

ISSN: 2349-2147



Modern Research Studies

Editor-in-Chief
Gyanabati Khuraijam

**An International
Journal of
Humanities and Social
Sciences**

An Indexed & Refereed e-Journal

www.modernresearch.in

Title: Traditional Socio-Political Life of the Moyon

Author/s: PENNY ROSE CHINIR

**Volume 3, Issue 1
March 2016**

pp. 190–219.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the articles/contributions published in the journal are solely the author's. They do not represent the views of the editors.

Email: editor@modernresearch.in
mrsejournal@gmail.com

Managing Editor: **Yumnam Oken Singh**



Traditional Socio-Political Life of the Moyon

PENNY ROSE CHINIR*

Assistant Professor

Dept. of Sociology

Don Bosco College, Maram

Senapati District, Manipur, India

Email: pchinir@gmail.com

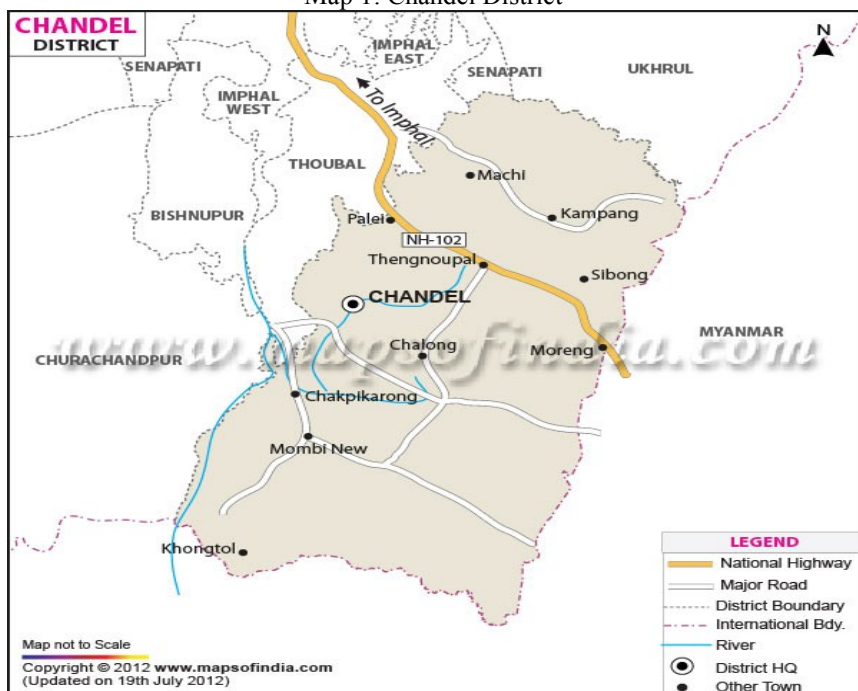
Abstract: The Moyon tribe in the Chandel district of Manipur is one of the thirty three recognized scheduled tribes of the state. In the traditional socio-political life of the Moyons, the village is the basic political unit. The village administration is managed by the village chief and his council of elders. Establishment of a new village is approved by the old village authority. Village Chief and Council of Elders are elected and they make the decisions and policies of the village. One of the main duties of the village authorities is also safeguarding the village boundary. Common contributions were made by each family to meet the expense of the village administration. The Moyon customary laws are democratic in nature and they must be followed by everyone, including the village authorities. In the traditional democratic Moyon administration, women were never taken into account. The village council worked as the chief judicial court and the chief is the supreme judge. When the village court is unable to arrive at a final decision, the last option is to settle the dispute by oath taking. The court deals with disputes such as land, family, marriage, livestock, properties, crops, taboo, theft, murder, etc. The customary laws require that every villager attend to his duty especially when it is fixed and declared obligatory by the village administration.

Keywords: Moyon, Manipur, political, village authority, village chief, Settlement, elders, court, customary laws, democratic.

* **Penny Rose Chinir** is presently working as an Assistant Professor at Don Bosco College, Maram, Senapati district, Manipur, India, in the Department of sociology.

The Moyon tribe is one of the thirty three recognized STs¹ of Manipur. Manipur is a border state in the north-eastern corner of the country. Chandel district is located in the south-east of Manipur. The district came into existence on May 13, 1974. It is linked to the Myanmar town called Tamu to facilitate trade between both the countries (NIC Chandel District Unit). Chandel is inhabited by the Moyon tribe along with other prominent tribes like Anal, Chothe, Kuki, Lamkang, Maring, Monsang, Paite, Thadou, Zou, etc.

Map 1: Chandel District



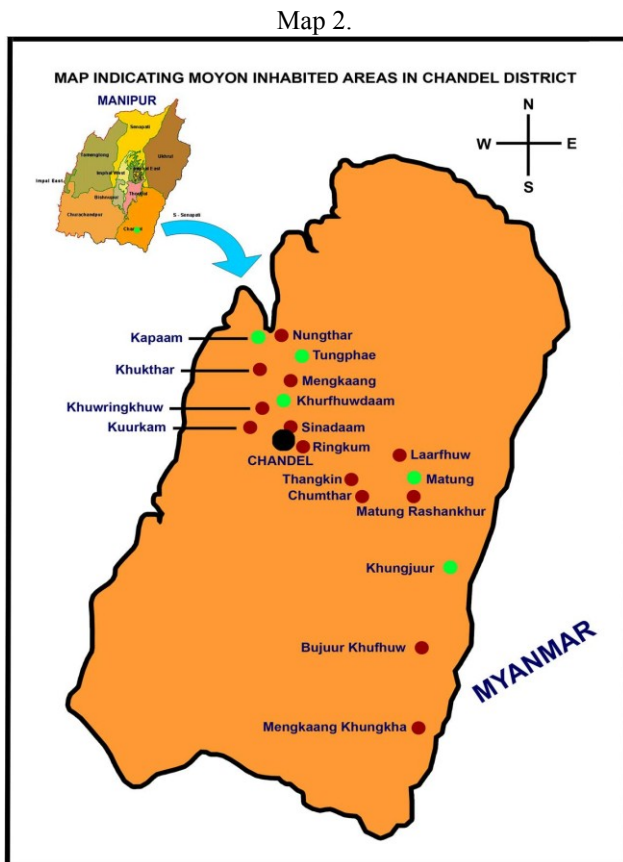
Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/manipur/districts/chandel.htm>

Moyons belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group of race and speak the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan group of language (Moyon 2006, 3). *Bujuur* is the indigenous name of their tribe and their common language is *Bujuur chong*. Their socio-cultural life is based on their customary laws and traditions. The Moyon tribe is egalitarian in nature (Singh 1998, 173). There is no specific lineage or clan for the chief or

¹ Abbreviation of Scheduled Tribes. Moyons were enlisted as ST in 1956.

village councillors. The society works on the principle of equal representation in the village administration (Shangkham 1995, 443). The people respect their village chiefs and their village elders who administer them for their welfare and progress. The society consists of two clans: *Shimphu* and *Ziingven*. The basic function of the clan is to regulate marriage. The people are democratic in nature.

