

CHASING SHADOWS

—

NOKHO N





ZUBAAN

128 B Shahpur Jat, 1st floor

NEW DELHI 110 049

EMAIL: contact@zubaanbooks.com

WEBSITE: www.zubaanbooks.com

Published by Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd 2023

In collaboration with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation



All rights reserved

Zubaan is an independent feminist publishing house based in New Delhi with a strong academic and general list. It was set up as an imprint of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali for Women, and carries forward Kali's tradition of publishing world quality books to high editorial and production standards. *Zubaan* means tongue, voice, language, speech in Hindustani. Zubaan publishes in the areas of the humanities, social sciences, as well as in fiction, general non-fiction, and books for children and young adults under its Young Zubaan imprint.

Typeset in Arno Pro 11/13

CHASING SHADOWS



*what are shadows?
aren't they the silent companions?
keepers of hidden stories
that loom over our lives*

*so close,
they know much about us
yet, never enough
for us to steal a glimpse
into the mysterious life
of a form of darkness
that can only exist in the light.*

My grandmother used to say that girls were forbidden to grow their hair when she was growing up. At regular intervals, an elder would gather the young girls and shave their head with a particular species of bamboo cane, known to the locals as *rünyi*. The cane would be cut, and its exterior sheaths removed. A sharp blade in the interior

portion of the stem would be revealed, which was used to shave the girls' heads. Shaving a head with a cane involved one hand holding the head in a tight grip, and balancing the blade on the scalp with the other, sliding it back and forth. At times, the blade would lacerate the scalp, making the poor sufferers writhe in agony. Blood seeping from their scalps and tears flooding their eyes, they would snivel, clench their fists, and fight through the pain. Understanding their suffering, the parents and a small group of elders would gather to comfort them with encouraging words.

'You are a brave girl. You can tolerate this.'

'You are a big girl now. Don't cry.'

'We are proud of you.'

In the absence of a razor to do the job, this was the closest one could come to shaving. This torturous process of shaving the head with a cane formed a painful childhood memory for all the women of my community during the pre-Christian era. A shaved head was a symbol of purity and innocence for the girls of my grandmother's world.

I belong to one of the major Naga tribes called the Chakhesang Nagas. The tribe was formerly referred to as the Eastern Angamis, and was once part of the Angami Nagas. The tribe speaks five distinct dialects. Despite differences in their mother tongue, the members of this tribe can trace a common ancestry, and have similar customs and traditions. Based on their cultural affinity and geographical location, a few leaders came together to change the tribe's name from Eastern Angami to Chakhesang, and they decided to segregate themselves from the Angamis. 'Though certain controversies remain in the absence of an official copy of the tribal recognition, it has been generally accepted by our people that the Chakhesang tribe got official recognition on 10th January 1946' (CPO 2021, 4). The tribe still celebrates Chakhesang Day every year on 10 January. The Chakhesangs occupy part of the Phek district of Nagaland, and two Chakhesang villages lie in the Ukhrul district of Manipur.

This paper dwells on a small part of the life of the Chakhesang Nagas during the pre-Christian era. It attempts a peek into the life of my grandmother's generation, the last one to strictly adhere to our ancestral ways of life before conversion. My grandmother's name is Mülhütsülü Nyekha, and she was born at Tswüswüzu village in the later part of the 1920s, although the exact year cannot be ascertained. Besides my grandmother, a total of 14 people from multiple villages were interviewed for this research. This research involved gathering the lived experiences of their pre-Christian life until the 1980s, their collective memory, and stories passed down through their own parents and grandparents. Since I belong to the Chokri-speaking group of the Chakhesangs, the local words used in this paper are mostly from my native tongue. However, the data was collated from all areas.

Before the rise of the British, our indigenous system of governance was limited to the village level. An egalitarian society, the village formed the core of a person's identity. Every village was comprised of multiple clans, each of which had its own role to play in the village administration. The belief system and rituals revolved around agriculture, and history was kept alive in the form of oral traditions by way of storytelling through conversations, folk songs, folk tales, menhirs, wood carvings, heirlooms, apparel, and so on.

So tightly knit was this society that most activities—rituals, songs, dances—could only be performed in groups. For example, a few friends of the same age would form a group called *müle*. This group would work together in one member's paddy field and then another's, rotating between each other's fields. Rather than working alone in their own fields, the group helped each other. Traditions such as this are still practiced in a lot of villages today. Another example is the spinning of fibres into yarn using traditional techniques. This activity was very often performed in a group, and was done either among friends or between a mother and her daughter(s). In order to forget their exhaustion and to lighten the mood, the people involved would sing folk songs and spin the fibres well into the night. In addition, most of the folk songs and dances of the Chakhesangs can only be performed

in groups through round singing and group dances. Every individual needs to play their own part for the song or the dance to blend into a perfect harmony.

As far as learning was concerned, the young boys and girls of a village would be inducted into a traditional *morung* as soon as they reached puberty, called *chethiche* in the Chakhesangs' Chokri dialect. Chethiche is a traditional institution where minors of the same age group are brought together in someone's house for congregation. Each clan had their own chethiche, and there were separate chethiche for boys and girls. It was in these dormitories that young boys and girls learned about life, from each other as well as from elders who would make time to spend with them to teach them folk songs, dances, indigenous crafts, sports, war strategies, and stories about their ancestors, as well as their culture. In exchange for the space, the owners of the house received free labour in their paddy fields from the young additional members, the two groups thereby sharing a strong symbiotic relationship. The chethiche played a significant role in the life of the Chakhesangs in the past. Members of a chethiche would live together for a little more than a decade. The bond that they shared during that particular phase would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Every year, one batch would join chethiche, and one batch would leave. They would join the chethiche as a boy or a girl, and leave the institution as a man or a woman. When the senior members of the chethiche reached about 20 years of age, they would be expected to be thoroughly acquainted with all the necessary skills, and to know how to perfect them without supervision. Once that happened, they would undergo a rite of passage in order to get initiated into adulthood. Such a process is called *Shesü Kūri*. Shesü Kūri refers to the coming-of-age trial marriages that everyone underwent, in order to prove to their community that they were ready to take on the responsibilities of an adult. They would undergo elaborate rituals lasting for a few weeks. The bride would also weave a shawl for the groom, and the groom would make a spade or a spear for the bride. On a designated day,

either during the post-harvest festival in December called *Thirinye* or the purification festival in January called *Sükrühnye*, the brides would march to their respective groom's house where they would live as husband and wife for a week or two. During that period of time, the couple would be required to undergo the final mandatory initiation into adulthood by way of physical intercourse. Once that was complete, the women would return to their respective parents' house and begin growing their hair, and the men would stitch cowrie shells onto their black kilts, called *tüsüne*. By then, they would have been endorsed as adults by their community, free to make their own decisions. They would also join their elders in visiting the chethiche, and teaching their juniors. Since Shesü Küri is simply a rite of passage, it was taboo for the couple to live together permanently. Should they wish to get married, they would need to go through a proper marriage later in life.

