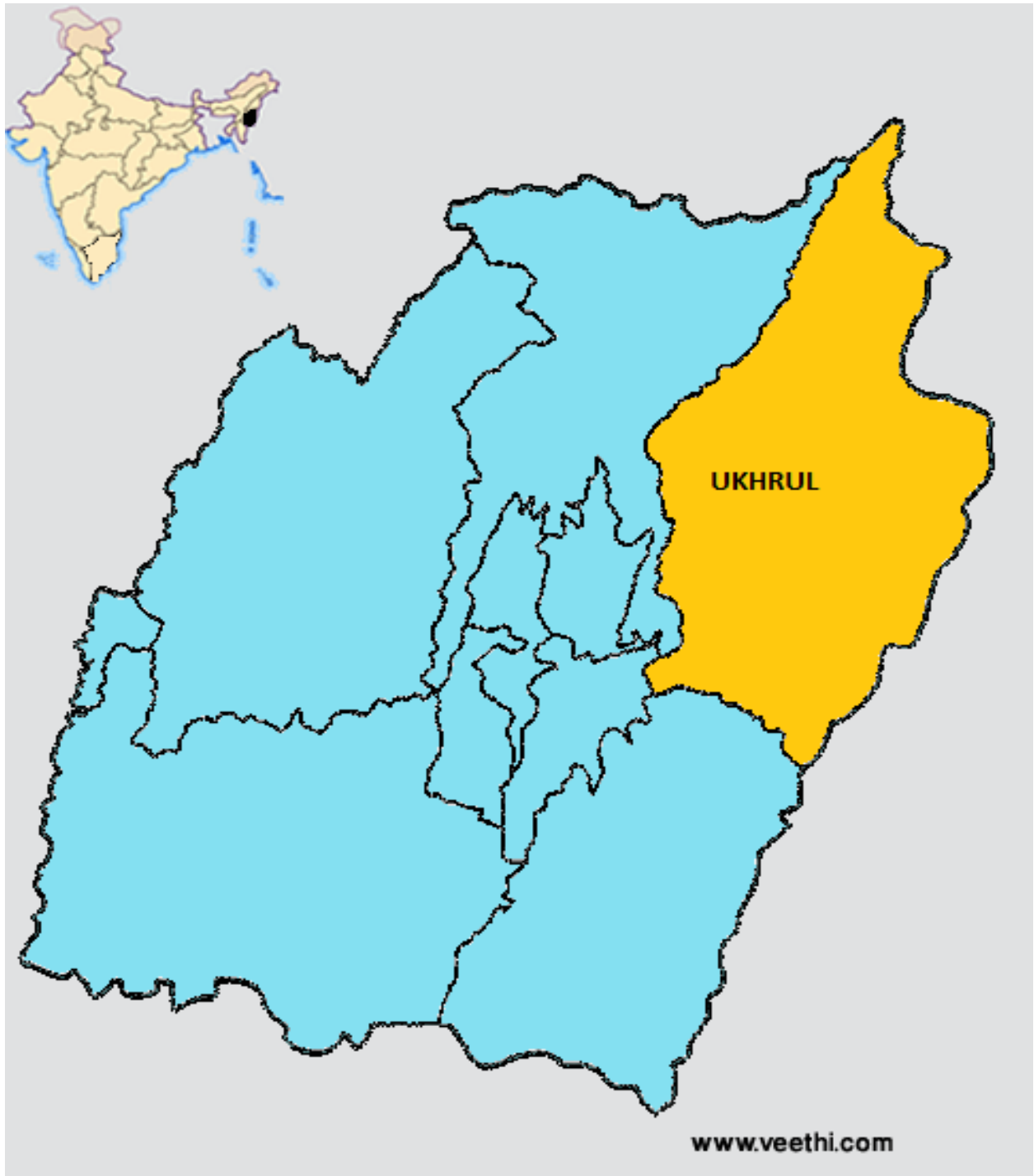


Image 1: Map of Ukhrul district in Manipur (in yellow color) concentration of the Tangkhul Naga

Objectives of the project:

Extensive documentation (both audio and visual) have done in two villages of Tangkhul one in CHINGAI VILLAGE which is in the northern village bordering with Myanmar and another in RINGUI VILLAGE, in the western part of the Tangkhul.. To classify or categorized the various music of the Tangkhuls .

