



Anal Culture at a Glance

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ABSTRACT

Manipur, often called "Switzerland of the East" is home to people of different castes, creeds, tribes and religions with distinct culture, tradition and heritage. The Anals are one of the first settlers of the 19 Naga tribes in Manipur. They have rich customs, cultures and traditions like other tribes of Manipur. Their culture is manifested in various aspects of their life. Their artistic and aesthetic sense and love of beauty are found in their various festivals, dances and music and in their arts and crafts. The Anal dances are performed during their colorful festivals, death ceremonies and sacrifices. Their songs are really enchanting. There are various type of songs composed by great heroes of the past, poets and singers. Culture provides us with guidelines that are learnt and shared among the members of a tribe or society, in the absence of which there would not be order in the society. In this paper, the author will discuss Anal cultural life focusing on the festive and customary aspects of Anal culture.

Keywords: Culture, Tribe, Customs, Society, Village, Tradition, Festivals

The Anals are indigenous people and one of the oldest tribes of Manipur like the *Dravidians of Ancient India. The tribe is mostly found in the South-Eastern parts of Manipur. They are one of the first settlers of 19 Naga tribes in Manipur. This group has been recognized since 1951 as a tribe of India. Racially, the Anals belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongolian race. They are mostly concentrated in the Sub-Divisions of Chandel, Chakpikarong and Moreh of Chandel district which is located on the southeast part of the state of Manipur. Besides there are scattered pockets of Anals found in the sub-division of Singhat in Churachandpur District of Manipur. One also finds three villages of Anal tribe in Burma. However, most of the Anal tribes are inhabiting Chandel and neighbouring areas. Chandel is situated in South-East of Manipur 64 kms from its capital, Imphal. In fact, the Anals are also a majority group among other tribal groups. They are found in an area which roughly covers about 700 sq. miles on the Chakpi River basin surrounded by the virgin forests and hills with cascading

waterfalls. The Anals shared, experienced, inherited, owned and sang about the same antiquity, origin, history, migration, customs, culture, traditions, land values, songs with all other Naga tribes from Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar; particularly with the seven sister tribes, the Marings, the Moyons, the Monsangs, the Chothes, the Lamkangs and the Taraos of Chandel district. As a matter of fact, the Anals have common political aspiration with the other Naga tribes. Of the Ancient Chronicles of Manipur, '*Chaitharon Kumpapa*' is probably the first chronicle that referred to the Anal tribe. According to this history, the first century colonizer travelled Manipur hills, there were many tribes including Anal tribe who took refuge from the aggression of the invaders. The Anal is one of the major tribes which spreads over the length and breadth of Chandel district.

Anal Culture

The study of the Anal cultural life has to begin by tracing

out the sources such as myths, legends and old songs of Anal tribe. The Anals do have different kinds of “songs and dances for different occasions and purposes”. In the absence of a written script the Anals learnt all the songs by heart¹, such a nature of learning was the only mode of learning things prevalent among other tribes also.

Culture is understood as a way of life for the members of a society, based on the “collection of ideas and habits which they learnt and the same are shared and transmitted from generation to generation”. Briefly, culture is a “design for living”. Culture as a design for a way of life has to do with human behavior. Unless those guidelines are learnt and shared among the members, there would not be order in the society. So, the two essential qualities of culture are that it is ‘learnt’ and ‘shared’. Since culture of a society has to do with the behaviors of the members of that society, these must be ‘an accepted way of life’ of the members belonging to that society. The accepted ways vary from one society to another. So, culture of one society is distinct from other societies². Therefore, it is proposed here to discuss the Anal cultural life. In the present study shall focus on the festive and customary aspects of Anal culture.

Thalkham (Farewell Ceremony)

Movement of the Anals from one village to other village was restricted. A person wishing to migrate to another village must perform Thalkham, a farewell ceremony before he leaves. A domestic animal and wine (zu) were offered to the villagers by organising a feast in the house of the village chief. That was a step for the future in the village, as it enabled him to reserve a right over his immovable properties in case he is to return to the village³.