Map 2 indicates the Moyon inhabited areas in Chandel district.

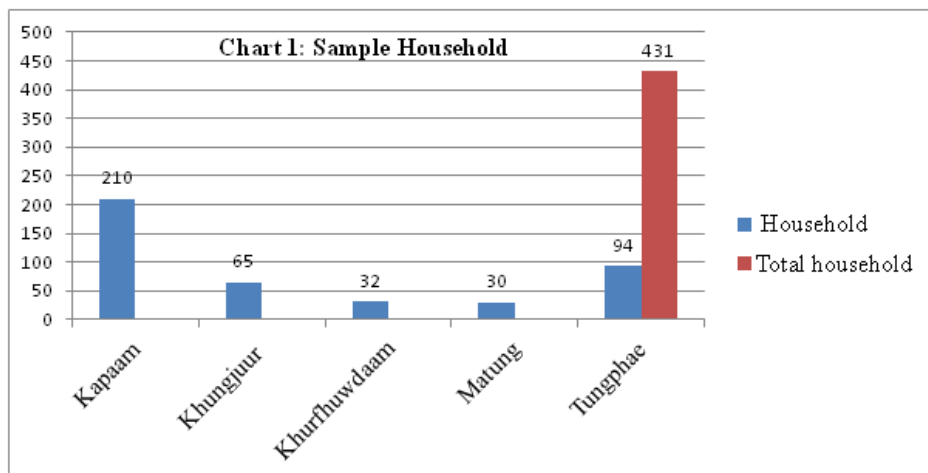


Source: Map of Manipur: <http://www.thisismyindia.com/manipur/manipur-map.html>

Five sample villages have been selected purposively for intensive study. It is observed that Kapaam has 210 households, Khungjuur has 65 households, Khurphuwaadam has 32 households, Matung has 30 and

Tungphae has 94 households. The total number of sample households is 431.

Chart 1 depicts the sample household.



Source: Field Study.

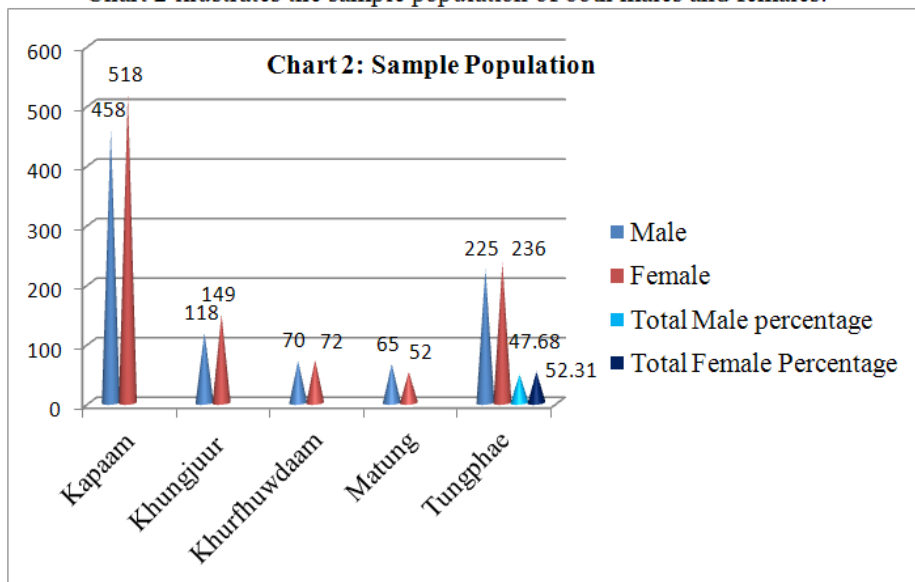
Table 1. depicts that the total population of five samples is 1963 of which 936 are males and 1027 are females. The percentage of male is 47.68% and the percentage of female is 52.32%. The female ratio is higher than that of male by 4.64%.

Table 1: Sample Population

	Sample Village	Male	Female	Total Male and Female
1.	Kapaam	458 (46.92%)	518 (53.07%)	976
2.	Khungjuur	118 (44.19%)	149 (55.80%)	267
3.	Khurfhuwdaam	70 (49.29%)	72 (50.70%)	142
4.	Matung	65 (55.55%)	52 (44.44%)	117
5.	Tungphae	225 (48.80%)	236 (51.19%)	461
	Total	936 (47.68%)	1027 (52.32%)	1963

Source: Field Study

Chart 2 illustrates the sample population of both males and females:



Source: Field study

Table 2 illustrates the literacy status of the sample villages.

Table 2: Literacy Status

Village	Total Literate		Total Illiterate		Total Population		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	MF
Kapaam	458 (46.92%)	517 (52.97%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.10%)	458	518	976
Khungjuur	118 (44.19%)	149 (55.80%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	118	149	267
Khurfhuwdaam	70 (49.29%)	72 (50.70%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	70	72	142
Matung	64 (54.70%)	52 (44.44%)	1 (0.85%)	0 (0%)	65	52	117
Tungphae	225 (48.80%)	236 (51.91%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	225	236	461
Total	935 (47.63%)	1026 (52.26%)	1 (0.10%)	1 (0.09%)	936 (47.68%)	1027 (52.31%)	1963

Source: Field Study

Chart 3 illustrates the unemployment of the sample villages (%).

Chart 3: Unemployment



Source: Field Study

The total literacy of both male and female of the sample villages is 99.89%. The total illiteracy of the sample population is one male and one female only. While the percentage of literacy is high, the percentage of literate unemployed youths of both genders is also high. It is observed that the total number of both male and female unemployed of the sample population is 45.84%.

The principle objective of the present study is to make an ethnographic study of the past and to document the cultural heritage of the people. The present paper adopts field study method through direct experience, observation, case studies and interviews with relevant informants while analyzing the empirical findings analytically. Moreover, my identity as a Moyon gives better advantage for an amicable approach and hence collection of data was made easier and more objective.

