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Cultural significance of the *Moh-Mol* festival of the *Tangsa* community in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Among different traditional festivals celebrated by around 30 sub-tribes of the Tangsa community in India, the *Moh-Mol* festival is the only festival that is celebrated by all the sub-tribes of the community in common today. *Moh-Mol* festival acts as a cultural nexus connecting all the sub-tribes of Tangsa to come together and celebrate it with grandeur and gaiety. It also marks the beginning of the new year as per the traditional calendar of the Tangsa. The festive season of *Mol* starts from April and continues till August. The present study focuses on the *Moh-Mol* festival of the Tangsa tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh. The study discussed the evolution of the *Moh-Mol* festival in the community, the cultural significance of the *Moh-Mol* festival, rituals, and customs observed throughout the festival, types of *Moh-Mol*, and the degree of its importance felt by the Tangsa community in the contemporary period.

Method: The data collection for the present research has been done through interview method and participant observations. Being a member of the studied community of the present research myself, even though I have attended the *Moh-Mol* festival several times since my childhood, but this time specifically having the researcher's perspective in mind and purposefully to observe the participants of the community, I have participated and witnessed the *Mol* festival held on 25th May 2019 in *Kuttom* village, *Ponthai Mol* conducted in *Wagun Ponthai* village on 06th October 2019 and also *Lenghog* ritual conducted at *NamchikHavi* village on 23rd December 2019 which was also an inseparable part of the study topic. The present article is written based mainly on primary data collected from field visits and participant observation. To procure the data for the present research, I have also interviewed around 25 field respondents during my field visit conducted between 25th May 2019 to 15th February 2021 in 11 villages in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The interview was taken from the experts, especially people above 50 years of age, those who know the *Runhoon* song sung during *Mol* festival as well as those who know better about the culture and traditions of their respective subtribes. The interviews were recorded with the help of audio-visual tools such as video cameras, as well as mobile too, as a backup. Microphone, flashlight, tripod, portable charger for mobile, laptop and hard disk of the laptop were all other necessary electronic accessories to store and manage the data, as well as for the clarity of the videos and audios of the interviews. The sampling applied in this research is snowball sampling and the interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended questions because the nature of the data was to acquire data from oral sources and folklore. The data was collected from the *Kimsing*, *Mossang*, *Ronrang*, *Muklom*, *Havi*, *Ponthai*, *Longchang*, *Tikhak*, *Lungkhi*, *Ngaimong*, *Hahcheng*, *Shangwal*, *Jugli*, and *Gahja* sub-tribes of Tangsa tribe.

Keywords: Tangsa, *Moh-Mol*, festival, sub-tribe, cultural

Introduction

Tangsa is an ethnic group highly concentrated in the *Patkai* range especially in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh, Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia district in Assam, and in the *Sagaing* region of Myanmar. According to Morey, there are around 70 different sub-tribes within *Tangsa/Tangshang*, each of which has an identifiable linguistic variety. (Morey, para 1) Simons & Fennigin in their study estimated 100, 100 speakers of Tangsa varieties in all countries for the year 2010; 60, 000 of which live in Myanmar. Bradley estimated 15, 000 in India and around 40, 000 in total in India and Burma. (as cited in Boro 2017, p. 4). At least 35 sub-tribes of *Tangsa* are found in India, with more in Myanmar. Morey says that "Despite the similarity of the terms *Tangsa* and *Tangshang*, they do not appear to be cognate, and they do not refer to exactly the same groups; some groups that would be called Nocte in India are subsumed under *Tangshang* in Myanmar. "

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(Morey 2014, p. 63) Even though all sub-tribes called themselves “Tangsa”, they have been categorized into two broader groups based on their common ancestry and shared cultural practices in the Indian side. As the research is focused on the Mol festival celebrated by Tangsa in Arunachal Pradesh, the sample of the population and the universe is limited to the state of Arunachal Pradesh only. So, I will discuss only the sub-tribes living in India and their cultural practices associated with the Mol festival. The two broader groups into which Tangsa sub-tribes can be categorized are *Pangwa* and *Tangwa (Non-Pangwa)* groups. *Pangwa* group comprises more than 20 sub-tribes of Tangsa who claim to be descendants of one common parent called “*SanwangTai*”; *tai* means grandfather and “*Homjamwi*”; *wi* means grandmother. This group celebrates the *Wihufestival* as *Pan-Pangwa Identity*. The group consists of *Chamchang/Kimsing, Lungri, Lungphi, Mossang, Tonglim/Cholim, Shankey, Ngaimong, Lungkhi, Jugli, Hahcheng, Hahlang, Gajha, Botey, Thamphang, Thamkok, Khilak, Hahkhun, Rera/Ronrang, and Shangwal*. Whereas the *Tangwa/Non-Pangwa* group comprises sub-tribes such as *Longchang, Tikhak, Yungkuk, Nokjah, Kato, Muklom, Havi, and Ponthai*. All sub-tribes speak different dialects of the Tibeto-Burman family which are intelligible between some groups and which are unintelligible between some other groups as well. They use Assamese pidgin as lingua franca and younger generations use Assamese creole as well as Hindi pidgin.

Mol-Mol Festival

All Tangsa sub-tribes celebrate several festivals of their own. Even though their dialects may be slightly or utterly different from one another, their dress code is slightly or completely different from one another, but the core of their culture and traditions, belief system, lifestyle, and the history of their origin and migration are the same if we look closely on these aspects. *Moh-Mol* festival celebrated by all the sub-tribes of the Tangsa in the state of Arunachal Pradesh acts as a cultural nexus bringing all the sub-tribes of the community together to celebrate it every year in April. Every year on 25th of the April, all the sub-tribes of the Tangsa tribe gather at the ground in *Kharsang* town, wearing colorful and beautiful traditional Mol attires carrying their respective musical instruments like drums and gongs and thousands of people gather there to watch, enjoy and join the *Moh-Mol* dance group. This *Moh-Mol* festival is the only festival that all the sub-tribes of Tangsa celebrate together at one platform and can claim proudly as their collective festival. All Tangsa sub-tribes celebrated at least 5-7 different festivals of their sub-tribe in their traditional culture but today only 1-3 festivals are celebrated by only those sub-tribes who are still in their traditional faith. Why did Tangsa choose this particular festival as their collective festival out of many other festivals? Let us find out the uniqueness and cultural significance of this festival.