Khuluhna Thangphuwng (Permission for settlement)

A migrant who wished to live in a new village was bound to seek the permission of the village chief. In this case he performed a customary function called

¹Rajendra Singh, *The Anals of Manipur*, Published by the Directorate for welfare of Tribals and Backward classes, Manipur, 1981, p.82.

²M. Harlambos and R.M. Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.3.

³Statement by H.B. Hmunkhel, Chandel on 16 May 2011.

‘khuluhna thangphuwng’ by offering a feast to the village chief and his councilors. Thus, he shall be given certain privileges in the new village like using of jhum plots, fishing ground, allotment of a suitable plot or site for the construction of his house, manual service to transport his properties from his former village. Such a tradition is still in vogue in Anal society of Manipur⁴.

Rituals and Festivals

From time immemorial, the Anals have variety of traditional festivals, songs and dances performed in a particular season or month. Festivities played important role in their life which displayed their joys, sorrows, victories and defeat in the war. There were also various festivals with social, cultural, religious, political and agricultural activities.

Totangkam or Akam (Feasts of Merit)

It is one of the greatest feasts of merit in the cultural life of the Anals. The performance of this feast was limited to the rich and well-to-do person only. The expensive nature of the feast was obvious. A large amount of materials and food stuff were freely and abundantly used for the whole village and community for a week. This kind of Anal festival has a religious significance as they are meant for God’s blessings. The festival has six different stages for a successful completion. They are Judong, Buthawng, Sapia, Hni, Akapidam and Duithuh⁵.

The first stage of the Akam is ‘Judong’ or ‘Inzu’ which lasts for two days and two nights. In this stage of feast, the village people participating in the feast will be served by very tasty dish of either a mithun or a pig along with traditional rice beer. This stage of feast also involves singing and dancing. The rich, therefore, in order to get a blissful life in “Athopam” (the abode of the dead), performed such kind of feast. However, widowers, widows and those who had committed forbidden marriage and theft were disqualified, in spite of being rich, to perform such celebration⁶.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

The second stage of the Akam is 'Butang' which is associated with erecting a stone monument or megalith in honour of a man's wife. The host of the feast offers a dog and a pig in addition to a Mithun or a pig for the feast. The feast also involves serving the villagers with good foods comprising of dog, pig, mithun and rice beers⁷.

The third stage of Akam is 'Sapia' that lasted three days and three nights, longer than the first two feasts. The celebration was accompanied with non-stop singing, dancing and merry-making in the host's house. The performers were served food and drinks while singing and dancing. The host arranged one mature mithun or buffalo, one large pig, one dog, one cock and forty five jars of rice beer for the feast. This was because it was celebrated in an extended manner.

The fourth stage of Akam is known as 'Lamhniing'. It lasted for five days and five nights. The feast may also be called inauguration of memorial stone, because the host erected stone monuments for himself as well as for his wife. The Anals dancers danced around the monument merrily. Plenty of rice beer and dish of big mithun or buffalo are the prime concern of the entertainment part.

The fifth stage of Akam is 'Akapidam', which is celebrated for two days and two nights. Here also the villagers are served with foods prepared with a large mithun. The dancing is also one of the main items of the feast that continues for the whole five days and five nights.

The sixth and the final stage of the Totangkam is 'Soltang Piita' or 'Duthuh'. 'Duthuh' is a symbolic act of service to other lower creations of God. So the host having completed his duty towards mankind by performing those feasts, now sought the help of villagers to assist him to fulfill his duty towards the birds and wild beasts or wild life. Here as well, the host arranged a large pig and four jars of rice beer for the villagers to eat and drink upto their hearts content. Following this, the villagers helped him to clear a large portion of the wood and feed the birds and wild animals. Totangkam is the most extravagant feast and a man who has performed

it is highly honoured in his community. In case a man dies before completing all the stages of Totangkam then Tenurong (the circle of the dancers around his grave and monument site) remains incomplete.