The present paper attempts to examine the *Traditional Socio-Political Life of the Moyons* before India's independence i.e., 1947. In the traditional socio-political life of the Moyons, the village is the basic political unit. The village administration is managed by the village chief and his council of elders. The chief and his council of elders are elected for their ability from different lineages of the two clans, *Shimphuw* and *Ziingven*. This administrative body of the village elders is known as "*khuw ipuh mee*" (BAP 2008, 11). The elders in the village council who have observed *pham ika* (installation ceremony) are called *phamnae*. *Phamnae* consist of nineteen ranks and the first five rankers are known as *phamlen* (cabinet rankers). It is found that Moyons did not have any trace of hereditary system in the election of their chiefs and their village elders from time immemorial. No women are also appointed in the village council.

The traditional socio-political life of the people is guided by their social customary laws which have been passed on orally from generation to generation. Some of these have been reflected in their folklores, folk songs, folk dances and folk tales. In the words of Moyon (Moyon 2006, 12), "Moyons had a very high sense of democracy even in the olden days as per the folklores and songs." The chief and the assistant chief are never elected from the same clan. Proportionate representations of two clans are taken into consideration in the village political management. The two groups consult with each other and manage the village.

This paper attempts to survey the socio-political life of Moyons in the pre-independence period, viz., establishment of village, the village chief and his council of elders, installation of the village chief and his council of elders, vacancy of the village chief, customary contributions, functions and responsibilities of the chief and village council, removal of the village chief and his council of elders, village court, role of women in village political affairs, *shaarkhii* (swearing) and settlement of various disputes.

Village Administration

Establishment of Village: The traditional customary laws sanction the approval of the village authority of one's last village before one

establishes a new village. He has to follow the tradition of *chongthang*² and *aarthaang*³ to the village authorities of his last village. Then, the village authorities approve and declare the establishment of the new village to the public. This applies also to a new comer to a village who has to perform *chongthang* and *aarthaang* to the village elders. It is to be noted that Moyons accommodate people of different ethnic groups into their community. The following interview proves that people of different ethnic groups have been naturalized into the community.

Interview 1

Name of the Informant: Ng. Khupao
Age: 70 years
Sex: Male
Place: Khurfhuwdaam
Date: 24 June 2014

Ng. Khupao affirms, “I belonged to Chin tribe and I became Moyon after performing the Moyon customary laws of *chongthang* and *aarthaang* to the village authorities of Khuwringkhuw and I declared myself as Moyon and adopted the “Nguwruw” lineage.” The interview reveals that Moyons are guided by their customary laws for the establishment of their village and for the acceptance of new comers into their established villages.

Village Chief and his Council of Elders: *Iruwng* is the indigenous name of the village chief. The traditional village is managed by *iruwng* and his council. They are addressed as village elders or village authorities and they are the policy makers and decision takers in the village. There are certain requirements to be eligible to the post of the village chief or to the post of the village authority. The village chief or the village authority must be a married man who heads his family and who registers his household in the list of the village householders. He must possess sound physical and mental health. He must not have more than one wife. He must not have questionable antecedents in the village

² It is official information to the village authorities such as marriage proposal or for the establishment of a new village.

³ The customary practice of offering of rice beer and chicken to the village authorities or to the village community for a specific purpose like for obtaining a homestead.

or tribe level. He must not be addicted to substance abuse. The following Table 3 lists the titles of the village chief and his council of elders. Manipuri terms are also written in bracket.

Table 3: Titles of the Village Chief and his Council of Elders

Sl. No.	Titles of the Village Council member	Sl. No.	Titles of the Village Council member
1.	<i>Iruwng</i> (<i>ningthou</i>)	11.	<i>Duungkuum</i> (<i>lanchingpa</i>)
2.	<i>Ruwngchang</i> (<i>senapati</i>)	12.	<i>Zuwrkumm</i> (<i>keirungpa</i>)
3.	<i>Khurah</i> (<i>khurak</i>)	13.	<i>Khaangsher</i>
4.	<i>Lukrah</i> (<i>luprak</i>)	14.	<i>Shirring</i>
5.	<i>Lukuum</i> (<i>mantri</i>)	15.	<i>Shakrung</i>
6.	<i>Paarcheer</i> (<i>pakhangrakpa</i>)	16.	<i>Khurfhuw</i>
7.	<i>Veenthang</i> (<i>chingsangrakpa</i>)	17.	<i>Meechaar</i>
8.	<i>Luza</i> (<i>meitrambu</i>)	18.	<i>Ruwrah</i>
9.	<i>Chiinglam</i> (<i>wangkhra</i>)	19.	<i>Phamzii</i>
10.	<i>Zupaar</i> (<i>upanba</i>)		

Source: Field study

As shown in Table 3, serial number one, *iruwng* is the village chief who is also known as *ningthou* in Manipuri. The next serial numbers from two to six viz., *ruwngchang*, *khurah*, *lukrah*, *lukuum* and *paarcheer* are known as the cabinet authorities while the rest are known as members of the village authority. The cabinet authorities are elected by the people of the village. The council members are elected by the village authorities through consultation and consensus. There is no fixed term of office and one remains in office as long as one is able to carry out one's duties and has the confidence of the people. It is noted that since time immemorial, the principle of proportionate representation of all the clans is taken into consideration in the socio-political administration of the traditional village of the tribe. These representatives who are known as the council of elders consult with each other and manage the affairs of the village.

Installation of Village Chief and his Council of Elders: *Pham ika* is an installation ceremony for the post of the Chief and his *pham apuuh* (council of elders). The installation ceremony of the chief is usually done separately while the installation ceremony of the others could be performed separately or in groups. A *phamzii* is exempted from performing his installation service. He is to take an active part in all the

installation services and other celebrations related to customs. The installation ceremonies of the chief and his councillors were done in a closed-door session exclusively by the elders of the village. Moyon customary laws authorizes that the chief and his council perform *pham ika* (oath taking).

Iruwng Pham Ihaang (vacancy of the Chief's post): In case the post of the village chief lies vacant, any member from *phamlen* (cabinet) fills up the post of the chief. However, the former chief remains in office till the new chief is officially installed. In case of death or removal, *ruwngchang* (assistant chief) acts as the chief till a new chief is appointed and installed. However, if the people express their desire to appoint another person other than the Assistant chief, the voice of the people is taken into consideration. The appointment of the chief is done in every village as per the customary laws. The appointment of the chief in Moyon is called *pham ithin*. The village elders offer meat to the person of their choice for a customary post. One has to return the offer of meat if one refuses the post entrusted to him. If one accepts the post, *takshaennii* (day for commitment) is arranged. On that day, the date for installation service is also fixed. One remains in service of the village administration as long as one has the confidence and goodwill of the people.

