



“The Evolution Of Tangkhul Hairstyle: Navigating Cultural Transition With The Introduction Of Christianity To Tangkhul Hills”

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Abstract: This study delves into the cultural metamorphosis of Tangkhul hairstyles, a phenomenon deeply intertwined with the advent of Christianity in the Tangkhul Hills. Utilizing primary and secondary data sources, the paper investigates the evolution of these hairstyles as a reflection of the community's adaptation to new religious and social paradigms. The research highlights the significance of hairstyles in conveying societal roles, personal identity, and the community's response to the introduction of Christianity. It provides a folkloristic perspective on how the Tangkhul Naga tribe's traditional hairstyles, once emblematic of their animistic heritage, have been reshaped by the influence of Christian values and Western aesthetics. The paper offers a perspective into the intricate relationship between religion, culture, and personal expression within the Tangkhul society, contributing to a broader understanding of cultural adaptation and identity formation.

Keywords: Tangkhul Naga, Tangkhul hairstyles, social dynamics, Identity, Religion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humans have demonstrated a profound interest in personalizing their appearance using grooming and self-adornment to gain social approval and other rewards. Ancient carvings also offer glimpses into deliberate hairstyling practices. The meticulous hair arrangement in these depictions reveals an early fascination with aesthetics. “Anthropologists believe that this desire to groom and beautify the body is an inherent part of being human” (Sherrow, 2023: xxiii). Artifacts such as combs and hairpins, spanning thousands of years, further illuminate humanity's enduring desire to groom and adorn their hair. Crafted with care and precision, these tools speak to the importance of personal appearance across diverse cultures and epochs. Hairstyles, a prominent aspect of personal grooming, have consistently held significance in societal contexts. They often communicate cultural identity, social status, and personal expression. The deliberate styling seen in ancient carvings hints at the role of hairstyles as a means of non-verbal communication reflecting individual and collective values. As societies evolved, so did how people personalize their looks. From elaborate wigs in ancient Egypt to intricate hair accessories in ancient China, individuals sought to distinguish themselves through unique and culturally significant hairstyles. These grooming practices were not merely about aesthetics; they were symbolic expressions deeply intertwined with societal norms and values, as “hair is a key aspect of appearance, one that is always on view unless it is purposely concealed,

removed, or lost due to aging or disease” (Sherrow, 2023: xxiii).

Beyond personal expression, hairstyles have also played a role in social dynamics. Certain styles were reserved for specific classes or professions, creating a visual hierarchy within societies. In this way, hairstyles became a form of social currency, contributing to the complex tapestry of human interaction. Throughout history, the pursuit of social approval has been a driving force behind grooming practices. Whether it was the elaborate hairstyles of the Renaissance or the sleek bobs of the Roaring Twenties, individuals often altered their appearance to align with prevailing beauty standards. The quest for social validation through personal grooming has been a timeless and universal aspect of human behaviour. In contemporary times, the significance of hairstyles persists. From fashion runways to everyday life, individuals continue to use their hair as a canvas for self-expression. Modern society witnesses a fusion of historical influences where hairstyles serve as a bridge between tradition and contemporary trends. The history of personal grooming and self-adornment, particularly through hairstyle, is a rich tapestry woven with threads of cultural identity, social dynamics, and individual expression. From ancient carvings to modern runways, the human desire to care for and personalize one’s appearance remains an enduring aspect of our shared history.

Hairstyles have held significant cultural, social, and symbolic meanings in diverse cultures. For instance, in ancient Egypt, adults donned wigs with forehead curls, while in Ancient Rome, both men and women embraced styles with hair arranged on the forehead. Similarly, Ancient Greece reflected this trend. In contrast, depictions of women in Ancient China displayed a distinct forehead with upswept styles or buns behind the head (Sherrow, 2023: 56). The Tangkhuls, traditionally an agrarian society, have a unique set of hairstyles that vary based on gender and life events. For instance, the tradition of women keeping a fringe holds deep cultural significance, particularly indicating the transition to a marriageable age in the Tangkhul community. This traditional practice signifies readiness for marriage, serving as a visual proclamation of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The hairstyle not only reflects cultural identity but also reinforces the communal understanding of societal roles and expectations. This symbolic transformation plays a crucial role in the fabric of Tangkhul society, highlighting the importance of rituals in marking significant life stages and fostering community identity. Understanding these hairstyles unveils the intricate social fabric and traditions that shaped Tangkhul’s identity.