“*Moh-Mol*” is not a combination of two words rather it is a single term pronounced alternatively with these two different words; “*Moh*” as well as “*Mol*” by the different sub-tribes of Tangsa. Therefore, throughout the research article, I will use any of this two nomenclature alternatively, as used by the sub-tribes. Traditionally *Moh-Mol* festival is celebrated by all Tangsa sub-tribes as a pre-harvest festival after sowing paddy seeds in their jhum fields. *Muklom* and

Havi used to celebrate the festival after *Sah-hit*^[1] activity was completed by every household in their respective agriculture field in the *Koh Hahh*^[2] (J. Khimhun, personal communication, April 27, 2019). As per the traditional lunar calendar of the Muklom, the *Sah-hit* period falls in *Jakhang* month which corresponds to April as per the Gregorian calendar and thus Mol is celebrated in May (N. Rekhung, & W. Kitnal, personal communication, April 27, 2019). Whereas in the *Jugli* sub-tribe *Mol* festival is celebrated in the month of July after celebrating the *ChamphangKuh* festival (T. Thungwang, personal communication, September 25, 2019) and in the *Mossang* sub-tribe it is celebrated in the month of August (L. Mossang, personal communication, January 24, 2021). *Tikhak, Longchang, Kimsing*, and all other sub-tribes of Tangsa also celebrated this *Moh-Mol* festival for a different number of days as per their convenience based on their jhum agriculture activity. In the *Ngaimong* sub-tribe, they called *Moh-Mol* “*ChamyaktokKuh*” (R. Ngaimung, personal communication, August 18, 2019). Even though the dates and the month of the *Moh-Mol* festival may differ in all these sub-tribes of Tangsa but the core idea and cultural concept behind celebrating this festival are the same in all sub-tribes of Tangsa.

The *Moh-Mol* festival is a pre-harvest festival celebrated to venerate and worship the “*Tungja-Chamja*”^[3] directly after sowing seeds of paddy in the Jhum agriculture in some sub-tribes while some sub-tribes celebrate it after weeding in the agricultural field is completed. The *Moh-Mol* festival starts in April and continues till August in Tangsa. Different sub-tribes of Tangsa celebrate this festival on any date within these months.

In *Muklom, Havi, Ponthai, Longchang, and Mossang* Mol festival is celebrated even today also in their respective villages by performing and observing proper rituals and customs while in other sub-tribes it is no more in practice due to conversion except the Tangsa Mol celebrated collectively in *Kharsang, Jairampur, Changlang, Miao* and *Itanagar*. But the *Moh-Mol* celebrated in the common grounds of towns like *Kharsang, Jairampur, Changlang, Miao, and Itanagar* are performed just to display the traditional culture and merry-making rather than observing the rituals and customs which is essential and root to the *Moh-Mol* festival. There are three main reasons why Tangsa is not celebrating with the same spirit that they used to celebrate in the past. The first reason is proselytization from indigenous faith to Christian as well as Buddhist religions. As rightly stated by one of my *Jugli* field respondents (T. Thungwang, personal communication, September 25, 2019), that Today Mol is the only festival celebrated by our sub-tribe that too not by individual sub-tribe at their own but the one which is celebrated jointly by all the sub-tribes of Tangsa. Because now *Jugli* community is 80-90% Christian

¹ ‘*Sah-hit*’ means ‘tilting the soil manually with the help of gardening tools and sowing seeds of any type of grain’.

² *KohHahh* refers to ‘hilly and mountainous area’. Here for Muklom and Havi people they refer ‘*Koh Hahh*’ to the hilly area under Changlang and Khimjong circle from where all other Mukloms and Havi living in plains of Kharsang, Miao and Namchik area migrated.

³ “*Tungja-Chamja*” means “the spirit of the arum and paddy”; “*Tung*” means “arum”, “*cham*” means “paddy” and “*ja*” in both the words means “the spirit”.

that is why most of them do not know how to perform even the rituals of these festivals.

The conversion is the main reason why *Jugli* as well as all other sub-tribes especially in the *Pangwa* group of Tangsa no longer practice their traditional festivals. In the *Pangwa* group, almost 99% are Christian now ^[4]. As *Mol* is also associated with the offering of food and drinks to the spirits of *Da* ^[5] in *Mossang* as well as some other *Pangwa* sub-tribes, they avoid celebrating this festival. As the Christian Tangsa abstain themselves from practicing old tradition like offering food and drinks to the spirit of *Da* which is also a mandatory ritual of the *Mol* festival, they utterly restraint themselves from celebrating *Mol* festival at their respective houses. (L. Mossang, personal communication, January 24, 2021). Another factor that restraint them from celebrating *Mol* festival is that the converted Christian are not allowed to continue with any of the traditional rituals and customs. During my interview, one of my respondent utterly deny not even to speak about their old traditional practices and faith because he said they were not allowed by the higher ecclesiastical groups and may display anything related to their traditional culture such as festival dances, songs, dresses etc., on the command of the bishops and cardinal during important occasions or events. (Gaon Bura Bubang-1 village, personal communication, September 24, 2019) In this way most of them even fear to talk about their traditional customs, and rituals due to direct prohibition by the ecclesiastical group. Whereas other factors also include the high expenses due to which people no longer celebrates the *Moh-Mol* festival. This factor was cited by the *Tikhak* and *Ponthai* groups. In *Tikhak* almost 90% are Buddhist which is also again the main reason why these sub-tribes do not celebrate traditional festivals in their household. One respondent in the *Tikhak* sub-tribe said that the *MohKuh* required at least three pigs to be a sacrifice which cannot be afforded by individual families. So, they have combined both the *Moh* festival and *Pugchak* now and instead celebrate it jointly during the *Pugchak* festival in April. (T. *Tikhak*, personal communication, November 1, 2020). As *Tikhaks* have mostly converted to Buddhism, they do not sacrifice any animals or fowl during *Pugchak* celebrations adhering to the non-violence religious dogma of Buddhism. For them, *Pugchak* marks the beginning of New year as per their traditional calendar. In *Ponthaitoo*, traditionally there were two different *Mohs*; “*Chimoh Moh*” and “*ChadongMoh*”. Here the period when *Chimoh Moh* was celebrated corresponds to the period of the *Moh-Mol* festival as it was celebrated in the months of June-July. But nowadays they have combined these two festivals and celebrate them in the month of September-October during the time they celebrated *Chadong Moh* in the past. The reason for combining these two festivals is most probably to acquire manpower as well as resources which may help them grandly celebrate the festival. (Songthing, S. *et al.*, personal communication, August 25, 2019) Another important fact in the Tangsa community is that over time,

along with the increasing influence of modernization, westernization as well as proselytization, people start repelling and alienating themselves from cultural entities such as festivals, traditional rites, and even language of their own. The same situation was realized by elders of the *Ponthai* sub-tribe where people must have not shown interest in celebrating several festivals. Therefore, *Ponthai* people decided to combine these two festivals so that they may be able to celebrate them with full support and enough resources collectively from every individual household. One festival can probably have more participants compared to two festivals in the case where cultural entities are going into oblivion. Similarly, in *Mossang* also there were four traditional festivals in the past but later due to excessive expenses required in festivals, they combined two festivals i.e., *Polo* and *Chamyaktuk*, and formed it into one festival called “*Mol*”. (K. Mossang, personal communication, September 1, 2019)