Customary Contributions: The Moyon custom (BAP 2009, 15-17) ordains a contribution of wine and chicken called '*aarthang*' which is collected from each and every household annually. The purposes are to bear the expenses of village meetings and to provide hospitality and entertainment to important guests who visit the village in connection with the village affairs. One's '*ruwniing* (*jhum* field) or *iva* (river) may be forfeited if one fails to pay these subscriptions.

Certain amount of paddy is also collected in the community granary by the village *chaanglu*. *Miru ynruwp* was the celebration at *khurfhuw*'s house to enjoy the wine subscription. As a custom, the newly appointed Chief and councillors would give feasts to the village befitting their ranks in their respective village administration. Exclusive share of meat known as elders' meat is given to the top five cabinet councillors. *Pham aapuh* (councillors) are also honoured at any function with their

respective seats in order. As per the Moyon customary laws there is distribution of meat called *sharam-baram*. The following are types of meat distributed at any installation ceremonies:

1. **Zuwmuwr tamnii:** Choicest pieces of meat kept in a bowl and offered to the chief.
2. **Khurjaar:** The share of all the invitees.
3. **Shakam:** The distribution of *phamnae shakam* is as follows: Two and half pieces of meat are given from *iruwing* to his lower rankers up to *lukuum*. Two pieces of meat pieces each are given from *paarcheer* to his lower rankers up to *chiinglam*. Two pieces of meat each given to *zupaar* and his lower rankers. It is also given to the retired *phamnae*.
4. **Shabarae or shariing:** Household share of meat.
5. **Sharungbeb:** Included in household share of meat.
6. **Kaechiim:** Finishing share of meat.

Functions and Duties of Village Chief and his Council:

The chief and his council of elders are the policy makers and they are responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the entire village. Besides the judiciary, the chief and cabinet administrative heads are responsible for the general development of the village. They implement all the welfare and developmental programmes of the village. They set the place and time for *jhum* cultivation and the process of agriculture. They collect taxes; look after the widows, the orphaned and the sick persons who are unable to attend the plantation and harvesting works in time. In short, the village council has a collective responsibility in the village affairs and administration. The functions and duties of the village authorities are described by Ng. Bengamsha.

Interview 2

Name of the Informant: Ng. Bebe
 Age: 60 years
 Sex: Male
 Place: Matung
 Date: 21 June 2013

Ng. Bebe says that the village affairs are managed by the chief and his council. In Matung there are six cabinet councillors for any policy

and decision making and there are other twelve councillors to assist the chief in his administration and duties of the village. The informant recounts that the chief is elected by the village male elders. He serves the people as long as the people are contented with the manner the duties and responsibilities entrusted to him are carried out.

For the Moyons, a social status of a man depends on his capacity of leadership in the village and his leadership for the welfare of the tribe. The chief and the elders are recognised by the society at every function either in the form of meat package or shawls or a seat of importance. However, it is not the matter of getting meat or shawl or chair, but what matters is the social recognition of the status of men who holds the leadership positions in the village.

The village councillors are appointed for their ability irrespective of their material possessions but they need to represent the different clans. The many duties and responsibilities which the village authority performs are to safeguard village boundary, to maintain law and order and ensure peaceful existence in a village, to check theft, robbery or any anti social activities in the village and to administer development and welfare works.

Safeguarding Village Boundary: One of the main duties of the village authorities is safeguarding the village boundary. Due to the ecological changes and the natural influences of rain, erosion and landslides, the traditional ways of maintaining the village boundary at time face difficulties within the tribe and its neighbouring tribes as well.

Interview 3

Name of the Informant: N. Beti
Age: 42 years
Sex: Male
Place: Tungphae
Date: 24 June 2014

The informant asserts that the people follow the traditional methods of maintaining the village boundary which is marked by physical geographical features like hill ranges, valleys, streams, rivers, etc. He identifies the existence of these traditional ways of boundary

maintenance among neighbouring tribes like the Anals, Lamkangs, Chothes, Monsangs, etc. However, the physical and geographical set up also changes over the course of time. As a consequence, boundary conflicts do occur either within or without the tribe. Efforts are made to survey the land in scale so as to demarcate the village boundary and avoid eventual conflicts. Interviews with various elders reveal that so far no bloodshed or violence has been recorded on boundary issues among the Moyons. On the other hand, the authorities have managed in maintaining peaceful relations within and without the tribe based on their customary laws.

Removal of the Village Chief and his Council of Elders: There are certain conditions which are laid down by the customary laws with regard to the removal of the village chief and his council of elders. If one accepts a customary post and makes a commitment but is unable to perform an installation service within a year, then, his candidature is declared cancelled. However, one may kill a cock and throw a party and plead for more time. In such an event the duration may be extended by three or four months. He will be removed if he fails to hold his installation service within the given time.

In the case of promotion, another person is officially installed to the vacant post created by the promotion, however, if the promoted councillor cannot perform his installation ceremony, he shall be removed and the latter will take over the former's post. A village council member can be removed from office for the subsequent reasons, viz., misuse of public funds, misuse or selling of village properties for one's selfish end, having more than one wife, for having been convicted of crime by the village court and a person may cease to be a member of village authority by retirement.

As per the Moyon customary laws, the chief takes an oath with these words, "I may be removed from my customary post if I'm found guilty of a crime." A guilty person may be forgiven if he asks for pardon after making good the loss and thereafter gives a penalty of one pig or cow. Like the chief, if any of the administrative heads are found corrupt, the customary laws sanction that they be impeached or sacked from their positions by the villagers. However, if the person confesses

and seeks pardon before the public or authority, then he is forgiven by paying a fine of an ox and a pig.

Role of Women in Village Political Affairs: In the traditional democratic Moyon administration, women were never taken into account. They were excluded from the village council and its meeting. They were not allowed to enter the village court except when they were required to give their witnesses or give their testimonies for the settlement of certain issues. The voices of women were not taken into any consideration. They had no voice in the appointment or elections to the village council. They were considered equal to children. However, women were involved behind the scene like cooking and preparing food and serving the men folk. They could not even share their views with their husbands. It was considered that the village administration was solely the responsibilities of the men folks and the duties of the women were to obey the men without any questions.