For the women, finishing Shesü Küri brought with it great relief simply because the painful process of shaving their heads was behind them. For men, their adventures would begin, as every ornament and piece of apparel they put onto their bodies from then on would have to be earned. Men wore many more ornaments than women. In the past, the number of ornaments and the kind of attire a man adorned himself with were a direct reflection of his life's achievements.

NOKHO N

THE SHADOWS



Photograph 1: Representative image of a tharumi, as no actual images of them could be found.

After Shesü Kūri, a woman would be referred to as *kūthami*, which means ‘one who finished Shesü Kūri and began growing her hair’. It also meant that she was now sexually active. Although a *kūthami* was never barred from having multiple lovers until she settled down, she was expected to find a suitable husband sooner or later and start a family. After marriage, a woman would be called *thünopümi*. For the men, their sexual adventures began. When it came to ornaments, a man could earn them for their valour in war, hunting, hosting feasts, and sexual exploits. Sex played a big role in the community, especially for men. The rewards for gallantry in sex were equivalent to the rewards given to war heroes. Both earned the same honour for men. Women also allegedly preferred men with more sexual experience, observable by the number of ornaments on their bodies, which encouraged men to keep building them up in order to seduce more women, coming full circle. When it came to sexual achievements, men’s ornaments could be earned only through *kūthami*. While women earned no merit, men would flaunt the number of women they had intercourse with by displaying those ornaments, and also by making certain carvings on the walls of their house; this status was reflected even in death, by the way a man’s grave was designed by his family. Such a culture gave birth to a certain group of *kūthami* who would travel from village to village to engage in casual intimacy and make ornaments for men. This type of *kūthami* are called *tharumi*, which is short for *kūtha kūrūmi*, meaning ‘nomadic *kūthami*’. Carrying her belongings in a traditional basket on her back, a *tharumi* was known to visit villages far and wide, not just Chakhesang villages but the villages of neighbouring tribes like the Angamis of Nagaland, Maos of Manipur, and so on. It is these women who continue to slip through the cracks of history, both written and oral. And it is these nomads who are the protagonists of this research paper. Although there are stories about *tharumi* visiting the villages of other tribes, I could not document what they meant to other tribes. This paper only documents their role in Chakhesang Naga society. Not a single *tharumi* is alive to share her tale, and this research was conducted through the eyes of the men and women of their generation

who are still alive. While sex was glorified without shame or remorse by men, it was not the same for women. Except for the tharumi, who openly expressed themselves through sex, women had to experience stigma around the topic, which increased after their conversion to Christianity. Although I managed to interview a few women, they were careful not to share any details that went beyond the surface.

AZUTSA'S FEEBLE TALES

Azutsa means 'my grandmother' in my native dialect. In order to begin my quest into the mysterious lives of the tharumi, I visited Azutsa. She is in her mid 90s, and lives in a sub-town called Chetheba, located just adjacent to our native village, Tsüswüzu. With just a generation between us, my life and Azutsa's life are poles apart. Even after conversion, her life is still fuelled by superstition and myth, which is hard for me to relate to. She carefully sat down with the help of her walking stick, without which she can no longer move about with ease. She let out a shy laugh, as if wishing I hadn't pushed her to speak. They've long buried those realities after all. But she soon became serious about my enquiry and slowly shared her thoughts, often self-reflecting to make sure that she wasn't exaggerating or sharing incorrect information. The following is an extract from our conversation. It is translated and slightly edited to aid the reader's understanding, while carefully keeping the meaning intact:

Tharumi were not as popular anymore during my generation. I think the last person in our village to bring in tharumi was npotsa [your grandfather] Thihi [the name of her deceased cousin]. He was my immediate senior. I remember him making an announcement, inviting people who wanted to host tharumi to get them from his house. I don't think anyone took them, because those tharumi didn't stay in our village for long.

That's the only experience I had with them. The culture was rapidly diminishing during my time.

However, I do remember stories my mother used to share when we were kids, stories about her own parents, my grandparents. She said my grandfather often hosted tharumi, and was encouraged by his wife to do so. Without a tharumi to make ornaments for men, a man's life was a handicapped one. Men would be frowned upon and mocked. So, whenever my grandfather brought a tharumi home, my grandmother would tell my mother and her siblings to treat her with respect and make her feel welcome so that she would not only make ornaments, but stay long enough to weave a shawl for my grandfather. Whatever a tharumi made was highly respected and treasured. My mother often said that she could not fathom my grandmother's desire for another woman to sleep on her side of the bed with her husband for long periods of time. But that was the norm during those days. I think from my mother's generation onward, tharumi became less popular among married men, and slowly stopped completely during my time. I don't know about other villages.

Tharumi were free people. They choose whose house they went to, and what kind of ornaments they made for their hosts. So it was important to keep them happy if they stayed at your house.

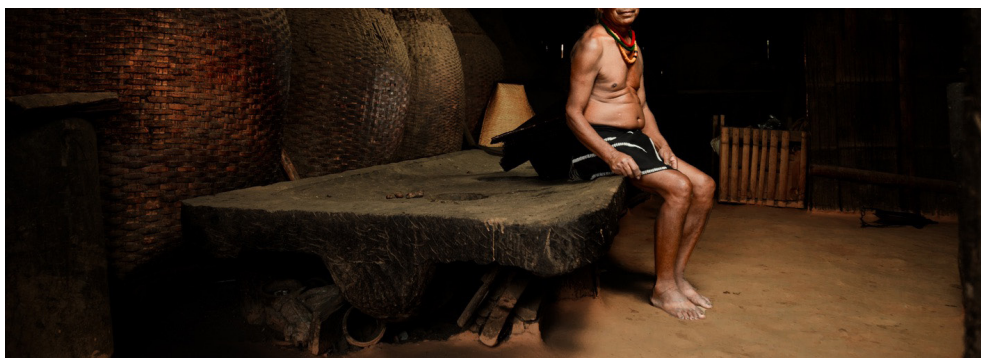
Oh! I also know of a kütha kürumi who got married to someone from our village, and settled down here in Tsüswüzu. But she couldn't adjust back to the rigid lifestyle of toiling in the fields all year round. She left soon enough, looking for adventure.