The Tangkhuls are situated in the northeastern part of India and extend over to the northwestern part of Myanmar forming an integral part of the larger Naga Hills. The area is marked by dense forests, meandering rivers, and a temperate climate, with heavy monsoon rains during the wet season. The geographical features play a significant role in shaping the lifestyle and cultural practices of the Tangkhul people, who are primarily agrarian. However, the arrival of Christianity in the Tangkhul hills marked a profound transformation in various facets of their society. The influence of Christianity extended beyond religious practices, affecting societal norms, values, aesthetics, and even personal appearance. In 1895, Reverend William Pettigrew, a Scottish-British Christian missionary born on 5th January 1869 in Edinburgh, Scotland, introduced Christianity to the Tangkhul Naga tribe. Pettigrew’s arrival marked a significant chapter in the Tangkhuls’ history as they encountered a new faith that would shape their beliefs and way of life. Pettigrew, driven by missionary zeal, embarked on a journey to bring the Christian message to the Tangkhuls, who were steeped in their indigenous beliefs. The introduction of Christianity was not merely a religious shift but also a catalyst for social and cultural transformations within the Tangkhul community. The missionaries’ teachings emphasized love, compassion, and the Christian doctrine, providing an alternative worldview to the traditional Tangkhul beliefs. The Tangkhuls, known for their strong sense of community, gradually incorporated Christian values into their social fabric, fostering a sense of unity and communal harmony. The arrival of

Christianity also brought about changes in education and healthcare by establishing schools and hospitals, contributing to the Tangkhuls' overall well-being and development.

The Tangkhul community underwent profound transformations marked by an emphasis on monotheism, salvation, and ethical conduct. Monotheism introduced a unified spiritual focus, redirecting religious practices towards a singular divine entity. This shift fostered a sense of communal cohesion and provided a moral compass for the Tangkhul people. Salvation became a central tenet, offering individuals a path to spiritual redemption and a heightened awareness of ethical responsibilities. The pursuit of salvation encouraged introspection and a commitment to virtuous living, reshaping the moral fabric of the community. This newfound emphasis on personal salvation also influenced collective behaviour, fostering a sense of accountability and shared values. Ethical conduct became paramount as the Tangkhul community embraced principles aligned with their monotheistic beliefs. The emphasis on honesty, compassion, and justice permeated various aspects of daily life, shaping interpersonal relationships and community dynamics. This ethical framework served as a guide for resolving conflicts, promoting social harmony, and instilling a shared sense of moral duty. The adoption of new hairstyles among the Tangkhul people became a visible manifestation of their faith. Christian beliefs often influenced personal grooming choices, and the adoption of specific hairstyles served as an outward expression of one's religious convictions. This shift in appearance became a reflection of a deeper internal transformation influenced by Christian values.

Tangkhul hairstyles held profound importance in the Tangkhul hills, reflecting cultural identity and social status before the advent of Christianity. These hairstyles were symbolic, representing various aspects of life such as age, marital status, and tribal affiliations. With the arrival of Christianity in Tangkhul hills, significant shifts occurred in Tangkhul society, including changes in traditional practices, rituals, and inevitably hairstyles. The new religious influence prompted a re-evaluation of cultural norms, leading to modifications in the way Tangkhuls expressed their identity through hairstyles. Post-Christianity, the Tangkhul hairstyle underwent initial transformations. Many Tangkhuls embraced simpler, more Western-influenced styles, reflecting the changing societal norms and the adoption of new religious practices. Few individuals embraced traditional hairstyles while following the new faith, creating a unique fusion that symbolized the blending of old and new cultural elements. However, the shift was not uniform, as variations existed based on the extent of individual adherence to the new faith and the preservation of cultural practices. Tangkhul hairstyles before Christianity held immense importance as cultural identifiers, reflecting age, marital status, and social roles. The arrival of Christianity introduced transformative shifts in these hairstyles, emphasizing simplicity and modesty. The subsequent evolution of Tangkhul hairstyles post-Christianity reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and the influences of a changing cultural landscape.