Cheling (Erection of Wooden Poles)

Cheling is a tradition among the Anals in which a horn-like wooden post is erected. It seems that the tradition was originated by a renowned person like Thumkhel, a popular Anal Phetha (hero). In this function, a mithun was tied by wild ropes called Khuwng-Thum Hru or Kangjam-Hru to a post made of an extra-ordinary tree like Padungthing (a kind of perishable tree). The tied mithun was then killed using spear (adopale) big dao (kangsang) and axe (tho) by a strong man of the village. According to the tradition, kholpu was the celebrant who chanted and threw an egg on the forehead of the mithun. The animal was killed in different ways. If killed by spear, the strong man has to spear the mithun on the front leg-pit; with dao he chopped off the neck⁸.

Hrungtha or Khutho (Village Sanctification)

The occasion was associated with the disposal of wastes by the ancient Anals. It was performed on the eve of New Year. Hrungtha means New Year of ancient Anals, which is now replaced by Kumhrin⁹. On this day, all the dirty things of the village gate were removed. It was also called 'suwngpang'. The annual disposal function was led by Athim and was carried out after the sun set. Following the disposal of the dirt from the gate, village gate was to be closed till the next day. This festival is also called 'Khutho'.

Chavan Kumhrin (Harvest Festival)

Chavan Kumhrin is a very important Anal harvest festival. This is popularly celebrated in present Anal society on 23rd October every year. On this occasion agricultural products are brought to and assembled in the church for offering and worshipping. This may be called a thanks giving day of the Anals. The old practice called Hesu is the root of the present-day Chavan

⁷Ibid.

⁸HB. Ruwngghnem, Chandel, 16th June 2011.

⁹Ibid.

Kumhrin. The festival is now mainly regulated by the Anal churches¹⁰.

The Anals had many traditional festivals but only a few of them survived the test of time. All this was on account of the fast conversion of the traditional Anal society to Christianity. "Chavan Kumhrin is one of them, which has gained the most popular position in the ascending order of importance. In the past, the time for "Chavan Kumhrin" was decided by the lunar cycle, but now after considering all the factors and also by the recognition accorded by the State Government of Manipur as a district holiday of Chandel District, the tribe, with unanimity has decided to celebrate it on the 23rd October every year¹¹.

The Anals trace the root of this festival to the pristine days of Anal tribe. In the olden days, different names were used for this festival, for example, Chavan Pathakowl, Budong Pitim and so on. In the past, every Anal family in each village would bring a small portion of their newly harvested products to the village trust where the village elders and clan elders would sanctify and bless the products to appease the Supreme Being, beseeching him for a bountiful harvest, for good health and prosperity of the community¹².

The Anal vocabulary 'Chavan' denotes autumnal season and 'Kumhrin' means New Year. Thus, 'Chavan Kumhrin' is interpreted as "Autumnal New Year". The term 'Chavan' is redefined in many terms like Chavan Du (Autumnal Water) Chavan Atho (Autumnal Air) and Chavan Changkuwl (Autumnal Maize), indicating the period falling between September and November which seems to correspond to the season of the northeast monsoon. Chavan Kumhrin as such is not necessarily the new year of the calendar year, but more as a harbinger of the arrival of new crops and grains, being the fruits of their yearly hard labour being received. This festival had been long forgotten or pushed into oblivion with the coming of Christianity, as the ignorant Anals were discouraged to celebrate the traditional festivals

by the early Missionaries, who planned to convert the traditional bound Anals to Christianity alluding them by imbibing anything they do with the traditional ways of life was to do with the devils, and hence should be abandoned by the Christians¹³.

Later on, after the native Christians have attained certain Christian maturity, the enlightened Christian leaders of the Anals began to interpret the Bible in their own cultural context and started seeking and searching what was the value in their own traditional ways of life. The serious looks into their traditional ways of life and culture began sometime in the third and last quarter of the 20th century. They found so much of spiritual value in the Chavan Kumhrin festival and thus began celebrating it in a Christian way without destroying the valuable original taste, meaning and tradition of the festival. Though, there were different names of the festival in the olden times as already alluded to, the term 'Chavan Kumhrin' was christened by late Pandit Lh. Thumthung of Chandel Christian village, in the year 1973¹⁴.