When I asked her about the status of women in the past, she lamented, 'Our lives fully revolved around men. These days, women enjoy more freedom, but during those days, we women were not considered humans. Everything we did was for the welfare of men.'

Azutsa added that lazy women, who wanted to avoid doing physical labour for their survival, often chose the life of a tharumi.

That could be true to some extent, but it is also easy to imagine that their love for adventure may have made them choose such a lifestyle. During the headhunting era, tharumi were the only women who could travel and explore new regions, experience the different ways of life in different villages, socialise with new people, and broaden their horizons. It is easy to imagine the women's yen for such an experience, and them eventually deciding to become a tharumi because there was no other way they could fulfil their dream. To add to this, people lived in constant fear within the borders of thick village fortifications during the headhunting era. Beyond the village, people would work in their paddy fields heavily guarded by warriors. According to 82-year-old Venezo Lohe from Khomi village, it was a taboo for warriors to slay women they had had intercourse with in the past. It was also a taboo to forcefully kill a woman who offered sex in exchange for her life. Such taboos allowed tharumi to travel freely during times of war as well. Even in the post-headhunting era, I imagine that becoming a tharumi was an escape for women who wanted to break free from strict societal rules and live freely. Lazy people would not become nomads and walk miles from one location to the next, sleeping with strangers in strange lands, and making ornaments for them as a way of life.

A HOST FROM THE PAST



Photograph 2: A former host, sitting on a wooden bed which hosted tharumi in the past.

Hosting a tharumi required elaborate preparation. A man needed to prepare grand feasts for as long as she stayed as his guest. Such 'grand feasts' involved slaughtering chickens and/or pigs, as well as an unlimited supply of good quality rice brew. He also needed a good bed for her to sleep comfortably in. A man was also required to procure the materials she would need in order to make him ornaments or sometimes to weave apparel for him. My interviewees, who were mostly men, said that only rich people could host tharumi. On the other hand, there is also the issue of physique. A tharumi may also refuse to go with someone who did not fit their idea of a 'good looking man'. And tharumi were also known to prefer tall and strong warriors who had already gained popularity for their bravery in war and success with women. As for men, they preferred a busty tharumi.

In the words of one of my interviewees:

When it comes to tharumi, their facial features came second. Since you asked for total honesty, please don't get offended by my words. You have a petite body and small breasts, right? During those days, you wouldn't be able to become a tharumi. We men preferred big breasts, bottoms, and calves. Women with such bodies were called *tüphove* or *tüphorüsa*. *Tüphove* meant they had a good body mass from top to bottom. *Tüphorüsa* meant a body worth envying. Only a woman with *tüphove* could dream of becoming a tharumi.

In order to better understand these tharumi, I then went to Porba village to speak with someone who had actually hosted them in his youth. Porba village is known to have hosted tharumi well into the 1980s, and is considered to be one of the last Chakhesang villages to practice this lost culture. At Porba, I joined my interviewee along with five other friends of his. Amongst the group, he was the only person who had hosted a tharumi. He narrated the following, as his friends sat beside him for support, and kept nodding and applauding his courage in sharing these intimate details with honesty and pride. I will not include his name, as per his request.

I am now 76 years old. While we were still practicing our ancestral religion, it was a matter of great shame to attend feasts and ritualistic gatherings without the valour of women. We cannot wear *nehiro*, or *tüsüne*, or *lokhreti*, without earning them from women. So, in order to achieve those ornamental rewards, I hosted tharumi in my home twice. I am not good looking or handsome, but I wanted to fulfil the tradition of our ancestors and earn a respectable name in my community.

I think I was 38 years of age when I hosted one for the first time, in 1985. I was in my youth. Some of my friends met two tharumi at Pfutsero town and invited them to our village. One of those tharumi was from Phusachodu village and the other was from Phugwu village [Kikruma]. These friends were my dormitory peers, and neighbours too. We used to share a bed in chethiche. They sent the word out, asking whether anyone would be interested in hosting them. So I decided to host them and fulfil my duty as a man.

I invited one of them home, killed a chicken to dine with her, and used her assistance. She stayed with me for three days. After the third day, another friend took her to his house.

I used to live with my mother, since I wasn't married. My mother was happy I had finally brought a tharumi home. She cooked for us the whole time the tharumi stayed.

My mother also encouraged us to go to the paddy field to get some fresh air and relax. I was in my youth, and unmarried. Sleeping with her once a day was not enough to quench myself. We would go to the paddy field to take a bath, and consummate there as well. There was no innerwear during those days. You remove your *tüsüne*, and you were completely naked. That was our culture. Nothing extraordinary. Everybody did it.

After sexual intercourse, I gave her some threads and made my plea, "My ornaments are incomplete. I would be grateful if you could make two to three pieces of *lokhreti* for me, and save me from humiliation among my peers." She agreed to make a few pieces for me. The tharumi only needed to make

a few symbolic rows. Once they made a few for us, it was no longer a taboo for us to finish the rest by ourselves.

Since I'm on the topic of ornaments, I will talk about another one. There are certain intersections where two footpaths meet. If you sleep with a woman in that junction, you earn the right to wear *thame*. Thame can be earned with any woman—a tharumi or a küthami. I earned that valour as well, although it wasn't with a tharumi.

The second time I hosted a tharumi, I brought her home for only one night. She was from Thipuzu village. I hosted her the following year.

Once we were done with a tharumi, we would tell her, "Your service is no longer needed. You are free to leave now." Either another friend would come and get her, or she may say that it was time she left our village. We didn't let her leave empty handed. We give her rice or vegetables or fruit, even money to help her on her journey, as a show of gratitude for staying at our house. Such gestures were never considered a payment though. It was our deep sense of hospitality not to let guests leave empty handed.

Since everyone grew up in chethiche along with their peers, without a distinction made on the basis of physical beauty or wealth, hosts from rich families were known to help their friends achieve their ornaments whenever they brought a tharumi home. In such situations, the host may request the tharumi to help his friend for a night, and make an ornament for him. Then, the tharumi would visit the friend's house at night and say, 'Is the owner of the house around? Your friend sent me.' She would sleep with him that night, make the ornament, and go back to her host's house the following morning.