Types of *Moh-Mol*

Mol festival is further categorized into two different types in *Muklom* as well as *Havi*; *Thal Mol/Paang Mol* and *Rom Mol*. *Makantong*, *Old Khimjong*, and *Thamlom* villages celebrate *Rom Mol* in the *Muklom* area whereas *Havi* villages located in the *Khimjong* circle such as *Tongthung Havi*, *Sonkhuh Havi*, and *Jonggi Havi* celebrate *Rom Mol* in *Havi* area. Rest of the *Muklom* villages such as *Old Chingsa*, *New Chingsa*, *Old Longkey*, *New Longkey*, *Old Yanman* and *New Yanman*, *Saching*, *Tinali*, *Kuttom* and *Khimjong* villages celebrate *Thaal Mol*. In *Havi* villages, *Namchik Havi* also celebrates *Paang Mol*. It seems that *Thaal Mol/Paang Mol* is just a replica of *Rom Mol*. The original type of *Mol* celebrated in both *Muklom* and *Havi* sub-tribes were the *Rom-Mol* but *Paang Mol/Thaal Mol* came into practice later when people from their original villages migrated to the plains of *Kharsang*, *Namchik*, *Miao*, and *Jairampur* and settled there. They wanted to celebrate their traditional festivals there in the plains too but due to the absence of *Solwa*, they started celebrating *Thaal/Paang Mol*. *Solwa/Nong-rom-tey/Him-khung-tey* is a person who comes from a particular family whose ancestors are believed to be the ones who discovered the drum, i.e., “*nong*” played during *Mol* festival and they are also responsible for worshipping the drum before anybody starts beating the drum during *Mol* festival. *Nong Rom* cannot be done by any other person except the hereditary *Solwa*. (N. Shungkho and T. Tekhil, personal communication, September 21, 2019) So, when some *Mukloms* and *Havi* migrated internally from *Changlang* and *Khimjong* circle towards the plains of *Kharsang*, *Namchik*, and *Miao* area, the *Solwa* from their original villages did not come along with them. But after permanently settling in these plain areas, they too longed to celebrate their traditional festivals. Therefore, they decided to celebrate the *Mol* festival without the hereditary *Solwa* but with a selected *Solwa* from any other clan. But as these *Solwas* cannot perform the “*nong rom*” rituals as it is strictly prohibited as per their tradition. Thus, the celebration of *Mol* festivals celebrated without worshipping the drum came to be known as *Thaal Mol/Paang Mol*. (K. Khimhun, *et al.*, personal communication, September 18, 2019) In the *Longchang* community also the concept of *Lam soltey/Solwa/Nong rom wa* is there who is hereditary and responsible for the worship of the “*Nong*” (drum) at the beginning of *Mol* festival.

⁴ While I was conducting field survey for the present research, I saw only 6-7 families of *Mossang Tangsa* (one of the *Pangwa Tangsa* group) were non-Christian and still a believer of their traditional faith in *Renuk* village while rest of *Pangwa* groups are all converted to Christian religion.

⁵ “*Da*” means ‘spirits of those men who had been sacrificed by the forefather of the *Mossangs* and many other sub-tribes of *Pangwa* group’.

Rituals and Customs observed in *Moh-Mol* festival

Moh-Mol festival is celebrated for consecutive four days in Muklom, 5 days in Mossang, Jugli, and Longchang, and for a different number of days by different sub-tribes but not less than 3 days in all sub-tribes of Tangsa. In Muklom, the first day is called "*Loom khhat*" day, followed by "*Loom bill*" day. The third day is called "*Hotey Yakri Khab*" day and the fourth and last day is called "*Yung Chol/Yung Ruhsaal*". On the first day of the *Rom Mol* festival, a ritualistic prayer is done by the "*Nong Romwa*"^[6] on the drums to initiate the drum beatings in the village. The drum beatings will be initiated by the *Solwa/Nong Romwa*^[7] himself in his house and from there he goes to the village common ground where several *Molnu*^[8] and *Molwa*^[9], wearing *Mol* attire; men carrying their respective drums, will be waiting for him. Customarily, the beatings of the drum should be started by the *Solwa* only who is hereditary, followed by other *Molwas*. *Molnus* will also accompany the *Molwas* led by *Solwa* by dancing *Mol* dance. The drum is continuously played for two days; the *Loom khat* and the *Loom bill* day. After enacting the *Mol* dance and playing drums at the common ground for several rounds, the group goes throughout the village beating the drums and entering every house. In *Mol* festival it is a tradition for all the sub-tribes those who play drums, to enter every house and play drums there or else it is considered a bad omen for the villagers as well as for the family whose house is skipped. On the second day also the drum will be continuously played without stopping it and continue to play in those houses whose house was left on the previous day. The *Mol* dance is enacted in the village common ground around 2-3 pm during the first two days, but the dancing pattern on both days are different and in addition, the audience are allowed to join the *Mol* dance in the end of the second day.

While the *Mol* group keep beating the drums entering every house on the one side, on the another side, the *Roonwa*^[10] accompanied by several youths and old people gather at one-two selected houses to perform *Roonhun* song and dance in the evening around 6-7 pm. The *Solwas/Nong romtey's* house is permanently chosen for performing *Roonhun* by the *Rom Mol* villages while in *Thal Mol*, two houses will be selected by the *Mol* committee for performing *Roonhun*. The *Roonhun* song is sung by a *Roonhun* expert and the others follow the last few rhyming words after the *roonwa* pauses after singing every stanza. People performing *Roonhun* dance^[11] in a circular pattern by moving step by step from left to right side holding each other's hand. The *Roonhun* is done for consecutive two days, i.e., both the *Loomkhat* and *Loombill* day. It is put to an end on the dawn

⁶ "*Nong-Romwa*" means "the man who worships the drum".

⁷ The *Nong-Romwa* is also sometimes refer as "*Solwa*" meaning the "the man who leads" because he is the initiator of beating the drums in the *Mol* festival. It is a custom in Tangsa that the beating of the drums has to be initiated by him.

⁸ Women who participate in *Mol* festival by dancing on the community group with other *Mol* dancers are called *Molnu*.

⁹ Men who participate in *Mol* festival by beating the drums and running around the community ground in a particular pattern with other *Mol* dancers are called *Molwa*.

¹⁰ *Roonwa* means *Roonhun* song expert who could sing the *Roonhun* song as well as understand it.

¹¹ *Roonhun* dance means moving slowly by taking steps sideways as to encircle the hearth by all *roonhun* dancers dancing to the *roonhun* song led by *roonwas* during *Mol* festival.

of the third day even though *Roonwa* says that the *Roonhun* song never finishes after singing consecutive two nights.