The impact of Christianity on Tangkhul culture has been profound, with the majority of the tribe embracing Christianity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This religious transformation has influenced various aspects of Tangkhul life, including their traditional customs, festivals, and even attire. Christianity introduced new perspectives on morality, family structures, and community dynamics, leading to changes in traditional practices. The study of Tangkhul hairstyles within this context becomes crucial, offering a lens through which to explore how religious shifts have affected cultural expressions and identity markers within the tribe. Investigating Tangkhul hairstyles will provide a valuable entry point for comprehending the intricate cultural tapestry of Tangkhul Nagas. Additionally, analyzing the impact of Christianity will shed light on the evolving dynamics within Tangkhul society, showcasing the interplay between tradition and religious transformation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hairstyles have long served as more than mere aesthetic choices; they are deeply embedded in communities' cultural, social, and spiritual fabric worldwide. Folklorists and scholars who delve into the stories behind these hairstyles uncover rich tapestries of tradition and identity, revealing how hair can be a powerful medium of cultural expression. In Goodwin's seminal work (1986), the significance of fashion, particularly women's hairstyles, in Japanese culture is meticulously explored. The evolution of hairstyles, from the cherished lustrous black hair to the intricate art forms they became during different periods, reflects the socio-cultural dynamics and shifts in leisure, class, and aesthetics throughout Japanese history. The narrative unfolds through various historical epochs, starting from the Heian period (ninth to twelfth centuries), where court ladies set the trend of wearing hair loose, cascading straight down their backs. However, as societal structures evolved, particularly with the emergence of the working class in the sixteenth century, a shift occurred. Working women began gathering their hair into buns at the nape of their necks, a trend that soon permeated through courtesans and townswomen. With the advent of Tokugawa rule in the seventeenth century, leisure time increased, leading to a gradual transformation of hair arrangement into a form of artistic expression. What began as a functional bun evolved into an intricate art form, with techniques of hair arrangement becoming increasingly refined. This transformation not only reflected leisure but also served as a marker of social status and cultural refinement. These sophisticated hairstyles were often adorned with various ornaments, which further enhanced their aesthetic appeal. The evolution of women's hairstyles in Japan from the Heian period through the Tokugawa period reflects broader social and cultural shifts.

Botsio, Essel, and Amissah (2023), delve into the fascinating Makai hairstyle among the Elmina people of Ghana. Their work provides a comprehensive exploration of the Makai hairstyle, uncovering its origins, design intricacies, and cultural significance within the Elmina community of Ghana. Through their research, they offer valuable insights into the role of this timeless tradition in shaping identity, rituals, and communal bonds among the Elmina people. Tomaz (2017) meticulously examines Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines of two different cultural milieus, Anzabegovo/Vršnik and Velušina/Porodin, illuminating how these ancient artifacts portray humans with meticulously styled hair. She scrutinizes the intricate details of these hairstyles, highlighting their symbolic importance within the context of the societies that created them. By analyzing the depiction of hairstyles on figurines and anthropomorphic altars, Tomaz invites us to appreciate the profound significance of hairstyling practices in shaping human identities and communal bonds across millennia. The Mohawk hairstyle, a distinctive look characterized by shaved sides and a strip of hair running down the middle of the head, draws its name and inspiration from the Mohawk tribe, a Native American group known for their fierce warriors who often sported this unique style. Ribke (2017) illustrates the fascinating evolution of the Mohawk hairstyle from its roots in the Mohawk tribe to its adoption by punk culture, and its eventual acceptance into mainstream fashion.