Not all men collected ornaments through tharumi. There were some men who preferred küthami lovers over tharumi, and broke the norms as a result. These were men who were frowned upon, and they faced immense pressure to host tharumi just like everybody else. Here's an interview from Porba village:

My name is Tavetso. I am 93 years old, and never hosted a tharumi, although a lot of them visited our village in the past. I was never rich or good-looking, so bringing a tharumi home was a distant possibility, but that wasn't the only reason. I preferred sleeping with lovers, and never liked the idea of casual sex. So, despite constant persuasion from my friends, who tried all means to make me change my mind, I refused to bend. In the end, I was made to pay a fine of ₹1 for not hosting a tharumi. I paid the fine to make them stop pressuring me. The payment was made as a donation to chethiche.

According to the menfolk, tharumi enjoyed a high status in society. They were highly respected, and men would go the extra mile to please them. I am left to wonder if tharumi felt the same. If a tharumi ever refused to sleep with her host, men had every right to force her out, even in the dead of night. When these women were hosted only for sex and to amass ornaments, and then discarded once their host was done with them, I wonder how one defines this as 'respect'.

TANGIBLE MEMORIES

The tangible heritage of the Chakhesang Nagas is symbolic and paradoxical. Symbolic because from the moment one is born, every article that is put on one's body carries a deeper meaning. The traditional attire and ornaments could never be used randomly. For men, once they underwent Shesü Küri, they were expected to earn every article by taking enemy heads, killing certain wild animals, hosting feasts of merit, and promiscuity. As they began achieving these feats, men adorned their bodies, and carved their houses. The past culture of the Chakhesangs is also a paradox because the rewards one could earn from war and sex overlapped in many areas. I cannot begin to comprehend how two conflicting acts—one borne from fury, and the other from lust—can receive the same rewards. It also feels like

sexual vanity, because men went to the extent of rewarding themselves with certain ornaments and carvings on their wall, simply for touching women's breasts.

One of the main reasons tharumi became popular in the past was their contribution through making ornaments for the men they slept with. Such ornaments were important for men to amass, as they dictated their status in society. During the era of migration, when there was an abundance of land, people freely migrated from their ancestral villages to new locations to establish a new village to call their new home. Only those men who had earned the most ornaments from women were considered worthy to take credit for being the person to establish a new village, and also become the chief or ritualistic head of the village. For example, Porba village received its name from 'Por', who was the person who established the village. The ancestors of the present inhabitants migrated from Phusachodu village. When it came to who would take credit as the main establisher, Por was found to have earned the most rewards through sex, due to which he became the chief and the village was named after him.

For men, besides earning ornaments through sexual intercourse, they also earned ornaments through achieving certain sex positions, as well as having sex in certain locations. Such a wide array of sexual adventures was more easily achieved with the free-souled tharumi women.

Humans are sexual beings. '*Homo sapiens* evolved to be shamelessly, undeniably, inescapably sexual. Lusty libertines. Rakes, rogues, and roués. Tomcats and sex kittens. Horndogs. Bitches in heat' (Ryan and Jethá 2010, 62). Women also have sexual needs, because of which these men were able to achieve their own merits. However, women seemed like mere tools for men to build their egos. While men flaunted their sexual adventures, women had to hide in shame or become a tharumi—the silent contributors. The shadows.

When it came to ornaments, a woman would allegedly decide whether she wanted to make them for a man depending on how he treated her. But women rarely refused to make ornaments for their

hosts or lovers. And coming from a society where a woman's life revolved around men, it is natural for a woman to want to make a gift for her lover. Coming to the relationship with a tharumi, one can assume that such a culture evolved from a woman wanting to leave a souvenir for a host with whom she had spent an intimate night. Perhaps something to remember her by. Coming from a patriarchal society such as this one, the community is designed in a way that expects women to be meek. This may also make women overcompensate a man's generosity, leading to them making such intricate ornaments for him just for a moment of intimacy. Nonetheless, beyond being fed with good food and drinks, one can also assume that a man's effort in playing a good host to get the ornaments could also denote a woman's pleasure during intercourse as well. For men, such souvenirs served as a decorative item they could flaunt with pride amongst their peers, and also as items with which they could climb the social ladder.

As the only explorers among women during the tumultuous headhunting era, one can assume that tharumi may also have played a role in transferring certain crafts from one village to another, through the articles they made for men.

One of the ornaments a man earned from a tharumi was the Nehiro. Nehiro is a collection of twirled threads that look like the skirt of a horse's tail. It is an extension of a *tüsüne* and is tied to the end of the rope that is wrapped around the waist like a belt. Nehiro needs to be positioned at the back, making them look more like a hanging tail. Another ornament is the *lokhreti*, which is the same as the *nihiro*, except it is longer and is worn around the neck as a neckpiece instead.

Betso tshü is another ornament made by a tharumi. It is made by braiding the stems of smut grass and is worn around the wrists and arms.

A tharumi could also be asked to weave shawls for men, as seen in my grandmother's mother's story, discussed earlier. They were expected to assist the host's wife in weaving shawls for him. Besides that, *rhe* is another woven sash whose making was reserved for a tharumi. It was more popular in villages like Zapami. Generally, a sash

CHASING SHADOWS



Photograph 3: Nehiro—tassels which can only be made by a tharumi.



Photograph 4: Betso tshü—worn as a wristlet or an armlet. Earlier, only tharumi were allowed to make this ornament.

could be woven by any woman. However, there is a certain motif which was reserved for the tharumi. Such sashes would have a white background, with red motifs on both ends.

As an outsider, a tharumi wasn't allowed to weave in the village. Therefore, a man would provide the materials and take her to his paddy field, where she would be made to weave the attire in a paddy hut. One can imagine her weaving all alone in the hut for long hours, way into the night, trying to finish the article of clothing. It is also easy to imagine her thinking about her childhood in the chethiche where she would weave with her friends, immersed in folk songs.

Men also made ornaments using the hair of tharumi, and sometimes the hair of their kũthami lovers as well. Such articles included earrings called *thanye*, and an ornament called *thame* which was worn like an arched tail and made with a base of wood. Men could also earn ornaments like thame through the locations in which they had sex. As shared by an interviewee earlier, they could wear the ornament by sleeping with a tharumi or a kũthami at the intersections of footpaths. A few strands of a woman's hair would be cut using the man's teeth, after sexual intercourse, in order to use them as thanye or thame. While some villages did not allow men to take a woman's hair without permission, men from other villages could steal a woman's hair when she slept. These two ornaments were also earned through war conquests, by cutting the hair of the enemies they slayed.

A woman's hair was valuable in a Chakhesang community. A woman was believed to carry her good fortune in her hair, and this was part of the reason why even fallen hair was carefully collected throughout her lifetime. When a man asked for a woman's hair, it is likely that she only agreed in the cases of men she truly loved. Giving a lock of her hair to someone was a symbol of giving them a part of herself. For men who could not find a woman who loved them enough to sacrifice a lock of hair for them to wear, their obsession may have taken extreme turns where they even stole the hair of women with whom they'd had casual intimacy through unfair means. Tharumi became easy targets for the greed of such men.