Vaajeerkung (village court): The village council worked as the chief judicial court of the traditional socio-political life of the people in the pre-independence period. The chief is the supreme judge in deciding all civil and criminal cases of the village. He heads the village council of elders. The village court hears cases and disputes and passes verdicts. If the nature of the case is small, only few members settle it. Imposition of fines, punishment and settlement of any case are done on the basis of its customary laws. All kinds of disputes and differences between families of the same clan are as far as possible decided by the clan elders. When they cannot solve the problems, the cases are brought to the village court. Both criminal and civil cases are tried by the council which passes final judgments. These decisions are given by well experienced elderly representatives of all clans. If the cases are vague and cannot be solved peacefully, then the village council resorts to taking of oath and ordeal. In boundary disputes, theft, etc., witnesses are to be produced. Filing a complaint petition is to be made to the chief. A case of suit begins if an individual or group verbally brings a complaint petition in the form of one jar of rice beer to the village court with a request to investigate into the matter and settle the case.

The village head in consultation with other responsible members fixes a convenient date for the hearing. Both the petitioner/plaintiff and the accused/defendant are intimated and summoned to appear before the court on the scheduled date for hearing through a messenger. In case a party/individual fails to appear before the court without prior information to the village court, a fine is imposed in terms of a jar of rice beer with a pig of five *vae* on the defaulters. If the accused is found guilty, he is liable to pay a fine as well as the compensation to the plaintiff.

Saarkhii-itu (swearing): When the village court is unable to arrive at a final decision, the last option is to settle the dispute by oath taking. It is practiced by the people for settling any disputes and cases. The elders assume that a person is guilty unless he or she proves his/her innocence by swearing. It was the only method of determining justice in the society in order to decide the right or wrong or guilty of an accused person. In cases where facts were difficult to find and impossible to solve, the last resort was to leave the parties to be tried with the help of supernatural power. The person concerned had to take an oath before the village chief and his council of elders and then he was supposed to submit the facts. It is thought that whatever the person said was based on truth. If he would tell a lie, the anger of God would destroy and punish the liar. There have been a few cases where disputes have been settled by *saarkhii-itu* (swearing). The settlements by *saarkhii-itu* are done only under extreme cases. Some examples of such settlements are mentioned below:

- 1 ***Mee shaarkhii* (eye witnesses):** The first procedure is to judge the case based on eye witnesses or witnesses or testimonies. A false witness may incur upon himself/herself a heavy punishment.
- 2 ***Chii shaarkhii* (water submersion):** In water submersion, both the plaintiff and the defendant are compelled to remain submerged in the river for an indefinite period of time. The person who comes out of the water first is considered guilty.
- 3 **Eating the earth:** In this method both the plaintiff and the defendant are made to eat the earth. The person who is able to eat more earth is considered innocent and



he would be the winner of the land.

- 4 **Swearing by biting tiger's teeth:** The plaintiff or the defendant swears by biting the tiger's teeth with these words, "May I be killed by tiger if I am guilty".



Tiger's teeth

- 5 **Swearing by *Bashih* (thunder bolt):** The plaintiff or the defendant swears by holdi Tiger'sng thunder bolt with these words, "May I be struck by lightning if I am guilty".



Thunder bolt

The following cases exemplify swearing by "water submersion" which was a practice not only in the Moyon tribe but also in their neighbouring tribes like the Anals, the Lamkangs and the Chothes. Rd. Jeepness cites a real incident which occurred among the Anal tribe of Chakpikarong, Chandel district. It was the practice of the pre-independence period. Even in the post-independence period such a practice has taken place although under very rare circumstances. It was in the year 2009; two individuals were fighting for a land which belonged to neither of them. They claimed that the land belonged to their ancestors. Each one swore that he was right and he was ready to risk his life for truth. They were submerged into the Chakpi River, unfortunately both of them died in the water and the judgment was that both were guilty. It is the belief from their ancestral days that even nature like water does not tolerate the guilty while the innocent will come out victorious. According to the belief, the guilty person when submerged into the river experiences something like a hot spring which prevents him to submerge even if he may be an expert in swimming. The elders in the present time do not encourage such practices as they think it is against the Christian principles. Yet when the two claimants are so very obstinate and it seems that it is impossible to come to any amicable solutions such practices take place.

Interview 4

Name of the Informant: R. Angti
 Age: 63 years
 Sex: Male

Place: Khungjuur
Date: 21 June 2013

In an interview, R. Angti says, “Swearing by ‘water submersion’ was the practice of the pre-independence period. Yet such a practice has occurred among the Moyons of post-independence period. It was in the year 1995. There were two individuals fighting for a *jhum* field. One was from Khungjuur village while the other was from Thangkin village.

The two claimants swore that the land belonged to them and no village authorities could settle their dispute. They swore that at their own risk they would submerge themselves into the river and declared that nature would settle the dispute by making the guilty come out of the water first. The two claimants, one was from Thangkin village and the other was from Khungjuur village submerged themselves into the river which was witnessed by the village authorities. The one who came out first from the water was from Thangkin village and he was judged guilty. As per the judgment of water, the innocent was that of Khungjuur village and the land went into his favour. The guilty was fined with a pig by the Village elders.”

Although swearing by “water submersion” was the traditional practice, it has taken place even in the post-independence period among the neighbouring tribes too. In the month of April 2014, two neighbouring villages of Kapaam village, namely, Lamkang Khungkha and Purumchumbang had a land dispute. Each village claimed the land belonged to its own ancestors. Negotiations were made to come to an amicable settlement but each village claimed that the land belonged to their village. No discussions or advices from the Church authorities or village elders worked out to settle the dispute. But at the same time the two villages did not want to make the dispute into a communal dispute since they belonged to two different communities.

The elders of the two villages feared that involving the two tribes would further lead to communal bloodshed. So they handed over the matter to the Naga Council. The Naga Council decided that the last option was to settle the dispute through the “water submersion”.

The condition was that the person who came out of the water first would be considered guilty. The two claimants' representatives were the village Chiefs of Purumchumbang and Lamkang Khungkha. Before they submerged themselves into the river, they swore in word and in writing with their signature stating that they had taken their own risk for any consequence. Also the guilty would lose the land as well as he would be fined with money as per the customary laws of the village court.

After all the agreements, the two claimant representatives were submerged into the Chakpi River, near United College, Chandel which was witnessed by many neighbouring village elders and prominent people. In that scene, the one who came out first from the water was the representative of the Lamkang Khungkha and as per the water judgment, he was judged guilty. There is yet another case where the swearing by eating the earth had taken place.