The *Nong tasib* ceremony is observed by all the *Nongwa* "the drum player"^[12] early in the dawn of the third day conducted by an elderly man who is an expert in chanting *Nong-tasib* mantras. *Nong-tasib* is a ceremonial prayer done to stop the beating of the drums by an expert who can chant the prayers and all drums of respective villages are brought together at their committee hall, kept on the floor in a circle and every time the expert chants and beat the drum in different beats which are accompanied by other *nongwas* by beating their *nong*. From that day onwards *Nong tom* (beating of drum) is prohibited. If anybody is heard beating a drum, he/she will be questioned by the village customary council and charged with a heavy fine. *Nong* is not just a musical instrument played in the Tangsa community but it is regarded sacred due to the high cultural significance it associates with, and thus they worship it during the *Mol* festival. So, it is not taken lightly when someone dares to play it on usual days than the *Mol* festival. For the sub-tribes those who celebrate their *Mol* festival by beating drums, for them celebrating *Mol* without playing the drum is impossible. Because *Mol* festival itself originated due to the discovery of *Nong* (drum) in these sub-tribes. Even though *Nong* was a culturally valued instrument for all Tangsa sub-tribes, the *Pangwa* group negatively associate the beatings of the drum. Because in *Pangwa* sub-tribe, *nong* was played only when *Datang/Dawan*^[13] was performed. It is another matter that it might have been played during the time of celebration and victory in *Pangwa* groups also before the *Datang* practice existed, but later the drum associating with *Datang* made it impossible for them to play it on joyful occasions like *Mol* festival.

On the third day of the *Mol* festival, the *Yakri-khab*^[14] ceremony is observed where the maternal uncles of every person come to their houses and tied a wrist band made of *rithingon* their left wrists and bless their respective nieces and nephews. The maternal uncle blesses all his nieces and nephews irrespective of age, to protect them from *sok-a-wi*^[15] and starvation that is going to come after the sowing season ends^[16]. And the last and fourth day is the *Yung chol/Yung ruh*^[17] day. The concept behind performing this activity of collective fishing is to cleanse themselves from

¹² *Nongwa* meaning the drum player can be anyone who plays the drum. It is not necessary that the *Molwa* who plays the drum in the community field himself should keep playing the drum for consecutive two nights and two days rather anyone who can play the drum may play his drum instead.

¹³ *Datang/Dawan* was a human sacrifice ritual where almost all *Pangwa* groups used to sacrifice their enemy or any other unknown person from unknown society for curing ailments as well as bumper harvest of the crops. *Datang* is the word used for human sacrifice in Mossang and *Dawan* is in *Ruera/Ronrang*.

¹⁴ *Yakri-Khab* means "*Wrist band tying*" as on this day wrist band is tied by respective person's maternal uncle. It is a *muklom* word but similar term will be there in other sub-tribes too.

¹⁵ Viral fever, cold and many other ailments occurred due to change in season.

¹⁶ In olden days *jhum* agriculture was the only means of livelihood for Tangsa people and people used to undergo the period from the time of sowing the paddy till the time of its harvest in shortage for food, especially mostly poor people.

¹⁷ *Yung chol-Yungruh* means community fishing through poisoning by herbs or making a wall to sieve the fishes and catch it from the wall made by bamboo, stone, piles of dry leaves and barks of trees.

the *sok-a-wi* and negative forces that might have been received by the villagers from other peoples' grudge in the previous year. It is like cleansing away their illness, suffering, grudges of people, and so on for a new beginning in a new year after this Mol festival. In *Pangwa* sub-tribes Mol is celebrated in a slightly different manner.

Evolution of Mol Festival as per Muklom and Havi Folklore

Mol festival may be celebrated as the pre-harvest festival where *Tungja-Chamja* is worshipped for a bumper harvest and also marks the beginning of the Tangsa new year. But in some sub-tribes such as Havi, Muklom, and Longchang, the spirit and soul of the Mol festival lies in the "nong", i.e., the drums which are played continuously for 2-5 days in the Tangsa Mol festivals. The origin and evolution of the Mol festival are directly connected with the story of the discovery of *drums/nong* as per their folklore. In these sub-tribes people from other clans cannot worship the drum at the beginning of the Mol festival nor can they lead the Mol dance group. The *Solwa* is the center and the founder of the *Moh-Mol* festival in which Mol is celebrated by beating drums called "Nong" in Tangsa. Whereas in the *Pangwa* group, as they play gongs and another musical instrument rather than drum during *Moh-Mol*, they do not have the concept of the *Solwa/Lam soltey/ Nong romwa*. Therefore, *Solwa* has immense cultural significance in those sub-tribes who play *nong* in the festival such as *Muklom, Havi, Longchang*, and *Ponthaisub-tribes*.

Importance of the Solwa/Nong romwa/Lam soltey in several Tangsa sub-tribes:

As per their traditional folklore and folksong, the "nong" originally belonged to animals that was discovered from the bank of a river and forcefully taken away by the ancestors of the *Solwas*. In Havi, the *Nokkah* clan is the main clan that discovered the drum from an animal called "tharu" ^[18] which lives in a wild sugarcane bush. The drum was heard for the first time by a young boy during a hunting expedition in the forest. But every time people approached towards the spot from where the drum sound could be heard, the *tharu* immediately ran into its hole. Later while passing through that area, two brothers *Langkhum* and *Langlon* also heard the same sound coming from wild sugarcane bush (*Rungtung/Song tham/ Langphung/Langrungtung*) ^[19]. When the sibling approached the spot from where the drum sound was coming, the sound immediately stopped. Again after sometime, they could hear the same sound coming from the bushes. The sound stopped again when they approach the bush. Now they made a plan to fool those *tharus* who were playing the drum. They tricked them by making it believe that all people have left the spot but in reality, the elder brother hid near the bush. After an hour, the *tharu* started beating and playing the drum bringing it out of its hole. During that time the elder brother catch one of the *tharu* and took away its drum. Later they brought the drum home with pride and kept beating it every morning outside their house. Their neighbor *Teykhum* and *Teyram*, belonging to the *Widdong Pangsa* clan, wanted to see what