At times, a woman's hair just might save her life. If a man came to take her head, a woman may offer sexual services to the man and request him to take a lock of her hair in exchange for her life. When such a request was made, it was a taboo to refuse. Since a man could not take the woman's hair without copulation, he may have slept with her to take a small lock of her hair, and spared her life.

The fact that the most valuable possession for a woman was her hair, and that she was not allowed to grow it until she become sexually active, speaks volumes about the status of women at the time.

Men could also wear shawls a certain way based on whether they'd had sex in certain positions. For example, *lobokhü* is a black shawl commonly worn by the older generation. But for young men, it is a merit wear, which can only be worn along with *tsakhü* and *kürikhü*. The three-piece shawl is usually worn with *kürikhü* on the inside touching the skin, followed by *lobokhü*, and then *tsakhü* on the outside. Such a combination can only be worn by men who have had sexual intercourse with two women at the same time, where the three bodies were stacked on top of each other during intercourse, with the



Photograph 5: Remnants of locks of hair accumulated from tharumi and küthami.



Photographs 6, 7, 8: Lobokhü, kürikhü, and tsakhü.

man on top. While lobokhü and kürikhü signify the women, tsakhü signifies the man who achieved such a position with two women.

When it comes to the ornaments and apparel whose creation was strictly reserved for the tharumi, their continuity was challenged when society bade farewell to the culture of tharumi. In order to preserve their crafts, some villages were known to have performed rituals to appease the spirits and seek their approval in order to allow the general populace to begin making these crafts. Rituals were also done to open certain ornaments up for common use. Rituals to remove a taboo from the community involve strict discipline from all its members, which wasn't an easy feat. Nonetheless, thanks to the wise decisions of leaders, the craft of making such ornaments stood the test of time. As for the tharumi, the ornaments made by them now lie hidden, burnt, or buried. Memories of them live on in the form of a handful of ornaments, whose owners need careful persuasion if one wants to learn the tales of the crafty tharumi who risked their lives to travel far and wide on foot, simply to clothe men with ornaments and apparel.

LYRICAL JOURNEYS



Photograph 9: Representative image of a tharumi.

So, how did one become a tharumi? The Chakhesangs believe that it lies in a woman's destiny. That one's fate is decided while still in their mother's womb. It was dangerous to venture out of one's village. Therefore, no parent wanted their children to become a nomad. Once a young woman become a küthami and decide to venture out of her village in search of her fortune, she packed the things she needed in a traditional basket and hid it. After her parents left for the paddy field, she would take her basket and inform some family members before bidding good bye to her native village. Young women in this position often left their villages in small groups of two or three. For their first

venture, they were known to visit familiar villages, and approach familiar people. Perhaps a neighbouring village to begin with. From there, they slowly gained the confidence to go further.

Every girl begins learning indigenous crafts from her mothers and friends from as young as seven to eight years of age. Although some ornaments and apparel are reserved for the *küthami*, these crafts follow a similar process. So, by the time they left their village, these women already knew the various methods well. From then on, they only needed to learn how to perfect them.

When *tharumi* visited a village, they were known to sit near the village entrance and announce themselves. They may have said, 'We are passing through your village. Would there be any generous man willing to receive us?' Other times, they were known to sit in raised stone circles called *dawhi*, and sing folk songs for attention.

When it comes to how long they stayed in one location, it depended on the number of hosts in each village. The duration was known to be anywhere between a few days to even a year.

All *tharumi* were known to compose their own songs to differentiate themselves from one another. Songs that formed the identity of a *tharumi* were called *Küthami Chele*. When a *tharumi* sang, men often knew who she was, just by listening to her songs. The following is the song of a *tharumi* whose name was *Shoprünülü*. This song was shared with me by *Khrünelü* of *Rüzazho* village. *Khrünelü* is 75 years old, and she heard the song when she was a young girl. She said that *Shoprünülü* always visited her village singing this song:

Shoprünülü ura lü detho
Ura lünyi'
Shode semole, ngomole
Sikünye litübo
shoyibalü lüyimüthüshe

The song talks about *Shoprünülü* wishing to visit the village, but she was lost and struggled to find her way there.

Tharumi were also known to sing songs with explicit lyrics, freely uttering words that even a man did not have the courage to say. The following is one such song, detailing the act of lovemaking, and tharumi were known to love singing it. I could not find the right words to make a fair translation, but it talks about her genitals thanking the man's genitalia for allowing her to feast on him. Lyrics like this are highly stigmatised today with the dawn of Christianity. This song was shared by my interviewees, who recalled it after decades, and except for the permission I got to publish it in this research paper, this song may never have been heard again on any platform.

Thüpumi thoteyo
Thünomi daori
Kümüzhō varishemo
Nkra kreyo nvü thibo mühe re re

It wasn't just the tharumi, men were also known to compose songs to please these women. The following is a song that men used to sing for the tharumi, as shared by Puthihü of Porba village:

Hano nie chü
 (as I exalt you)
nenō mi rüyo
 (you pursue someone else)
Mi taho ri no anüle
 (I chose you among the many)
Nsa cho ri njücho kümhale
 (your rear is as beautiful as your front)
Ami tayo mi rüsaho
 (if we're together, we won't have to envy others)

Although tharumi composed daring lyrics to entertain and attract men, they were permitted to do this only so long as they fed a man's ego. They were never allowed the same liberty in bed. A man should always lie on top of a woman during intercourse. It is said that at times some tharumi tried to get on top instead. When that happened, they were expected to immediately beg the man to forgive them, and

perform what is known as *Rüliphi*. This is a kind of ritual where one person blessed the other by reciting words of blessings. Should they refuse to perform the *Rüliphi*, the man could assault them or do whatever he may want with them, without repercussions. A man was also allowed to share his bed with two women at once in order to earn extra ornaments, but a woman was never allowed to share a bed with two men. Women in general were expected to be totally submissive to men in all areas. This echoes the words of my grandmother. 'We women were not considered humans. Everything we did was for the welfare of men.'