Interview 5

Name of the Informant: N. Angen
Age: 35 years
Sex: Male
Place: Laarphuw
Date: 23 May 2013

N. Angen relates an incident which happened about forty years ago in his village between two claimants over a *jhum* field. The two individuals were cousins as they belonged to the same clan. Since both were unyielding in claiming the field, they decided to swear by eating the earth and prove their innocence. As per the belief, the one who is able to eat more earth is innocent and the one who is unable to eat is guilty. The village authority warned the two claimants about the risk and its consequences. The earth was brought before the village court to witness the swearing. Just before the swearing, the guilty one surrendered and refused to eat. So he was fined with a pig of five *vae* by the village elders and the land went in favour of the innocent one. According to the certainty of the elders, even nature like earth does not tolerate the wrong and it reveals the truth in favour of the innocent, and the guilty is put to shame in public.

Settlements of various Disputes

Land: As mentioned earlier, settlements of any disputes by swearing are done only in extreme cases. Land disputes have been settled through the wisdom of the elders. Land disputes occur often among hill villages due to lack of proper demarcation of the land boundary in the hill areas. First of all the land in the hills is too vast and as the Elders who know the demarcation of the land by natural methods die, doubts arise over the ownership of the village land or *jhum* field. When such land disputes arise, the village authorities make an enquiry from the elders of neighbouring villages or from the elders of different villages who have the proper knowledge of the land.

Interview 6

Name of the Informant: Ng. Beti
Age: 62 years
Sex: Male
Place: Thangkin village
Date: 20 May 2014

Ng. Beti, opines that one of the main reasons of land dispute in the hill villages is that some individuals manipulate the natural resources for business. There are a few individuals who deal in business by selling trees and natural resources of certain portion of the hills for a year or two without the knowledge of the village authorities.

It is also observed that they claim certain portion of other's land as theirs and sell it secretly without the knowledge of the concerned owners. Such practices destroy the natural demarcation by streams or by hillocks or by bamboo groves. When land disputes take place, the village authorities consult the elders who have the knowledge of the land and its boundaries. In this way land dispute is settled amicably by the elders of the villages. The following is an example of such an amicable settlement of land dispute by the elders.

Interview 7

Name of the Informant: Ch. Monu
Age: 38 years
Sex: Male
Place: Khurfhuwdaam

Date: 2 May 2013

Ch. Monu describes, “There was an issue over the *jhum* field called *Rungha Samsii* in Khungjuur village about 10 km. from the Chandel headquarters. The two claimants were from Thangkin village and Khungjuur village. The dispute was brought to the elders and they called for me. I justified, let me throw a subscription of meat and wine to the village authorities and henceforth reclaim the ownership of the *jhum* field. My intervention was accepted by both the claimants and the village authorities. Because they knew that the disputed land belonged to my grandfather and I as his grandson had every right to reclaim it.”

Naeduung Ven Shungna Itheh (abortion): The customary laws forbid any pregnant woman, either secretly or openly to abort a child. Abortion is prohibited by the Moyon custom. An act of abortion is regarded as an act of murder. A couple or a person guilty of this crime is punishable by the village authorities with a fine of five *vae* pig. But the illegal child born of *izuwr* couples of the pre-independence period would be killed with *shareel* because the customary laws forbid an endogamous marriage.

Mee Irangnuw Ymbaruwh (possession of another man’s wife): The Moyon customary laws forbid *mee irangnuw ymbaruwh*. It condemns any man from the possession of another man’s wife either by force or in the absence of her husband. The customary laws also condemn such an act even when taking possession of another man’s wife with her own consent.

Mee Phungkha Yngkhii (interference to couple’s life): If a person spreads rumours and whereby brings about disturbance in the otherwise peaceful marital life, such an act is treated as an attempt to break marital life and such a rumour monger is punished by the village elders with a pig of five *vae*.

Isher Amanruwh (taboo): *Isher amanruwh* refers to anyone who breaks into the house of a neighbour with a weapon like *dao* or an axe. When such a person threatens the household or creates havoc inside the compound or damages any property, he is accountable before the village court. The village court is responsible to arrest him/her and

penalize him/her with a pig of five *vae*. Such acts committed even without a weapon are also punished for he/she is judged to have brought taboo into the latter's household. He/she is accountable to replace it or make compensation for the damages done. Moyons in the pre-independence period settled all their disputes in the village court. *Isher amanruwh* applies also when drowning takes place in someone's river or the dead body is found in the neighbouring village. The following case illustrates such an incident of *isher amanruwh*.

Interview 8

Name of the Informant: Ch. Koko
 Age: 40 years
 Sex: Male
 Place: Thangkin village
 Date: 4 July 2014

Ch. Koko recalls, "My son, hardly three years old, was drowned in the year 2007. On that day my wife had gone out for marketing, there was no one to look after my two sons. So I took them and made them play on the river bank while I was fishing. Just then Ch. Angam and his four friends came for fishing and persuaded me to help them to fish with dynamite. I gave all the possible reasons for my inability to comply with their request as I did not want to leave my two children by themselves. On being persuaded, I went further along with the group for fishing with the dynamite. While they were collecting fishes from dynamite, I returned to the river bank where my two children had been waiting for me. To my shock, my younger son was found missing. My elder son who was hardly five years could not understand or explain where his young brother had disappeared. So I started searching for my son. I followed the river bank downward suspecting him to have been carried away by the river. More than a kilometre away, I found the dead body of my son in the shallow water soon after the deep water."

Koko had to perform a subscription of meat and tea party to the village authorities of Monsang Pantha village because the dead body of his son had been recovered from a river that belonged to their territory. Drowning is still considered *isher amanruwh* not only among the Moyons but also among the neighbouring tribe like the Monsangs. It is

learnt that unlike the past, instead of a ritual, a prayer service was held to prevent such a tragic death in the near future.

Ymbaruwh (theft): If a person steals in the absence of its owner, any property like ornaments or crops or domestic animals, he must return it. The stolen item must be returned intact or else the robber must replace it or pay the price of the goods to the owner. The customary laws forbid any one to rob the properties of others whether they are found inside or outside the house or anywhere else. If anyone is found guilty, he is penalised according to customary laws. If a thief is neither in a position to return the stolen goods nor pay the fine for his crime, the village court flogs him with a stick ten times or twenty times or thirty times or fifty times which corresponds to the degree of his crime. Further, he is made to march through the street hanging around his neck all the names of the stolen items.

Ynrw/Taakuw (robber): Moyon customary laws describe that taking possession of the property of another man by force or threat is an act of robbery. Such a crime is punishable with a fine of one pig. Besides, the criminal or the culprit must return twice the amount of goods which have been seized by him. Taking possession of the property of another man after causing physical injury to its owner is an act of robbery. The guilty is to be judged according to customary laws.