It becomes evident that hairstyles are much more than superficial attributes; they are dynamic canvases that capture the essence of cultural narratives. They bear witness to historical transformations, embody symbolic meanings, and affirm identities. As such, hairstyles offer a profound understanding of the human experience, revealing how deeply intertwined our appearance is with the cultural stories we live and breathe.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach, combining ethnographic techniques and historical analysis to understand the evolution of Tangkhul hairstyles in relation to the introduction of Christianity in the Tangkhul Hills. The research involved a thorough review of existing literature on Tangkhul history, culture, and the impact of Christianity on the region, as well as relevant works on hairstyles and cultural

expression. Extensive fieldwork was conducted in the villages of Chingjui, Hunphun, and Phungcham, utilizing participant observation to understand contemporary social practices and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals from diverse backgrounds to gather information on traditional hairstyles, their meanings, experiences with the transition to Christianity, and perspectives on the evolution of hairstyles. Data analysis involved thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, historical analysis to reconstruct the evolution of hairstyles over time, and comparative analysis across villages. All research was conducted with a focus on ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent, protecting participant anonymity, and respecting cultural sensitivity. The findings are presented in a narrative format, drawing on historical information, ethnographic observations, and interview data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the pre-Christian era, Tangkhul hairstyles were far more than a matter of personal grooming; they were a vital aspect of their cultural and spiritual identity. Men's and women's hairstyles served as visual representations of their social status, marital status, age, and spiritual beliefs. These practices ensured that the societal norms and values of the Tangkhul community were upheld and communicated through the medium of hair. As such, hairstyles were a crucial element of Tangkhul's cultural heritage, reflecting the community's rich tapestry of traditions, beliefs, and social structures.

4.1 Traditional Tangkhul Hairstyles: A Folkloristic Perspective

As mentioned above, Tangkhul hairstyles held profound cultural importance before the advent of Christianity, reflecting the community's rich traditions and social fabric. These hairstyles were not merely aesthetic expressions but embodied a deep connection to identify status within the Tangkhul Naga society. Distinctive hairstyles served as markers of age, marital status, and social standing. Some of the distinctive hairstyles of the Tangkhuls that functioned as a visual language, communicating essential aspects of an individual's life, are as follows:

Children's hairstyle: Children's hairstyles in Chingjui village hold immense cultural significance, particularly in the tradition of head shaving observed until the age of nine (9) or ten (10). This practice is deeply rooted in the village's customs and symbolizes a rite of passage for both boys and girls. For young boys, the distinct aspect of this tradition lies in leaving a portion in the middle of their shaved heads. This specific segment, measuring the size of three fingers, extends from the front to the back of the neck. The meticulousness of this process reflects the importance placed on cultural values and the transmission of heritage. This unique hairstyle serves as a visual marker within the community, distinguishing children in this stage of their lives. It fosters a sense of unity and identity among the young ones, emphasizing their shared cultural heritage. This uniformity in hairstyle not only reinforces a collective identity but also signifies the equal importance placed on each child's journey to maturity. As children undergo this shared experience of head shaving, it fosters a sense of community and mutual understanding. The tradition becomes a collective memory, strengthening the social fabric of Chingjui village. In the context of Phungcham village, the practice of shaving children's heads until they reach a certain age stands as a distinct cultural tradition. Unlike Chingjui village, where the male child adopts different hairstyling customs, Phungcham's uniform approach to hair for both male and female children highlights important aspects of the community's social structures.

Married man hairstyle: In Chingjui village, the hairstyles of married men hold profound importance, reflecting both cultural traditions and societal significance. Central to this style is a segment of hair, known as "*Khanjaphu*", which measures the size of three fingers in width. This segment is left in the middle portion of the head, a deliberate and symbolic placement. The hair (*Khanjaphu*) on the back of the head is allowed to grow long, often reaching down to the waist. This lengthy portion is a stark contrast to the sides of the head,

which are shaven clean. The long hair (*Khanjhaphu*) at the back is not left loose but is bundled and tied with a white thread spun from locally grown cotton, underscoring the connection between this practice and the community's agrarian lifestyle. The use of locally sourced materials for the hair thread not only emphasizes the self-sufficiency of Chingjui village but also highlights the importance of traditional crafts and skills passed down through generations. The deliberate parting of the hair in the middle of the front portion of the head further enhances the distinctive appearance of this hairstyle. This specific style of parting and tying is imbued with cultural meaning, signifying the transition from bachelorhood to married life. It serves as a public declaration of a man's changed social status, making it immediately recognizable to others in the community. This visual cue plays a crucial role in the social structure of Chingjui village, as it communicates marital status without the need for verbal confirmation. Moreover, the hairstyle's significance extends beyond mere appearance. It symbolizes the responsibilities and roles associated with marriage within the village. In essence, the married men's hairstyle in Chingjui village serves as a rich cultural artifact, encapsulating aspects of identity, tradition, and social structure.