One can only ask oneself if they ever composed lyrics about their own pain. Or got lucky enough to share a deep and meaningful connection with any of their sexual partners. We may never learn about their lives beyond how they presented themselves to the world. However, I did find certain stories of them getting possessive over certain men. Puthihü of Porba said that some tharumi travelled with a 'love charm' called *thevü*, and gave it to the men they were attracted to. The receivers of *thevü* experienced a strong longing for this tharumi, almost like a bad addiction. As an outsider or an outcast, families did not allow men to marry tharumi. When a man was unable to break free from this charm, he would resort to drastic measures. It is said that he would wait for her to attend to the call of nature and eat her excreta. Such an extreme act allegedly helped him break the charm and go back to his normal life. Similarly, men were also known to possess *thevü* and give them to the women they wanted, tharumi included.

LUCKY CHARM

Besides the sex and the ornaments, there is another reason why the culture of tharumi gained popularity in the past. The Chakhesangs believed that hosting tharumi brought good luck and prosperity to the individual. Tharumi were also believed to bring prosperity to

the entire village. This is evident in the role they played in two of the biggest events among the Chakhesangs.

First is *Cheda-Chinyi*. This is when two friendly villages hold a feasting event in one of the villages to strengthen their friendship. During the headhunting era, certain villages would come to a mutual understanding to leave behind past conflicts and sign a verbal peace treaty. When such a treaty was accepted, they would not only stop taking heads from each other's villages but would also come to each other's rescue in times of trouble. These villages organised get togethers for their inhabitants to get to know each other. These events were called Cheda-Chinyi. Inter-village marriages sometimes happened through such gatherings. Otherwise most people married within their own village due to the lack of interaction between villages. On the day of Cheda-Chinyi, every villager would put on their best clothes and men could flaunt the ornaments they'd earned. On such days, a tharumi could join the celebration. Some lucky men sometimes managed to take a tharumi home. If that happened, the Chakhesangs believed that prosperity would fall on the village. Men would be on their best behaviour, trying to seduce women on such occasions. During such events, a kũthami could also become a tharumi, if they found a man they were attracted to, and if the attraction was reciprocated. She could go to the other village, and begin travelling elsewhere from there.

The next event where the presence of a tharumi was considered lucky was the Feast of Merit, called *Zhotho* by locals. The Feast of Merit was the biggest honour Chakhesangs could earn in a lifetime. In Chakhesang culture, respect is earned by giving and sharing. Therefore, when a family managed to harvest more than they needed, they could decide to share their harvest with their village, putting on the Feast of Merit. The feast was a ritualistic event. It involved multiple days of feasting, and hundreds of rituals that lasted months. The main items in the feast would be rice brew and meat. For good luck, a tharumi would be invited to the feast and would be made to open the lid of a barrel so that the celebration could begin. It is believed that when a

tharumi inaugurates the celebration, the food and drinks prepared will last the entire feast. This is because the menu for the feast needed to be prepared beforehand, and it was considered bad luck for the host if the items did not last for the whole feast. Although this act of involving a tharumi was optional, since the celebration had to move ahead even in her absence, the presence of one was highly favoured.

THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

Tharumi were able to travel to different villages, including enemy villages. This is because they were protected by a taboo that disallowed a man from killing a woman he'd had sexual intercourse with. This is evident in a folk song shared by 70-year-old Theyeta of Khomi village. The song is about a headhunter called Novarühü who killed a tharumi by mistake. The song is a conversation between the culprit and the victim before she breathed her last in his hands. Unknowingly, the warrior killed her, and—regretting it—he left without taking her head:

Novarühü
No ha zhie to'me
 (are you going to slay me?)
Novarühü
O ha zhie to'lume
 (oh! are you really slaying me?)
Shiemo' zhieva
 (unintentional killing)
Shiemo' zhieva
 (unintentional killing)
O thüli pü künyi
 (oh! it is taboo to take the head)
Shiemo' zhieva
 (unintentional killing)

I remember a story I often heard from one of my grandfathers who passed away in 2018. His name was Nelüyi. I came to a realisation only during the course of this research that this story was about the tharumi. I felt the need to include this story in this paper, because it tells the tale of a tharumi who singlehandedly avenged her village. I shall narrate it the way I remember it:

As shared earlier, I am from Tsüswüzu village. My village is considered one of the oldest and biggest Chakhesang villages, and was one of the most feared villages during the headhunting era. With an impenetrable defense, its influence spread far and wide, and about 40 villages were known to pay tribute to Tsüswüzu for protection.

Kütsapo is another fierce Chakhesang village, located about 100 kilometres from Tsüswüzu village by road. For some reason, the two villages became rivals and were engaged in a brutal war for a long time. Finally, to bring Kütsapo to its knees and end the war once and for all, the Tsüswüzu warriors went to Kütsapo, broke their defenses, and beheaded most of their best warriors. As they were leaving, a warrior from Tsüswüzu was overcome with greed and went back to Kütsapo in the hopes of beheading one more warrior. The few surviving warriors surrounded and killed him. Out of rage, the Tsüswüzu warriors went back and completely razed the village to the ground.

It was a heavy defeat for the inhabitants of Kütsapo village. They gave up all hope of continuing the war with Tsüswüzu. Among them was a lady who persistently challenged Tsüswüzu, but her pleas for revenge fell on deaf ears, and no one dared to plot another suicide mission. Unable to convince anyone, the lady decided to avenge her village by herself. She became a tharumi and travelled to Tsüswüzu village all by herself. She managed to seduce the strongest warrior of Tsüswüzu village, and stayed at his house, waiting for the right moment to strike. The warriors were mostly nocturnal beings. They would stay up all night, and sleep during the day. So, one morning, as the warrior lay sleeping peacefully, the lady struck him with a spear, instantly killing him. She immediately took off with his head.

In their own way, the people of Kütsapo rewarded the lady for her bravery with the highest honour they could allow. The village broke an age-old custom, and allowed women to make war cries beyond the borders of the village. Till this day, Kütsapo is the only Chakhesang village that allows its women to ululate.

I believe there are many more stories that depict the bravery of tharumi in times of war. Stories long forgotten, or never known. Regardless, one cannot undermine the warrior spirit that helped them venture out of the comfort of their villages in the first place.

LITTLE SECRETS



Photograph 10: Representative of a host.

In a Chakhesang Naga society, a man can leave behind a legacy based on his sexual conquests as well. A man literally counts the number of women he successfully seduced through the course of his life using small inland pebbles. These stones would embellish his grave when he died. I once counted 37 stones on a grave in Lozaphühü village. Some elders said there used to be men whose graves had many more, but they have all disappeared. The Austrian ethnologist Haimendorf also noted, 'On one grave, evidently that of a great favourite of the fair sex, I counted sixty-two small stones, and I could not help wondering how his relatives or indeed he himself remembered the exact number of his loves' (Haimendorf 1939, 25). Such pebbles accounted for only the *küthami* and *tharumi* these men had intercourse with in their lifetime, and did not include a man's wife, or wives if he was married multiple times. It was a taboo to have multiple wives, but a man and a woman could decide to get a divorce if the marriage had failed. Both the man and the woman could remarry as many times as they wanted.