The study of various aspects of folk music may eventually solve many difficult problems of ethnology. It portrays contemporary life, documents traditional behavior, reinforces systems of belief and provides safety valves to release pent up resentments. It throws light on the numerous aspects of a social organization and provides clues to an understanding of the interplay between culture and personality development. The study of music can also help in understanding acculturation pertaining of the relation between culture and the environment, as also between culture and personality.

Music, which may be summed up briefly as combination of sounds to please the human ear has always played a vital role in human society. Unlike the music of the developed society, Tangkhul music has myriad functions. It is a feast not only for the eyes and ear and mind of the people but it is also a heritage of knowledge and wisdom of the tribal people.

Documentation and findings.

Altogether 50 songs from were recorded at in 6 days from the above mentioned villages. Various types of songs included *Rai Laa* (war song), *Thisham Laa* (song to departed soul), *Yangyir Laa* (spring song), *Chapchat Laa* (song of lamentation), *Naokhot laa* (lullaby) etc. Most of the musical activities of the Tangkhuls were related to lullabies, work song or song to accompany work activities, music used for celebratory or religious purpose. In other words Tangkhul have song for every occasion

(1) Nature:

- The song is performed in three voices or parts with same tune, Okrei (soprano), Okla (alto), khakrei (bass) and their songs are repetitive, the ending part of the previous line will be sung again in the succeeding lines. The melody was always in slow time, whatever the nature of the song, joyous or otherwise.
- Symbolism is the core of the oral verse. The young maidens are compared to buds, young boys are compared to bamboo shoot, the beautiful breast of the girls are compared with ripe mangoes, beautiful black and long hair of women is compared to the tail of a horse. The Tangkhul songs are very strong in metaphors.
- Music, among the tribal people develops directly as an integral of their live in everyday activities and social interaction which arises out under various life situations. Particularly, songs and dances as an amusement integral part of all the

activities of the people. In all favorable occasions-economic, social, religions and political events were celebrated with accompaniment of music.

- Entertainment at community level is mostly functional and is performed on the basic of the customs, moral and values of the society. Mass participation in such activities induces social life and brings harmony and unity among the people.

(2) **Ownership:**

- Music is not considered as exclusive property of its individual members, but of the community among the Tangkhuls. The musical performances in a tribal society involve all the members of its community. Musical performance cuts across the boundaries of age and sex. In other words in the Naga society, everywhere is a prospective music maker and practitioner and youthful age is the most suitable period for such activities.

(3) **Transmission:** Traditionally, folk music of Tangkhul Naga is frequently connected with non-musical activity, thus folk music can be called functional music. The transmission of folk culture is frequently incidental rather than making a conscious decision to learn.

The task of music learning is accomplished indirectly through the exposure to some other task of which music is a part. He or she initially learnt the music and other cultural aspects of the society as an incidental part of association with his father or mother or absorbed the information from the senior inmates in the *morung* (bachelor dormitories). For the Tangkhul society singing are more than exercises for entertainment and passing away the time. It is a sacred trust that the old man must pass on before he die. On many occasion in a rainy seasons or in cold winter noon, old man were usually surrounded by curious wide-eyed children and adults enjoyed the long session of singing till late nightfall. On festive occasions boys and girls of different age-groups join the elders' members of the village in singing. Children watch the verbal and gesture expression of the elders and repeat them. As everyone participated there was no grouping of audience and listeners, and there was no boundaries between musicians and listeners, there was no audience in itself. Everyone is a participant. Transmission occurs primarily through the communal participation in music activities that are normally tied to specific socio-cultural events or settings. It is the regular features of every village to sing and dance prior to retiring to bed. Dance and songs are organized in every *morung*. This is the time, where a senior inmate of the *morung* teaches the art of singing and dancing to their junior inmates.