The first celebration of this festival in modern times according to the record of Anal Naga Tangpi (ANTA) occurred in 1973 at Chandel head quarters by the Anals of Maha area. According to 'Anal No' (Anal Customary Law), as per decision of the elders, educationists, public leaders of the Anal tribe and its villagers in their Assembly held on 9th October 1978 at Chandel Christian village, agreed and adopted to celebrate the two grand festivals – 'Chavan Pathakal' and 'Hrungtha'. Chavan Pathakol is another name of the Chavan Kumhrin but once Chavan Kumhrin was named and accepted for this festival, it gained more currency than other names and began celebrating as Chavan Kumhrin every year. With the initiative of the Anal elders and the active support of Shri. H.V. Lalringa, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, Chandel and Shri. Ch. Birendra Singh, MCS, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Chandel, Chavan Kumhrin was declared a district festival and fixed on the 20th October vide order no DC/TPL/03/14/78¹⁵.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹BD Thumdal Anal, "A brief account of Chavan Kumhrin festival", Spectrum, 2014.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid. pp.2

Christianity and Chavan Kumhrin

Chavan Kumhrin is a festival that heralds the arrival of new crops and grain instilling new hopes and invigorating new spirits in the people. In the past, every family in the Anal village would bring a small portion of newly harvested crops and grains to the village trust which would be blessed by the village and clan elders led by Kholpu (Chief) and Athim sacrificed a small portion to their supreme being beseeching for a bumper harvest, for the good health and prosperity. With the advent of Christianity, today Chavan Kumhrin is celebrated in accordance with the Christian beliefs and practices so much so, that, the onset of Chavan Kumhrin ushers in with offerings and prayers by every family in every church taking the form of fresh grain offering like the Israelites as found in the Biblical Mosaic laws of the Old Testament¹⁶.

Lungpa (Erection of Megalith)

Lungpa was an individual function associated with erection of megaliths. Many Anals performed Lungpa in the pre-Christian days, and it is still performed even after Christianity came to Anal country. In the olden days Athim who conducted the ceremony of Lungpa carried it out as part of the old religion, it aimed at gaining social standing in the village and the community. The Anals believed that few megaliths of Anals' fore-fathers still exist in Turbunglon, Tangsuwngbung, Thanlon, Kalembung in Chandel and Churachandpur districts and in some parts of Myanmar¹⁷.

Anal Dance Forms

The Anals are rich in performing arts. They have different traditional customs which can be used on different occasions including dancing and singing. Some of the Anal dances are examined below:

Kamdram or Ridam (Cultural Dance)

This dance form was associated with Akam function. It is a dance in a troupe in which male and female take part and move around as they dance. The dance was

used in the past in honour of the host who performed Akam.

Ludam (Victory Dance)

Ludam dance was performed as victory dance when the head of enemy was brought as trophy called Lupia. This dance was originated from the time of head-hunting. In the dance, a male and female dressed with basket full of firewood would dance in a circle around the cut off head of the enemy. While dancing, men ate cooked meat and drank a cup of rice beer¹⁸.

Jakadam (Couple Dance)

Jakadam dance was associated with social festival. In this dance form, a man and woman will dance together before public. Kamtang is a troupe which sang songs in tune with the dance rhythm. Kamtang party is highly respected by other fellow villagers and special treatment was given to them in eating and drinking¹⁹.

Ritual Practices of Anals

Hlitho (Ritual for Bounty Crops)

Hlitho festival was performed in connection with jhum cultivation, that is, after the jhum fields were burnt for sowing seeds. This festival was more ritualistic in nature rather than merry-making and was performed in the very field where cultivation will take place. It was called Binglum. A limited feast was held for the village priest (Athim) and the village elders who were present there. They were served rice beer and cooked meat of dog. The ultimate purpose for Hlitho was two-fold (i) it was performed for bounty crops, and (ii) for the safety of the farmers throughout the seasons of cultivation in the village²⁰.