Lupunuw Suwrka Namka Abuwh (forced marriage): If a man attempts to possess an unwilling girl by force, it is considered as an attempt to harm the maiden's prestige. In such a case, the guilty man is to pay a fine of one pig to the village elders. Besides this, he has to pay a heavy fine of five cows and a gong to the girl for defaming her maidenhood. If a forced physical relationship is committed with the assistance of his friends, his accomplices are fined with one mithun. If a woman becomes pregnant out of such a relationship the child in her womb cannot be aborted. A person guilty of child abortion is not permitted to remain in the village. The man responsible for the pregnancy of the girl is accountable to take care of the child.

Miktheh (murder): A person who takes away the life of another man is a murderer. There are three categories of murders, viz., impulsive murder, cold blooded murder and accidental murder. The impulsive

murder refers to a murder without pre-planning or prior thought which can take place while fighting. Cold blooded murder is a premeditated murder and an accidental murder is caused by accidents during hunting or by road accidents, etc.

Moyon Customary Laws (BAP, 2009, p. 28-29) imposes the penalties for every category of murder. In case of impulsive killing, the murderer shall pay a sum of rupees two lakhs to the family of the murdered. Besides, he shall pay a fine of a cow and a pig to the village and deceased family for sanctification respectively. In case of premeditated killing, the murderer shall pay a sum of rupees three lakhs to the family of the murdered. Besides, he shall pay a fine of a cow and a pig to the village and deceased family for sanctification respectively.

In case of accidental killing, the murderer shall pay a sum of rupees one lakh to the deceased family. Besides, he/she shall pay a fine of one cow and one pig to village and deceased family for sanctification respectively. It is found that there has been no record so far of a murder case among the Moyon tribe. It is found that no Moyon has ever killed another Moyon or killed another person either by impulsive or by cold blooded. But there have been a few cases of accidental killing during hunting trips. The following case depicts such accidental killing.

Interview 9

Name of the Informant: R. Koti
Age: 59 years
Sex: Male
Place: Bujuur Khuwfhuw
Date: 23 June 2013

R. Koti states that although quarrels and impulsive fights have taken place among the Moyons due to the consumption of alcohol yet they become friends the next morning. They continue their friendship and good relationship. He recalls an accidental killing that took place in Matung village about sixty years ago. Two bosom friends, late Ng. Thompa and late Nungchim went for hunting. Suddenly, Thompa who held the gun saw a deer in front of his friend and shot him. According to the faith of the pre-independence period, Moyons called this as *shaaring akhum* which means the evil force has blinded the hunter. After

shooting the deer, Thompa realised that the deer was none other than his own bosom friend. With sorrow and fear, he put his friend Nungchim who was not yet dead near the river and ran home. When the village people saw Thompa with blood on his shirt, they understood that he was under the spell of *shaar ing akhum*. The village people came in search of the body and true to their perception, found Nungchim fighting for life near the river. They carried the dying man for treatment on their backs in turn. Unfortunately, on the way, the man breathed his last. While dying, Nungchim pronounced his forgiveness and begged the people not to take any revenge on his friend because it was not intentional because it was due to *shaar ing akhum*. Respecting his last words, even the family did not take any action and no case or compensation took place. Yet another accidental killing took place at hunting which is described below.

Interview 10

Name of the Informant: Ng. Dam
 Age: 50 years
 Sex: Male
 Place: Laarfhuw village
 Date: 24 April 2013

Ng. Dam recalls his life experience, “Over ten years ago I had gone for hunting along with two of my friends, viz., W. Daniel and Ng. Clement. At that time we were staying in Matung village. Daniel was under the spell of *shaar ing akhum* and instead of shooting the deer; he shot his friend, Clement. Luckily it pierced only his thigh and it did not hurt his bone so he is still alive although the bullet is still inside his body. I was frightened that I too might be shot under the evil spell. So I ran to the village to inform about the incident. The people rushed to rescue the injured man. To our surprise, Daniel was trying every means to save his friend whom he had shot. Then the people carried the injured friend, Clement on their back from the thick forest and rushed to the hospital for the treatment. Luckily, Clement escaped death and he is still alive today.”

Since such an incident took place accidentally, the medical expenses of the injured man in the person of Clement was met by Daniel and his

family. It is also found that Daniel's family killed a pig and observed a day of cleansing of such a tragic incident from the village. There was no court case and it was amicably settled among them.

Interview 11

Name of the Informant: Ng. Angngang
 Age: 54 years
 Sex: Male
 Place: Laarfhuw village
 Date: 24 June 2013

There was yet another accidental shooting which took place due to *shaar ing akhum* about seventeen years ago. According to Ng. Angngang, during the New Year celebration the village men went for hunting as a group. Suddenly, L. Honeychung under the spell of *shaar ing akhum* shot at Cr. Kopel thinking to be the hunted animal. Luckily Kopel did not die as he was shot under his arms. The men carried the injured friend and brought him to the village on their backs in turn. Then from the village they rushed him to the hospital and he survived death. Even in this case, there was no revenge or appeal to the village judiciary as it was considered accidental. Honeychung and his family bore all the medical expenses of Kopel and as per the Moyon customary laws, the family offered meat and wine for the cleansing of such a tragedy from the village. Thus, the village authorities managed to handle the situation in an amicable manner.

Pikaari Asham (absence from village duty): The act of *pikaari asham* (absence from village duty) in the traditional socio-political life of the people is punishable by the village court. It is observed that one's *ruwniing* or *chii* could be confiscated by the village if one absented himself from attending one's *pikaari*. The customary laws required that every villager attended to his duty especially when it was fixed and declared obligatory by the village. Under such traditions, one could not take it for granted. But if the villager could not fulfil his obligation, he could inform the village authorities and they would exercise their discretion accordingly.

Livestock or Properties or Crops: There different ways of settlement of damaged livestock or properties or crops of the people. If a man without warning the owner injures a livestock that caused damages to his crops or properties or garden or field or household, he is expected to treat the injured animal until recovery. After the livestock is brought to whole he will take with him a chicken and compromise with the owner. If a livestock succumbs to its injury, then he will pay the price of the livestock. Besides, penalty is imposed upon him by the village court. If someone lets loose his cattle despite the warnings given by the village authority the owner is solely responsible for the death or injury of his cattle. If a livestock is caught in a snare, then the one who puts the trap will have the dead livestock by paying the price of the livestock to its owner. Thereafter, he will kill a cock and compromise with the owner of the dead livestock. If a livestock is caught in the vicinity of a village or on the track/territory of domestic animals, then the one who sets the trap will be penalised according to the customary law.