(4) **Functions:**

- The Tangkhul music convey simple thoughts pertaining to a community's traditions, beliefs, rituals, social values, norms, festivals, heroic deeds, love and hate and everyday problems in simple language and style, present a community's

way of life. These songs are in a real sense, wealth among the illiterate and under educated society handed down from generation to generation.

- Folksongs play a vital role in educating the younger generation. The simple tunes of songs enlighten the tender minds of children with the useful knowledge of geography and history in the earliest manner. The moral song teaches the younger generation the norms and conduct of society, and philosophy of life. Besides the knowledge of geographies of worldly and mythical heroes, the folksongs also impart technical know-how of ploughing, sowing, irrigating and harvesting to the people.
- The songs not only reflect the Tangkhuls attitude to many aspects of life, they are the principal and recognized medium through which the individuals as well as the group express most intense emotions.

Implementation of the project

The fast disappearing of the age old folksongs of the Tangkhuls can be attributed to various factors. Some of the factors responsible for the lost and decaying of the folksongs can be seen through the functions played by the song in the Tangkhul society. As has been stated above that, in a tribal society like Tangkhuls, there are songs for all occasion, and songs are very seldom sung without a reason. Every song must be appropriate to the occasion on which it is sung. Thus, when the need for certain songs type disappears, the songs belonging to the type are likely to be quickly forgotten. The almost disappearance of the rituals songs and war songs and the completely disappearance of the *death song* are certainly a result of this kind. As a result of their conversion to Christianity, the Tangkhuls have to give up the rituals of the indigenous practice since the missionaries forbade as unchristian. With the lost of its functions, the rituals songs quickly disappear. It is seen that, the first song to be lost was the song least needed. If the trend of the disappearance of music with social institution continues, and if the Tangkhuls traditional music should ever disappear altogether, the last song to survive will probably be those for entertainment. It is not because entertainment is pre-eminent a social needs, but because it is least dependent on social institutions. Today, it is evidence in most part of the Tangkhul areas that songs associated with traditional social institutions has disappeared.

NCHCI shall make an attempt to

- Would encouraged and suggest that existing indigenous festivals that are rich in culture must be properly organized.
- Facilitate periodic competitions of folk songs.
- Encourage the existing schools and institutions to organizing of "summer camp" inviting experts from different associations to teach school.

Specific areas of the respective state in which the art form (s) is practiced- Geographical, topographical and other related aspects that the project may cover

Some photos of the project:



Image 2: Chingai village, one of the village where the project are undertake



Image 3: Some of the folk singers from Chingai village



Image 4: Female singers from Chingai village



Image 5: Male folk singers from Chingai vilage



Image 6: Folk singers from Ringui village



Image 7: Folk singers from Ringui village

Conclusion and challenges ahead:

The Tangkhuls are one of the most unique ethnic groups of the Nagas. It has rich cultural heritage. Unfortunately the Tangkhul tribes do not have written script of their own. Thus all their past culture, history belief system and way of life are passed down through oral tradition, mainly through folk songs and stories. Therefore the most authentic source of information of the Tangkhuls is folksong.

Today the Nagas has two worlds, he belongs to neither of these fully and completely-that is after getting the western education, he partly alienated from pure tribal tradition but never completely adopted into European culture.

Culturally Nagas is standing at the border, turning their backs on indigenous and heading to the western culture. Their millennia-old way of life hangs in the balance. It might be tempting to dismiss the Nagas plight as a price of progress, but apart from the tragedy of losing yet another culture in a world of flourishing cultural diversity, the fading of the Naga is a harbinger an early warning of large-scale destruction.