was that amazing instrument that creates such an energetic sound. But *Langkhum* and *Langlon* would hide it immediately by running inside their house and putting it on *kalraang* ^[20]. Therefore, the *Widdong Pangsa* brothers also made a plan to trick their neighbor to see what instrument were they playing every day. Now they also act as if both of them are inside their house but in fact, the elder brother hides near their house early in the morning before they started playing the drum. And later when they took out the drum and played it outside their house, he saw what instrument it was. Now *Langkhum* and *Langlon* left for their agriculture field. During their absence, *Teykhum* and *Teyram* stole the drum and keep playing it the whole day. In the evening when the *Nokkah* brothers returned from their field they could not find their drums. After few minutes they heard the sound of the drum coming from their neighbor's house. They went there and saw their drum in their hands. Therefore, they claimed that the drum was originally theirs which has been stolen by the *Pengtha* brothers. *Nokkah* and *Pengtha* brothers fought over the drum but settled the case later by deciding that one would be responsible for worshipping, i.e., "urom rang", it and another for leading the Mol dance group as "Solwa". From that day onwards whenever the Mol festival is celebrated *Nong* is worshipped by one of the clans and the Mol, the group is led by another clan. (W. Mandok and W. Songthing, personal communication, August 31, 2019) ^[12] in this way, these two clans have shared responsibility of organizing the Mol festival which another clan cannot do because *Havi* history associates them with the discovery and possessing of drums from *tharu*. And the same folklore is told by *Muklom* but in their folklore, there is only one clan, i.e., *Rekhung* who is believed to be the discover of drums. *Khomwa* and *Nanwa* discovered the *Nong* from *Langphung tong* ^[21] during the hunting expedition and took it away from the frogs and fishes. (N. Shungkho and T. Tekhil, personal communication, September 21, 2019) some folklore expert says it was a monkey who originally owned the drums. Other folklore expert says that the animal from whose hand the drum was discovered and taken away by humans were not monkeys. It is not clear and some assume that it might have been frogs, fishes, or any other water creature because the drum was discovered near the river under the wild sugarcane bush. Although it is a debatable topic that what was the animal from which the drum was discovered and taken away but the connotation here is that these two sub-tribes discovered the *drum/nong* from the hands of an animal rather than inventing themselves. The deep meaning suggested in the folklore could also mean that the origin of drum is from the wild, wooden log being originally brought from the forest. Or it could also mean that humans must have heard the sound from animals in the forest and might have invented the instrument from where similar sounds can be created. Those people who must have heard or invented the drum must be the *Nokkah* brothers in Havi and *Rekhung* brothers in *Muklom* or say any one of these clans. Mol festival was celebrated every year after humans took away the drums from that rodent called *Tharu*. And every year at the beginning of the Mol festival, the beatings of the drum

¹⁸ Rodents which lives under the ground, the specific animal is unknown.

¹⁹ These four different words are spoken in Havi as well as Muklom sub-tribe; first two expressions in Havi and last two in Muklom.

²⁰ *Kalrang* is an open platform built immediately below the roof and above the floor of Tangsa traditional houses, which is like a ceiling of a roof but made from bamboo and wood and several items can be stored in it.

²¹ Wild sugarcane bush.

are initiated with a proper prayer called the “*nong rom*” ritual by the clans whose forefathers discovered the drums from animals. As per the folklore, when the drums were discovered, the size of the drums was extremely small compared to the drums made today because the animal’s skin used to cover the drums on both sides was made from frog’s skin.

Significance of Solwa/Nong Romwa/Lam Soltey/Him Khungtey

Solwa is hereditary and comes from the Rekhung clan whose children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are customarily allowed to lead the Mol group. His place cannot be taken by a person from another family so only his descendants are customarily entitled to be a Solwa in the future too. In case a person from that family will not exist anymore, Khimjong Mol itself will come to an end.

The above lines are stated by one of my field respondent Mr. N. Shungkho (N. Shungkho, personal communication, September 21, 2019), who is a *Roonhun* expert of *Khimjong* village. Here the last sentence shows the degree of importance the *Solwa* holds in the Muklom society who celebrates *Rom Mol*. The interviewee believed that if the bloodline of the *Solwa* clan will come to an end then the Mol festival celebration itself will come to an end in their village, i.e., *Old Khimjong village*. *Rom Mol* festival without a “*Lum-Solwa*”^[22] is impossible but the *Solwa* comes from only one bloodline. As discussed above, the ancestors of the *Solwas* in both *Haviand* and *Muklom* sub-tribes were the ones who brought the concept of the Mol festival into their respective societies. Therefore, it is their hereditary duty and responsibility to worship the drum called as “*nong rom*” ritual to initiate the beatings of the drum on the first day of the Mol festival. The name “*Rom Mol*” itself is derived from the word “*Rom/Urom*” which means “prayer by throwing rice grains and sometimes rice beer” also. So, *nong rom* by *Solwa/Nong romwa* is the main ritual which is performed in *Rom Mol* because this Mol is the continuation of the original Mol started by the founders of Mol festival and discoverer of “*nong*”. Over generations, their descendants have been performing “*nong rom*” continuously, from the time when the concept of Mol festival started in the *Tangsa* community. To perform the *nong rom* ritual, the *Solwa* put three *Nabphaanyaks*; made in a cone shape and will attach it to the drum and will throw grains of rice on it and pray. The prayer is done as in the following lines:

Chori-ko o, laangri-ko o

Etey eh shing ta ewa a shing ta

Tung wang phu o cham wang phu o

The meaning of the above prayer is, ‘to mark the seasons referred to as “*Chori*” and “*laangri*”, this Mol is celebrated and hence drum worshipped, (even though the second sentence is not uttered verbatim, but the connotation is there hidden because in the meanwhile in action the worshipper is worshipping the Drums), “My grandfather and my father fixed the same ritual (that is of worshipping the drum to initiate Mol festival in *Rom Mol*), May the Arum and the paddy come to us” After doing this prayer, he steps down from his house beating the drum, and goes to the village ground where the *Mol* group has gathered and then performs the *Mol* dance together which is called ‘*Lumkhat*’, i.e., the beginning day of the *Mol* festival.

On the third day of the *Mol* festival also, he performs the *nong rom* ritual again in the same way as he did on the first day of the festival to put a complete stop to the beating of the drum. Following this ritual, nobody will ever dare to beat the drum again in that village including the *Solwa* himself. Even in the *Roonhuns* and also the *Roonwa* addresses the role of *Solwa* saying that “Mol festival belonged to *Rekhung clan*, they started this festival, and they were the ones who did ritualistic prayers on the drum.” (K. Tekhil, personal communication, September 21, 2019)