Unmarried man hairstyle: In Chingjui village, the hairstyle of unmarried men is not merely a fashion statement but a cultural emblem that serves to distinguish them within the community. This unique coiffure involves leaving a distinct segment of hair, known locally as "*Khanjhaphu*", which measures the width of three fingers in the middle portion of the head. This segment is allowed to grow uninterrupted until it reaches the waist, while the sides of the head are completely shaved. The maintenance and presentation of this hairstyle involve intricate practices. The long hair (*Khanjhaphu*) is gathered and bundled at the back of the head using a white thread. This thread is not just any thread but is spun from locally grown cotton, adding an element of local craftsmanship and resource utilization to the hairstyle. The bundling process is both practical and symbolic, ensuring that the hair is neatly kept while also signifying a connection to the local environment and traditions. Adding to the aesthetic appeal, the bun is decorated with a flower known as *Jhafü pungpa*, which is also locally grown. This adornment is more than a mere decorative element; it reflects the community's appreciation for natural beauty and their connection to the local flora. The presence of the *Jhafü pungpa* in the hairstyle highlights the importance of local biodiversity and the villagers' intimate relationship with their natural surroundings. This hairstyle is highly admired by the villagers, particularly the women folk, who appreciated the long, thick, and silky nature of the hair. Such admiration underscores the hairstyle's role in the social dynamics of Chingjui village, where physical appearance intertwined with cultural practices can influence social standing and relationships. The hairstyle of unmarried men in Chingjui village differs significantly from that of married men, particularly in the absence of a middle parting at the front of the head. This distinction is a crucial visual cue within the community, making it easy to identify unmarried men at a glance. Such clear demarcations in hairstyle based on marital status are not uncommon in traditional societies, where visual symbols often play an essential role in social organization.

Maranao Samphun (Orphan hairstyle): The *Maranao Samphun* (orphan hairstyle), particularly for male orphans in Phungcham village, holds profound importance and cultural significance. Distinct from the hairstyles of well-to-do families, this style features a small ponytail, roughly the size of the pinky finger, positioned at the back of the neck. This unique hairstyle serves as a visual marker, symbolizing the orphan status within the community. In this context, the hairstyle reflects not only the individual's life circumstances but also communicates a narrative of resilience and identity. The small ponytail acts as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by male orphans, emphasizing their distinct roles within the community. Furthermore, the Maranao hairstyle plays a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and unity among the Tangkhul people. It serves as a visual cue that distinguishes one's social background, fostering mutual understanding and

empathy within the community. This shared cultural practice reinforces the bonds between individuals who have experienced similar life circumstances, creating a sense of solidarity among male orphans in Phungcham village. The significance of this hairstyle is not limited to its aesthetic appeal; rather, it encapsulates a narrative that transcends generations. As a cultural marker, it carries the weight of tradition, reminding the community of the resilience and unique experiences of male orphans. The small ponytail, though seemingly subtle, becomes a symbol of pride and identity, contributing to the rich tapestry of *Maranao* culture. Hence, the *Maranao* hairstyle carried by male orphans in Phungcham village is a powerful expression of cultural identity, resilience, and unity within the community.