Chahrotho (Ritual to Cure the Pestilence)

Chahrotho festival was performed usually after the crops were grown in the fields, which happened during the month of July or August. The mode of performance

16 *Ibid.*

17 *HB Ruwngghnem. Op.Cit.n.8*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Statement by W.S Johnson, Tokpaching village 13th April 2010.*

of this ritualistic festival involves capture of insects which caused pestilence and put in bamboo tube and was taken to the Athim (priest) who performed a rite on the crops. The rite is less expensive with consumption of rice beer only²¹.

Hesuw

Hesuw is a tradition in persons who were assigned to clear jungle and to burn the jhum fields were prohibited to eat certain food items during the period. They were free to eat the same only when the rite was performed which usually fell in the months of July. The tradition was in vogue in view of fruitful cultivation of the year²².

Kuh-Su-Kuh-Vang (Last Harvest Ritual)

This rite was performed in connection with harvest of a year; it may be called the last rite held by the Anals. The rite was performed with certain restriction: nobody was allowed to be in the just harvested jhum fields after the last foodgrain was collected which was called "Ahmum". As a matter of fact, the belief among the Anals was that the violation of the restriction would cause ill-fate in the form of ghost haunting. So, the Anal farmers had to leave their fields and sang songs of the past life in the field during the cultivation seasons. The song might have been the memories or joys experienced by them, or simply the folksongs that are sung to the beautiful autumnal season which came after harvest. The month in which the rite is performed could be in November or in the early weeks of December in those days²³.

Musical instruments

The Anals are particularly fond of music and have several musical instruments. They consider music as a compulsory item of every festival and occasion. The most important musical instruments of the Anals are Dalkhuwng (Gong), Pajandal (Plain Gong), Dalkang (Small Gong), Tengkhoh (Trumpets), Khuwng (Drum), Tili (Pipe), Rasem (Pipe Instrument), Sanamta (String Instruments), Tampu (Hum), Tumla (Wind Instrument)

and Pasa (Mouth Organ). They joyously sing and dance with the help of musical instruments.

Arms and Weapons

The Anals were brave hunters. In the olden days, hunting was very popular among the Anals. The main arms and weapons used by the Anals during hunting were, Kang (Dao), Lanthal (Big Dao), Pho (Shield), Adopale (Naga-Spear), Ado-Kumki (Hooked-Spear), See-Sal (Bow and Arrow), Dule (Archery), So-ka (Gun or Arrow Trap), Thamtek (Heavy Log-trap), Sa-patang (Roped-trap), Tho (Dagger), Kangche (Smaller dao) and Phung (Gun).

Dresses and Ornaments

In primeval times, the Anals used only a few traditional attires during cultural dances. Men wore different dresses such as Lubu (Headgear), Chang (Loin cloth worn by hunter), Phintho (Metallic wrist-band), Javi-Jutha (Loin clothes), Dil (Loin cloth worn to cover the private parts), Pakan Lungam (Shirt), Phirangcho (Turban), Khamencho (Turban), Dilphuwam (Dhoti), Nacho (Ear-ring) Jati-bu (traditional shawl).

Women wore broad loin clothes as skirts such as Buvum Lungvin (black Lungi), Irang Lungvin (dappled colour lungi) and Analnu lungvin (women lungi). The loin cloth "Ahnong" was tucked in at the waist and falling down upto the calves or the ankles. Unmarried women also used to cut their hairs and used to show their navel to indicate that they were of chaste character. Various necklaces used by the women were Aka-hru, Aphe and Athihru. They also used Bangles such as Hal, Kuhcho, Kuh-pal and Kolencho. Women adorned themselves with ear-rings like Nacho, Nahru, Pari, etc. Hair garbs like Lukhum and Samtho were used by the women.

Foods and Drinks

The Anals always like to eat steamed rice (ngan-bu) with delicious meat and vegetables. They eat two heavy meals a day. They rear chickens, pigs, dogs, ducks, buffalos, cows, sheep, goat, etc. for consumption and for sale. They are fond of hunting and eating wild animals such as deer, bear, monkey, porcupine, boar, fowl,

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

brow- antlered deer, tigers, etc. They also eat variety of vegetables, green leaves, wild-nuts, fishes, crabs, snails and so on and so forth.