In *Rom Mol* a hereditary *Solwa* has to perform ritualistic prayer on the drum even though the villagers may or may not celebrate the Mol festival collectively due to some reason. Even though the villagers may or may not support him, still he has to do the *nong-rom* whenever the festival arrives. In *Muklom* villages, only *Makantong*, *Old Khimjong*, *Thamlom*, and *Simrang* villages celebrate *Rom Mol*. The Mol celebrated in *Simrang* is the continuation of *Thamlom Mol* because the *Solwa* of *Thamlom* shifted to *Simrang* and settled there. So, as it is his hereditary duty to perform prayer on the *nong* during Mol festival, he does the same therein *Simrang* village. And the villagers also follow the tradition of *Rom Mol* strictly so, the Mol festival there has been turned into *Rom Mol*. The *Solwa*’s duty and responsibility in the context of Mol festival somewhat match to a *Lungwang* in a village because every year when Mol festival arrives he has to perform the ritualistic prayers (*Rom-a-rang*) then only the rest of the people will start the festival celebration process. It is like a *Thangting* (rituals to appease the evil spirits) or his Dharma. In case if he forgets to perform the *nong rom*, he faces certain challenges either on an individual level or on a family level. He or any of his family members may become ill or meet any bad luck such as accident as the consequences of not performing the *nong-rom*. A few years ago, the *Solwa* of *Simrang* faced similar bad luck when he did not perform the ritualistic prayer “*nong rom*” on the drum. (K. Tekhil, personal communication, September 21, 2019) Only by performing *nong-rom*, he will get prosperity in wealth as well as health. Although people would not celebrate Mol due to some accidents or ill health in the *Solwa*’s house, the villagers will make rice beer and celebrate the festival by visiting the relatives’ houses. The *Solwa* also has to perform the *nong rom* and beat the drums several times inside his own house. Lastly, he will keep it away without continuously beating it throughout the village otherwise drums are played non-stop till the *nong-tasib* ritual is done. Thus, the villagers also do not play their drums in a certain situations when *Solwa* himself does not come out of his house, carrying and beating his drum.

Another important custom and tradition associated with *Solwa/Nong-romwa* are that when any new person would like to participate in the Mol dance group, that particular year he/she has to first observe a ritual. On the day of the festival, the *Molwa* and *Molnu* will start the Mol dance from the house of the *Solwa/Lumkhat wa*. While all *Molwas* beat their drums together in a particular pattern led by the *Solwa*, the beginners will have to perform Mol dance for three rounds revolving around the hearth of the *Solwa*’s house. After completing three rounds he/she can go to the Mol ground. On the *Loommat* day, i.e., on the third day also the beginner should go to the *Solwa*’s house again. This type of

²² “*Lum-Solwa*” is synonymous term for *Solwa*.

custom is called *Thabeing* ^[23]. (N. Shungkho, personal communication, September 21, 2019)

Contrary to this, *Nong rom* is not performed in *Thaal/Paang Mol* because as the name rightly suggests; "*Thaal*" or "*Paang*" means "common ground" or "a ground where the community gathers"; this festival is just a festival celebrated in the common ground by various villages rather than continuing the original one from the past. *Thaal/Paang Mol* was started by those people who migrated internally from their original hilly area in the Khimjong and Changlang circle to the plains of *Namchik* and *Kharsang*. The *Romwa/Solwa* stayed back at their original villages in the *Koh Hahh*, so it was not the continuation of the original *Rom Mol* celebrated in *Koh Hahh* rather it was a replica, a copy of the *Rom Mol* without the proper "*nong rom*" rituals as well as without continuity in the celebration every year. In *Thaal/Paang Mol* the *Romwa* is selected for 3-5 years and also the festival can be skipped after a consecutive three years celebration and again if skipped it should be skipped for three years. The concept of "three years" in doing anything is called "*tahop*" in *Tangsa*. The "three years" or "three times" is traditionally thought of as auspicious augury in *Tangsa* culture. So, when someone dies in the village exactly during the *Mol* festival then *Mol* is not celebrated and if it is skipped that year, the following two years also *Mol* will not be celebrated. Another thing is that when *Molwa* and *Molnu* choose to participate in the *Mol* dance group, traditionally they are required to complete three years of participation based on "*tahop*" custom and if they want to continue, they may continue for another three years. They may continue for a lifetime but starting from the first year of their participation, every three-year cycle should be completed. They may leave after every 3 years interval like 3, or 6, or 9 years but not after 1, or 2, or 4, and so on.

Cultural Significance

Mol festival is extremely important in the *Tangsa* community because it has cultural significance. First of all, it is the pre-harvest festival, where the spirits of *Tungja-Chamja* are venerated by worshipping it for a bumper harvest. The best example can be seen in the Longchang sub-tribe where *Molwa* represents *Tungja/Chamja* (the spirit of Paddy and arum). A symbolic ritual is conducted in one person's house in respective Longchang villages after two nights from the beginning of the *Mol* festival. Here two people are seated on the left and right side and they are given two different drums; one with rice and another with rice beer. All *Molwas* enter this house and dance three rounds. The owner worships the drum by throwing rice grains into the east and west direction from which at least a *Molwa* should be able to catch some rice grains. The ritual is symbolic of holding the *Chamja-Tungja* by the villagers. The *Molwa* must catch the drops of the pure rice beer thrown into the air with their closed eyes. Without this ritual the *Mol* festival is incomplete. (N. Zongsam, personal communication, September 28, 2019) The beating of the

drum continues for three consecutive days and nights after this ritual.

Moh-Mol also marks the beginning of the new year as per the traditional *Tangsa* calendar. Therefore, several sub-tribes of *Tangsa* considered it as auspicious for beginning any new thing such as Longchang and *Tikhak* people bring their newly married brides on this special occasion to start her new married life with her husband and her in-laws. As it is the major festival and celebrated grandly with lots of merry-making and joy, relatives, friends, and guests come from far and near places and meet each other on this happy occasion. In the olden days, when no proper roads were connecting remote villages of Arunachal Pradesh, especially in the district of Changlang where even today also, some villages have no proper roads, during those days people usually took difficulties attending *Mol* festivals to visit each other during such auspicious occasion. Sometimes young people from different places would get acquainted with each other during such occasions and even would become life partners in future. As *Mol* festival marks the beginning of the traditional New year of *Tangsa*, every year on this auspicious occasion the maternal uncles come to their respective nephews' and nieces' house to bless them for the whole year. They tie a wrist band made of the bark of a wild tree called "*rithing*" ^[24] in *Muklom* and chant mantra after chewing the Sichuan pepper called "*Chhangjong*". This tradition of tying the wrists band and blessing their niece and nephew is called as "*Yakri-khab*" ceremony. *Tangsa* believes that whenever people from far and near places, from different directions come to celebrate the festival, they also bring *sok-a-wi* ^[25] with them which tends to cause viral fever, cough, and temperature. So, as the *Mol* ends and the guests leave, the maternal uncles drive the *sok-a-wi* away through the *Yakri-Khab* ceremony.

Another significance of this ceremony is that some people say that in *Koh Hahh*, the period between the *Mol* festival when the foxtail millet "*Himi*", seeds are sown and the period when it is harvested is the period of food shortage, especially in the past when most people solely depended on subsistence farming for their livelihood. Therefore, most of the time, poor people used to suffer from starvation mainly in this period. So, the *Yakri-khab* ceremony was also to bless their nephews and nieces by their maternal uncles so that they should not suffer starvation till they harvest the crop. In some *Pangwa* sub-tribes such as *Mossang*, (L. Mossang, personal communication, January 24, 2020) and *Kimsing* also, the concept of protecting themselves from starvation, most probably after the sowing season till the harvest period is there. It can be seen on the first day of the *Mol* festival which is symbolically performed through a particular ritual. In this ritual, they will attach the firewood with the bushes of thorny plants and tie both these two things together. These two things tied together will be pulled by the elders and the children will beat with the help of sticks on the two things attached. Later these things are dumped in the outskirts of the village where people rarely go there. The symbolic meaning of observing this ritual is to

²³*Thabeing* means in order to avoid misfortune and bad omen a person must be present in that particular house where the ritual or custom is observing.