Even as a married man, engaging in sexual relations with a *tharumi* in order to gain ornaments was not considered adultery; ironically, infidelity on the part of the wife was harshly dealt with. If a woman was accused of adultery, she would have to leave her husband's house empty handed. She was not allowed to take any of her possessions with her, including her clothes. As for the man she was accused of having an



Photographs 11, 12: (left) Rows of stones neatly placed on a grave. Each stone represents a *tharumi* or a *küthami* that the person had managed to woo in his lifetime. (right) The presence of stones leaning against other stones signifies that the man participated in a threesome.

affair with, he would earn respect among his peers. Men found smart ways to keep their libido going even after marriage.

Coming from a community where it was normal for every adult to have multiple sexual partners, I began enquiring about whether sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) existed. I found one called *mükrerü*, which can be translated as ‘poverty infection’. I could not find the name of this particular infection in English, but symptoms included itchy and painful genitals. Small bumps would appear on the genitalia, and sometimes pus also formed. It is said that the people suffering from it were forced to stay at home for months, unable to work in the fields. Every sustainable society toiled in the fields and lived hand to mouth. If one was unable to work for prolonged periods of time, one could not harvest that year and became easy prey for poverty. That is how the disease got its name. It is said that tharumi often carried the infection and spread it in the village. Since a woman’s genitalia is largely internal, women took more time to heal from the infection. But it never stopped my ancestors from continuing their sexual exploits.

We lived in harmony with nature, and for every sickness, our forests always came to our rescue. Below are indigenous remedies for treating *mükrerü* as practiced by locals, both men and women:

1. Iron Walnut (*Juglans sigillata*)—Called *Khuse* locally, this is a wild fruit of the walnut family found in abundance in our forests. The shell of the fruit was pounded, and the juice was pressed and applied to the affected area.
2. Hog Plum (*Choerospondias axillaris*)—Locally called *Khulase*, hog plum is another wild fruit widely found in the area. Locals pounded the bark of the tree, pressed the juice, and applied it to the affected area.
3. *Türhüvakh rinha*—This is another wild herb found in the forest. I could not find the plant during the course of my research, which made it difficult to identify its English name. The only description I have of this plant is that it looks similar to a ginger plant, and is found deep in the forest.

4. *Vediro*—A wild creeper that grows near streams. I couldn't identify this plant during the course of my research either.

To further understand STDs, I spoke to Dr. Nounenuo Terhase Mere, a Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Naga Hospital Authority Kohima (NHAK).

When we talk about STDs, Herpes can cause painful ulcers in [people's] genitalia, including involvement of the inguinal lymph nodes, which means swollen lymph nodes in the groin. The ulcers will be very painful [for both] the man and the woman. Actually, there's no treatment for that, since it's a virus. It depends on the person's immune response. If the body's immune system is good, it fights [the virus] and [the problem] may resolve within a few weeks. But if the person's immune system is compromised, it could worsen.

STD is a silent disease. So if the immune system is good, the virus will be asymptomatic. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the most common silent STDs. So, what happens is that the organisms lie in the reproductive tract. If we take medicines, [they] will disappear. But if left untreated, the organisms will go upwards towards the upper reproductive tract and cause something called a Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). When a woman suffers from an untreated PID, it damages the tubes and other reproductive organs, leading to infertility. When the tube is blocked, there is no way for the egg to meet the sperm. Sex workers mostly suffer from untreated STDs, leading to PID.

It would be wrong to pin point what kind of STDs existed in the past, but one can get a sense of them through what we know today.

Interestingly, among all the people I interviewed, not a single person had personally witnessed a pregnant tharumi nor did they know of any child born from one. The only illegitimate children they knew of belonged to the kũthami who never ventured out, but had lovers in their village before marriage. I tried to find out if we had any

methods of abortion or contraception in the past. Most of the people I interviewed confidently assured me that we never had them, and that if they existed the knowledge of them may have been shared in deep secrecy only among the tharumi. I, however, learnt about a plant that helped in the termination of a fetus. Sadly, the person who knows about this plant refused to share any information about it for fear that the younger generation will use it.

A child born out of wedlock was scorned, be it a child born to a kũthami or a tharumi. This is because when a child is born, they undergo a certain ritual which some villages call *nubo*. Unless an infant undergoes the ceremonial rite that welcomes them into the community, they are believed to bring bad luck to the entire village. The presence of both parents was crucial for this ritual, as one can guess. So, what happened when a child was born out of wedlock? For the pregnant woman, she would have to name the father. When the father was named, it was a taboo for the man to refuse, regardless of whether he believed it to be true or not. If the man refused to accept the child, it was believed that his life would be filled with bad fortune. Such a culture is practiced till today in some villages. Every village had their own laws regarding the birth of a child out of wedlock. Although there is no known case of a pregnant tharumi, the laws would have implicated them as well.

If a pregnant woman named the father, the man would have to help raise the child, although there was no law binding them to get married. However, due to having multiple sexual partners, a woman could also fail to identify the father. When that happened, the child would not be able to undergo *nubo*, and it was a taboo to raise such children. After giving birth, the mother would be expected to take her infant child to the river immediately, and press their throat until the child stopped breathing, and then bury the infant nearby. The burial place could not have anything that symbolised a grave, and the infant would be put to an eternal sleep without a name. When societal laws forced a mother to take the life of her own child, I cannot imagine the pain she had to live with.

Some villages may have allowed the child to live. However, the mother and the child could never partake in the festivals and rituals of the village, especially those related to war. They would also be banned from staying in the village during times of war and festivals. During such times, they would be required to move outside the borders of the village and live in the forest. The evidence of such a culture can be found in the lyrics of an old folk song. The song was found at Phüsachodu village, where they predicted the outcome of a war Thenyizu village was involved in. The song talks about a lady named Müdosalü from Thenyizu village whose child had not undergone the birth ceremony and had to leave the village in wartime:

Müdosalü niesü ditemo

(Müdosalü is now gone)

Thenyizumi lizhe epo dotho

(the war success of the Thenyizu people may spread far and wide)

FINDING HOME



Photograph 13: Representative image of a home.