Main Findings and Conclusion

Corruption and Exploitation: The present study discovers in spite of the constitutional privileges and protection ensured to the STs for their socio-economic development, the sample villagers suffer from all forms of economic and political exploitations.

Government Policy of Administration and Implementation: The British policy of isolation of the tribals was broken down with the advent of Christianity and the achievement of India's independence. A considerable concern about the welfare of the tribal people is reflected in the various provisions of the Constitution adopted by the constituent assembly on 26 January 1950. In order to promote the integration of the tribal people with the rest of their Indian brethren, the Constitution provides for special safeguards to the tribal communities.

Role of District Administration: Another significant finding about the socio-political life of the sample population in the post-independence period is the role of the district administration. The functions of coordination for planning and for the implementation of district programmes are combined in a single officer commonly described as the development commissioner. Manipulation and

corruption are some of the root causes of low development in the sample villages.

District Council Act 1971: The introduction of the District Council Act 1971 which is a constitutional provision in relation to the administration of the tribal areas has failed to meet the needs of the sample villages. After a gap of twenty years, the District Council was resumed in 2010. Although the Autonomous District Act as provided under the Sixth Schedule, article 244(2) and 275(1) is for the administration of tribal areas, the provisions of this Schedule are never extended to Manipur Hill Areas.

Government's Attempts to Amend MLR and LR Act, 1960: The state government's attempt to amend the MLR and LR Act, 1960 poses a great threat for the tribals in general and for the sample villages in particular. The attempt to amend the Act is an attempt to curtail the provisions for the protection of the tribals who depend entirely on land for their sustenance.

Gap between the Upper and the Lower Class Groups: The developmental plans and programmes of the district do not really benefit the people because of the weakness and lack of honest commitment in administration.

MSHPR⁴, 1947 and its Succeeding Act in 1956: While the MSHPR, 1947 empowered the chiefs the right to nominate the members of the village authority, the succeeding MHVAA⁵ 1956 has imposed restrictions on this power by introducing the provision for election of the members, if not to be nominated by the deputy commissioner of the district.

Political Consciousness: Chandel has two constituencies, namely, Chandel No. 41 and Tengnoupal No. 42. Sample villages like Kapaam and Tungphae are under constituency No. 42 and the rest of the sample villages are under constituency No. 41. Politically Moyons of the

⁴ Abbreviation of Manipur State Hill Peoples Regulation

⁵ Abbreviation of Manipur Hill Village Authority Act.

sample villages have been handicapped as they are fragmented under two constituencies despite the fact that their population is very low.

Village Authority: The sample villages in the post-independence period have modified and adapted their traditional village authority with the terms of the government “in all the government recognized villages, there may be governmental authority members concurring their term with that of election term of the government” (BAP, 2008, p. 17).

Installation Ceremony: For the installation ceremony of a Chief, the President of Moyon tribe administers the “oath taking”. Again, in the installation service of any cabinet authorities, all the village authorities of the tribe and of the neighbouring tribes are invited.

Leaders of Various Organizations: Another finding about the socio-political life of the sample population is the presence of various organizations recognized by them. There are the Church leaders, leaders of the women society, the leaders of the students’ union and the leaders of the youth clubs.

Power and Administration of the Village Authority: The introduction of the MHVAA, 1956 has weakened the power and administration of the village authorities. Although, they are a body in whom the highest power of the village is vested, they have recourse to other higher authorities as they have to follow the customary laws of the tribe at the apex level, laws of the MHVAA, and the policies of the government.

Village Court: If a Village Court is not in a position to dispose of a case in its court, then, it refers the case to a higher court. Besides the village court, there is also a Chiefs’ Association court both at the regional level and at the tribe level. One may appeal to the Chiefs’ Association court or to the Moyon Naga tribunal if one is not satisfied with the verdict of the village court or the Chiefs’ Association court.

Formation of Chiefs’ Association: The Chiefs’ Association Court may decide cases involving land disputes, *jhum* fields, etc., and such other appellate cases filed at its court. The village chiefs are the judges at the court of the Association of Chiefs.

Role of Church in Village Polity: The Church and village administrative body work hand in hand for the developmental programmes in the village. For instance, the installation services of the village councillors are conducted according to the Christian rites and according to the customary laws. Moyons have integrated the Christian principles of leadership and the customary laws about the village authorities.

Low Population: Owing to low population, the sample villages under research have many drawbacks. Since the tribe has no direct access to the State Assembly, it has no chance of availing of the government resources, power and authority. In other words, Moyons have no access to power corridors or to lobby privileges.

Impact of the Mainstream Meiteis on the Moyon tribe: Mainstream Meiteis are the major community in the state and with numeric strength; socio-economic and political resources are also in their hands. Many of their cultural ways have influenced the sample villages under study.

This paper has explored the significance of the unwritten customary laws which guided the people in all their social-political life and practices. The traditional village political administration is based on equal representatives of both the clans of the tribe. It has also explained the democratic nature of the people. The villagers love and respect their village chief and his council of elders, who are accountable to their villagers for their well being and development. The villagers too have their voice if power and authority are abused by their village authorities, to the extent that they can ask them to surrender their posts on moral ground. The traditional socio-political life is at crossroad with all the changes that have taken place since the introduction of Christianity and the achievement of India's independence. With all the changes that are taking place both at the national and state level, the traditional socio-political life of the Moyons have undergone changes as discussed above in the main findings. While on one side, the traditional socio-political life of the tribe is adaptive to the constant changes that encounters in the society and in the nature, it is also faced with deeper challenges of its future survival with the rapid transitions which are beyond the socio-culture conditions of the people.

References:

- Bujuur, Aanchung Puh. 2008. *Bujuur Kastam (Moyon Customary Law)*. Kapaam, Manipur: Bujuur Aanchung Puh.
- Moyon, Roel Philip. 2006. *An Analytical Study of the Impact of Christianity on Traditional Culture of Moyon Naga Tribe*. Unpublished thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Degree of B.D. Tiruvala, Kerala: Gospel of Asia Biblical Seminary.
- Shangkham, Gina. 1995. "A Brief Account of the Moyons." In *Manipur Past and Present, vol.III.*, edited by Naorem Sanajaoba, 440-456. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Singh, K.S., ed. 1998. *People of India Manipur Volume XXXI*, Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India Seagull books.
- NIC Chandel District Unit. *The Official Website of Chandel District Manipur*. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://chandel.nic.in>
- Map of Chandel District. *Maps of India*. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/manipur/districts/chandel.htm>
- Map of Manipur. *This is My India*. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://www.thisismyindia.com/manipur/manipur-map.html>