²⁴ The outer layer of the bark of *rithing* tree, which is a wild tree; the specific name is unknown, is properly peeled and the remaining inner layer which becomes like string is properly braided in traditional style and tied on their nephews' and nieces' hand by respective maternal uncles during *Mol* festival.

²⁵*Sok-a-wi* means a negative force or evil spirits which has the tendency to harm people and cause illness.

drive away starvation which is represented by the firewood attached with the thorny plants. (G. Chena, personal communications, September 3, 2019) Their want to drive away starvation is seen in their act of beating and pulling these things by the villagers. Through this festival, they pray to God for a bumper harvest otherwise if the crops would not yield enough to serve them till the next harvest season, the prolonged period of starvation is inevitable.

The most important part of the Mol festival is that as the festival marks the beginning of the traditional new year, it marks the beginning of new life. Therefore, it is also a new beginning to the other world for those who died as well. Thus, the person who died between the previous year Mol and this year Mol festival is given a farewell ceremony to send it forever to the other world called *Balim/Wolimby* some Tangsa sub-tribes. The farewell ceremony is observed in Havi, Muklom, and Jugli sub-tribes. In Havi, it is called “*Lenghog*” rituals, whereas in *Muklom* it is called “*Raang*” and in *Jugli* it is called “*Boygjong*”. *Uraang/Raang* ritual is conducted by a family from whose house a member has died between the period of the previous year and this year Mol to bid farewell to the deceased’s soul. The substitute for *Uraang/Raang* ritual is the “*Uhchon*” ritual which required fewer expenses and is conducted by poor people. To perform both these rituals the lock of the deceased’s hair is kept inside a bamboo tube and every day the deceased’s soul will be offered food and drinks near his hair. After this ritual, the deceased soul is not considered a part of the family anymore. In the *Uhchon* ritual, the deceased’s lock of hair is put inside a bamboo tube and worn as a necklace by his/her parent. *Uraang/Raang* ritual is conducted 4 days before the Mol festival and *Uhchon* is conducted 3 days before the Mol festival starts. The first day is the day of *Raang-wahh-kip* (bamboo inspection day) where *Raangwa* (*Raang* ritual expert) is invited. He goes to the jungle, inspects the *Wahh-saang* bamboo used for making *Raangtu* (bamboo structure representing the deceased’s dead body), and prays over it by throwing *wongkhi* (rice grains used for prayer) and chant mantras. The second day is the *Raang-wahh-duk* ^[26] day. On this day the selected *Wahh-saang* is brought home and laid down in the inner room where the dead body is traditionally kept to represent the deceased’s body and mourned by the villagers. The third day is the *Raang-loomday*. On this day a human structure is made from the *Wahh-saang* by the *Raangwato* represent the deceased’s body called *Raangtu*. Villagers waited for the *Raang-tu* as if they were waiting for the dead body and on the fourth and the last day called *Raang-chipday*, the *Raangwa* was kept away inside a temporary hut made at the *Palthong* ^[27]. In this way, *Raang/Uraang* ritual was conducted for consecutive 4 days in the past at *Koh Hahh*. But nowadays it is hardly practiced because it was a tedious tradition that required huge resources as well as manpower. On the fifth day, the Mol festival is celebrated. Whereas the *Uhchon* ritual is conducted for 3 days. On the first day, the deceased’s lock will be kept on *Wantim*, i.e., the husking plate and the bamboo tube where the lock is kept is cut into two halves. Any animal, either a pig, fowl, or cow is sacrificed in the deceased’s name. The bamboo basket is prepared by *Raangwa* on the third day. *Raangwa* was offered food and drinks abundantly by people who

conduct *Uraang/Raang* or *uhchon* rituals in the past. Rich families used to spend excessively for *Uraangin the Koh-hahh* in the past. For example, *Nokhom*’s father conducted *uraang* twice; *uraang* in the next year of his son’s death and *Raang-Khohpail* in the year after the next year because he was rich and had lost his only son. *Raang-khohpail* is also exactly performed in the same way *Uraang/Raang* ritual is observed except the bamboo structure i.e., the “*Raangtu*” is not made. (J. Khimhun, personal communication, June 5, 2018) In the *HaviLenghog* ritual also the *balimsare* bid farewell by the family members. As the lock of hair of the deceased is worn as a pendant inside a bamboo tube by the deceased’s family member for the whole year in *Uraang* and *Uhchon* rituals, in *Havi* also the same is done to bid farewell to the deceased. The *Lenghog* ritual is observed in December by Havis of Namchik. During this traditional farewell ceremony, two women belonging to the deceased’s family sing a song called *Raangsey* by going throughout the village for three rounds in a day. These women who are called “*Rangloomtey*” will keep singing the *Raangsey* on behalf of the deceased and the family members for consecutive two days until the lock of the deceased’s hair is not cremated. The song is sung in the praise of the deceased as well as *Chengwa*, i.e., the God *Rangfraa* is also questioned about the untimely demise of the person. The *Raangsey* is sung in the evening also. Sometimes old people sit around the hearth in the evening and complain about the *Chengwa* through their song. The *Raangloomtey* questions him that where did he take away the person. Through their song, they say that *Chengwa* is making the deceased family, his/her parents, and children searching for the deceased’s life. What was wrong with this person’s hearth, floor, granary, or pillar of the house? ^[28] “Maybe the floor must have been vice, maybe the granary must have been vice. “ They question him that “as *Chengwa* is responsible for the creation of every being on this earth, why did he take away that particular person?” They say that his/her family wanted that person but you took him/her away. “The song displays the anguish of the family members, relatives, friends, and the villagers for the death of the person over the creator. Any beloved person of the deceased on whose memory *Lenghog* is observed wears the traditional Mol attire on behalf of the deceased if he/she was a Mol dancer. After that, the person keeps dancing Mol dance by going around people’s courtyard on the deceased’s behalf. The *Lenghog* rituals would last for two to three days. The family of the deceased would offer the deceased’s soul whatever seasonal crop they have grown in their agriculture field such as arum, paddy, yard-long beans, maize, etc. The deceased’s soul is given pure rice beer, normal rice beer, whisky, tea in a bamboo tube on the right side of the inner room where the deceased’s lock of hair is hung on a wooden pole. Cooked rice, meat, and his belongings are also given to the deceased. And lastly, on the second-third day they slaughter one or two pigs in the deceased’s name and a cow along with it. The pig’s and cow’s skull and tail will be hung away with other belongings, food, and crops given to the deceased inside a temporary bamboo hut made nearby the entrance of the village. On this day only the lock of the deceased’s hair is cremated in front of his/her house on a

²⁶ ‘Rang-wah-duk’ means ‘Bamboo cutting day’.