Tharumi are known to travel not just to Chakhesang villages. Their influence is said to stretch to the neighbouring tribes as well, like the Angami, Mao, Poumai, and so on. The following story was narrated to me by 82-year-old Venezo and 70-year-old Theyeta from Khomi village.

Two tharumi from my village went to Jakhama village [Angami village]. If they crossed Jakhama, they would reach Manipur. Worried that they would be lost for good if they reached Manipur, the inhabitants of Jakhama took turns hosting them for long durations, and sent a message to my village so that we could go and get them.

When you visit a village, the host will always ask which village you're from, right? So, when they learned that they were from Khomi village, they prevented them from travelling further away.

This village community hall was inaugurated by the Jakhama village council. They were invited here because of their kindness in helping us find our lost daughters during the headhunting era.

How long a tharumi travelled as a nomad either depended on the individual or, in cases like the story shared by Theyeta, they may have been coerced home by their families. Some more lucky ones may have fallen in love with a host and decided to settle down. As shared earlier, my grandmother said she know of a tharumi who visited her native village and got married. Most of my interviewees knew of at least one tharumi who had married someone from their village. A lot of times, such arrangements were frowned upon. This was not because of these women's lifestyle, but because of their hair. As previously established, a woman's fortune lies in her hair, and at times a tharumi's hair may have been stolen by her host. People believed that marrying such women brought bad luck, because they had already given away their strength (hair) to someone else. But if a man still decided to marry a tharumi, he would announce that he was following his heart and marrying her, and that she would no longer be available to sleep with

anyone else. Once the announcement was made, and the marriage rituals were completed, she became a member of society, in possession of full rights.

According to the Customary Law, it was a taboo to behead the in-laws. The Customary Law handbook of the Chakhesang Nagas also mentioned that inter-village marriages brought peace between former enemy villages (CPO, 2020, 61-62). In the past, especially during the headhunting era when travelling was dangerous, most inter-village marriages happened with tharumi. One cannot undermine their role in bringing peace between different villages in the past.

Some tharumi may have decided to reunite with their families. Like prodigal daughters, they would return home and implore their families to accept them. The clan or the family would construct a house for the tharumi and give her a paddy field. A tharumi could also decide to settle in another village of her choice if she grew close to a family during the course of her travels. A family from that particular village would adopt her and give her a house to live in, and a paddy field to cultivate and survive on. However, except for a few lucky ones, it is said that most tharumi without a husband were mistreated by their biological or adoptive families. Just as a man without his ornaments was considered an incomplete man, a woman without a husband was considered an incomplete woman.

For the last of the tharumi, Christianity found most of them. 82-year-old Tavehü from Thipuzu village said that the last tharumi were seen in his village in 1959. He saw them convert to Christianity and strip off the old ways. In his words,

Two young girls visited Thipuzu village in 1959. I remember the year because I was studying in Class 7 when they came. It hadn't been long since they had started travelling as tharumi, because I vividly remember they had short hair. A few of my seniors hosted them. That was the final time anyone hosted tharumi in my village. Those two girls went to Khulazu Basa village after Thipuzu. Revival began sweeping in our area during that time. They were called by Jesus to serve Him

while at Khulazu Basa and they converted there. Their faith grew so strong that they even received the gift of healing and began to perform miracles. It was amazing. Remember the story of how Jesus saved a prostitute from being stoned to death in the Bible? This was no different. God truly works in mysterious ways.

Until the recent past, it was rare for most Chakhesang people to get married to someone from a different village. Generally, it was just the tharumi who would settle down in another village—either through marriage or because they chose to make it their new home. I believe their migration has helped spread our crafts, folk songs, and other forms of knowledge from one village to another. Perhaps, in their own way, they brought the different villages together, helping to connect the tribe.

Sadly, in just one generation, their existence was completely wiped out. They were respected, loved, envied, and enjoyed a certain reputation in the community, but now their contributions have been



Photograph 14: Representative image of a tharumi, weaving for her host.

overlooked and undermined. The new generation has never heard of them, the older generation now calls them prostitutes. I initially addressed them as courtesans. But to be a prostitute or a courtesan is to get paid for sex. I no longer have an English word to categorise them. They had their own category, called *tharumi*, meaning a woman who travels to engage in sexual activity, in order to make ornaments for men.

They were so close, yet I could not touch them. Like shadows, they lingered but never showed themselves. They knew the secrets of families, yet their own life was kept in mystery. They assisted mothers and wives in entertaining and adorning men, but never got the chance to be part of a community. Generations of women who travelled to places their peers would never have dreamed of, hosted by varieties of strangers in strange lands, used their craft to clothe and embellish those they had just met, just for the sheer pleasure of helping men, now lay cancelled by history and scorned by their community. Trying to hide their existence is a direct threat to our culture itself, without which our identity is challenged. Today, they are fondly remembered by the few survivors who hosted them, who can no longer flaunt their ornaments, and a few who saw them and shared their stories for the first time. I am grateful that I managed to gather a few fragments of their lives as seen through the eyes of those who had the courage to come forward, and share their memories of the silent contributors who shaped my cultural heritage.

REFERENCES

Image credits: Tshetsholo Naro

Works cited

Chakhesang Public Organisation (CPO). 2021. *Commemorating Chakhesang 75th Anniversary*. Phek: CPO.

- Haimendorf, C.F. 1939. *The Naked Nagas*. London: Metheun.
- Ryan, C. and Jetha, C. 2010. *Sex at Dawn*. New York: Harper.
- Chakhesang Public Organization (CPO). 2020. *Chakhesang Customary Laws and its Traditional Practices*: CPO.

Interviews

- Zhiengulo, Zapami village, 1 October 2022
- Khrünelü, Rüzazho village, 7 October 2022
- Mülhütsülü Nyekha, Chetheba town, 29 May 2023
- Müthapoyi Chiero, Porba village, 9 September 2022, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Hüsavo Sakhamo, Porba village, 9 September 2022, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Puthihü Tenenu, Porba village, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Tavetso Thücie, Porba village, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Pukrohü Chiero, Porba village, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Nüposü Swüro, Porba village, 30 May 2023, 14 February 2024
- Venezo Lohe, Khomi village, 23 September 2022, 30 May 2023
- Theyeta Nakro, Khomi village, 23 September 2022, 30 May 2023
- Tavehü Thingö, Thipüzu village, 31 May 2023
- Hüzüyi, Phüsachodü village, 3 September 2022, 1 June 2023
- Rüdashüyi, Phüsachodü village, 3 September 2022, 1 June 2023
- Dr. Nounenuo Terhase, Kohima, 9 September 2023, WhatsApp correspondence with author, 14 February 2024