Zu (local beer) occupied vital role in the early Anal society and was drunk on all important functions. Zu was prepared of fermented rice millet, maize, etc. mixed with yeast.

The Installation (Khamtungro) Feast of the Anal Village Chief

The installation feast of the Anal village chief was held involving his nomination and the time-bound arrangement of the mass feast. Installation feast was partly cultural and partly customary. Installation in Anal language "Khamtungro" means coronation. But, since the term is closely related to the royal enthronement, the term installation is used here. The feast involves sumptuous dinner or lunch borne by the elect Khuruwng or Chief. His subordinates should also follow-suit but in a lesser level of expenditure. Moreover, their economic condition is allowed to determine the size of their installation feast. The function is also seen as a swearing ceremony of the elected chief and his subordinate. During Khamtungro (coronation) both swearing and handing-over of charge usually takes place. The function is also accompanied with merry-making during the night²⁴.

Fortune and Sacred Stones among the Anals

The preservation or possession of sacred stones has to do with the belief of good fortune. Good fortune was for bounty food grains and ever successful hunting in one's life. The fortune stones were of two: "Chahlung" and "Sahlung".

Chahlung was for bounty grains and with latter successful hunting or bounty of meat or flesh. In the olden days nothing was so inevitable in one's life, but grains and meat. If possession of either those two were bounty, one's life was considered prosperous. So, it was believed that if one possessed either Rice stone or

Meat stone, he could be prosperous²⁵. The finding of those stones was believed to be a matter of providential or fatal leading. The rich were believed to be people who were destined to be rich or successful. Since, not everyone was destined to be rich or successful.

With the coming of Christianity, the non-Christian beliefs and practices were greatly abandoned and forgotten. So, they are virtually non-existent in any part of Anal society.

Ralsa Lu Idon (Head Hunting)

The most dreaded thing next to the devastation caused by natural calamities in the past was head-hunting and inter or intra tribe feuds. While head-hunting was not the very practice of the feuds but it could be part of it because hunted heads of the enemies could be used as a war trophy of the village or party. There was also head-hunting which was not carried out as part of a feud. In a sense the process was more dangerous because the risk of being killed could happen at any place or time to any individual(s). That is to say, a man working in the field or on the way to house or at any place was vulnerable to the enemies. That is, head-hunting was a very act of cutting off the head of man for which the head-hunters were purposely in search of a man or men who were alone or a few at that moment. Such practice was very common among the Naga tribes living anywhere.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can state that the Anals are rich culturally. They do have their traditional culture which is distinct from that of other tribes in many respects. The culture-bound Anal society came under the pressure of change particularly in the early 20th century. The period was the time in which they started embracing Christianity. With the coming of Christianity the Anals started abandoning many aspects of their age-old cultural life. The new religion brought about modern education, which was instrumental in changing the cultural life.

At present the majority of the Anals follow the Christian way of life by practising cultural things which are

²⁴Kanlung Ruvndar, *The Social Political Life of the Anal Tribe of Manipur, an M.Phil. Dissertation submitted to Manipur University, 1995, pp.86-88.*

²⁵*Ibid. p.93.*

greatly western. As per the new trend the Anals also tend to revive their traditional culture as other tribes do, beginning from the last quarters of the 20th century. The celebration of Chavan Kumhrin by Anal Christians is the case in point. But this trend seems not to reverse back to their old cultural life. For, it may involve the reversion of their present religion which is next to impossible. Yet the trend may grow almost stronger taking shape after the compulsion of ethno-cultural identity. In the north-east and particularly in Manipur, identity crisis has forcefully come to a stay. No tribe remains unfelt, but, each tribe has been swept under its current.

In short, the Anal society is in a transitional stage from traditionalism to modernization. While the former happens to be more attractive and forceful, the latter is not without its influence on the present society which is based on the ethno-political compulsions, which the Anals are often subject to, and bend according to the spirit of a larger ethno-social concern.

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