²⁷ Palthong means the entrance to the village

²⁸ In Tangsa there is a belief that the pillar, hearth, granary or any other things are not made properly at the time of building the house then it can lead to the death of any family member

sahkhangtree firewood. All the villagers, friends, family, and relatives emotionally cry as they feel the deceased death and funeral rites again which they felt a year ago at the time the person died. This cremation ritual touches the heart of the villagers which make them mourn intensely during *Lenghog*. (field survey) ²⁹ Jugli also offers the *Wolim*, i.e., the deceased some food, drinks, and meat during the Mol festival. In the past, they used to offer *Khing* (traditional basket for carrying paddy and other food items) and many other foods which the living people eat such as tea leaves, fowl, rice beer, etc. The deceased is acknowledged about this last offering and told to go to his own world *Wolim* and not to worry or envy his family in the living world. Only after offering the *Wolim* is done, the fire on which *Wolim*'s food was cooked is extinguished and the hearth will be cleaned properly. Then the fire is lighted for another time on the cleaned hearth and food is cooked for the living people. (T. Thungwang, personal communication, September 25, 2019)

Roonhun Song in Mol festival

Another important aspect of celebrating the Mol festival is that if one wants to know about the Tangsa society and culture, one should try attending the Moh-Mol festival, especially the *Roonhun* song and dance activity in the evening during the first and second day of the Mol festival. Tangsa, especially the *Non-Pangwa/Tangwa* group sings their cosmogony myth, evolution myth, etiological tales, and every other folklore related to their culture in this *Roonhun* song. *Roonhun* expert sings the *Roonhun* song in old Tangsa language which is completely different from the present-day language. It is incompatible for common people but it has a certain term for every item found in our day-to-day life and only *Roonwa* knows those terms. For example, in the *Runhun* language bees are called “*katsa*”. Opium is called “*Sengwi/Sengkhot*”, the traditional ornament “*Rongtang*” is called “*Maylam*” and another traditional attire “*Kangrang*” is called “*Banchi*”. The boar's teeth are called “*Wakpa*” in the common daily language of Muklom, but in *Roonhun* language it is called “*Ngepha*”. Likewise, many other items used in the Tangsa community have got a name in the *roonhun* language which is different from the common language. (N. Shungkho, September 21, 2019) As per the *Roonhun* song sung by Mukloms, the story of discovering and worshipping *Nong* by the *Rekhung* clan is also narrated in these lines of the *Runhun* song. *Ngakung-Ngahluk* (lungfish) is referred to as God's sister who turned into a human being, married a widower, and several years later turned into an elephant in *Roonhun* song. This story also tells the discovery of *pi-ru* (rice beer brewing agent) from the wild. Through the *roonhun* song how salt well was acknowledged by non-tribal of the plain through the help of Dongwa, the trade of boar's teeth by two brothers to unknown cannibal area, and many other folk tales are narrated. The *roonhun* song also tells that how heaven and earth were extremely close to each other that Gods and goddesses could even married human beings but later the realm of gods and goddesses were separated by a man who married God's daughter. *Roonhun* is not just a myth or folklore but it has cultural importance as it is similar to the

historical document of Tangsa people where every aspect of their culture and tradition emanates. In Rom Mol villages, it is considered blasphemy to sing the *roonhun* song during usual days except for the Mol festival day. Their culture and tradition do not allow them to sing *roonhun* songs on normal days. *Roonhun* song is customarily prohibited to sing on the other day except during Mol festival. *Roonwa* says that *Roonhun* is unending. It does not even come to an end within two consecutive nights of singing. If one knows the folklore, one can keep telling it in the *Roonhun* language until the stories come to an end. The folklore sung through the *roonhun* song tells us that why, how, and from whom the idea of playing the drum, “*nong*” the main musical instrument played during Mol festival came to human minds? Even the origin of various traditional ornaments of both sexes and attires worn in Mol festival is also narrated through the *roonhun* song. *Roonhun* song does not tell the history of origin and migration of our ancestors but the evolution of human beings on the earth is told. The annihilation of sinners by the God Chengwa in the unknown past, the birth of new human beings, the origin of food grains, language, literature, the lifestyle of people, etc. are also sung in the *roonhun* song. Etiological tales related to the origin and discovery of items like water, fire, palm leaves, roof, bamboo, pillar, wall, etc. are narrated in *roonhun* song. In this way, the *Roonhun* song sung during the Mol festival is the paramount source of the cultural history of some of the Tangsa sub-tribes, especially Non-Pangwa groups like Muklom, Ponthai, Havi, Longchang etc. Therefore, people who belonged to Non-Pangwa group in particular, and all Tangsa in common, must attend the Mol festival to understand and learn about their culture and traditions. In case of the Pangwa group, they have a similar type of song called *Sahwishey* sung during *Wihufestival* which tells the complete history of their ancestors, their cosmogony myth, etiological tales, etc. Therefore, in the case of the *Pangwa* group one must continue celebrating and attending the *Wihukuh* festival celebrated in the winter season starting from November-February to understand their cultural history.

Conclusion

Despite immense cultural importance, *Moh-Mol* has just become a festival of a show-off for many Tangsa sub-tribes in the present scenario. Even though the festival is the main source of many cultural beliefs, most Tangsa sub-tribes do not take it from their heart to celebrate it in the present time. It is extremely a matter of concern which Tangsa should think about it. Many rituals and customs have been completely left by Tangsa mainly due to the adoption and conversion of other religions rather than their indigenous faith, at least Mol festival must be celebrated and every household should participate in this festival by performing the *Moh-Mol* customs and rituals properly. Because this Festival has immense importance if we try to analyze it carefully. And nothing is bad if we talk about the rituals and customs observed in the Mol festival except in the Pangwa community, they feel bad about the rituals of offering food and drinks to the spirit of *Da*. Because in the past they feared the spirit of *Da* very intensely and as a consequence, 99% of the Pangwa community converted while trying to repel themselves from the rituals and customs associated with the *Da*. Tangsa people should understand that the Mol festival in which a large part of their culture is rooted should

²⁹The information related to Lenghog festival has been acquired through participant's observation after attending Lenghog rituals performed at Namchik Havi village by the author herself, and group interviews, 23rd December 2019

not vanish away into oblivion in the future or else their younger generations will regret and question their ancestors' foolishness of not preserving their cultural roots. Least it should not be too late for them to realize one day that they have lost the gem of their cultural roots but it is too far away from them to regain it or reach it again. Losing the root of our culture is another way to losing our community's identity. A rootless culture may die shortly anytime like a tree which has been unrooted.

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