Maiden hairstyle: The maiden hairstyle of the Chingjui village holds immense cultural importance. The meticulous cut, just below the ears with a forehead fringe, symbolizes a significant rite of passage for young women. This tradition, rooted in the deep cultural fabric of the community, marks the pivotal moment when a woman enters the threshold of marriageable age. The act of cutting the hair is laden with symbolic meaning, signifying the shedding of the girlhood phase and embracing the responsibilities and expectations associated with womanhood. The careful precision of the cut underscores the gravity of this transformation, highlighting the attention given to early detail in the process. The tradition of women growing long hair leading up to this ceremony serves as a visual representation of time, patience, and growth. The act of cutting the hair, therefore, becomes a powerful metaphor for the shedding of the past and the readiness to embark on a new chapter in life. Furthermore, the forehead fringe adds an additional layer of symbolism. It not only frames the face but also accentuates the significance of the eyes, which are often considered windows to the soul in many cultures. This accentuation implies a newfound awareness and maturity as young women navigate the complexities of adulthood and potential partnerships. The careful shearing process is not merely a physical transformation but a reflection of the cultural tapestry that weaves together identity, heritage, and the timeless journey into maturity.

The maiden hairstyle of the Phungcham village is also not merely a matter of fashion or trend; rather, it is a symbol of maturity and readiness for the responsibilities that come with womanhood. As young girls grow, so too does their hair and the decision to don the maiden hairstyle signals their preparedness to embrace the next chapter of their lives. The length of the hair, varying from one individual to another, reflects the uniqueness of each woman and her journey towards marriage. Some may choose to let their hair cascade down their back, while others may prefer a more modest length. Yet regardless of their length, the forehead fringe remains constant, a marker of identity and belonging within the tapestry of Phungcham village life. The fringe demarcates a girl's transition into womanhood and her entry into the marriageable age. This change is publicly visible, signalling to the community that she is now considered an adult eligible for marital proposals. Through this practice, the Phungcham community not only honours its traditions but also provides a structured and meaningful way for young women to transition into adulthood. This simple yet significant tradition underscores the intricate ways in which culture and identity are interwoven in the daily lives of the villagers, maintaining a vibrant tapestry of customs and values that define their social landscape.

Married women's hairstyle: The married women's hairstyle in Chingjui village holds profound cultural importance, symbolizing tradition and marital status. The decision to keep long hair signifies a commitment to marital responsibilities, with the length of the hair serving as a visible marker of their married status within the community. The distinct practice of not maintaining forehead fringes and opting for a middle parting reflects adherence to cultural norms and a sense of identity. The hairstyle choice is not merely a fashion statement but a deliberate expression of conformity to traditional values and societal expectations. The neatly bundled hair further reinforces the notion of order and discipline within married life. In Chingjui village, this

hairstyle acts as a visual language, communicating the wearer's marital status and commitment to family life. It also fosters a sense of unity among married women, creating a shared identity through this common practice.

Hunphun Sampho: The Hunphun hairstyle, unique to the village of Hunphun, holds immense cultural importance and significance for the male folk who adopt this distinctive look. The *Hunphun Sampho* involves a meticulous and symbolic hair arrangement. The central segment of hair, known as "Sampho" in the local dialect, is left long. This segment typically measures the size of three fingers and is situated prominently in the middle of the head. The rest of the hair is shaved, emphasizing the central tuft. The long hair in the middle is then gathered and fashioned into a bun on top of the head. This bundle is not merely tied but is adorned and secured with a porcupine spike, which serves both practical and decorative purposes. The use of porcupine spikes to fashion the bund in the *Hunphun Sampho* hairstyle underscores a deep connection to the community's traditions and natural surroundings. The care and attention required to maintain the *Sampho* also highlight values of discipline and dedication, which are highly regarded in Tangkhul culture. This hairstyle, therefore, is more than just a fashion statement; it embodies a sense of identity, unity, and pride among the male folk in Hunphun village. It also serves as a visual marker of belonging to the community, reinforcing a shared cultural heritage.

Hao Kuiret (Hao coiffure): The *Hao Kuiret* hairstyle has roots that intertwine with the cultural practices of the Phungcham village. According to oral traditions, the hairstyle was inspired by the rooster, a bird revered for its beauty, alertness, and spirited nature. The rooster's crest, characterized by its distinctive, upright comb became the model for this traditional hairstyle, symbolizing vigilance, and leadership. This distinctive hairstyle involves shaving the sides of the head, leaving a central portion that is kept short through regular trimming. The act of shaving the sides while keeping the middle portion short yet tidy requires precision and care. This careful grooming reflects the values of discipline and respect for tradition, emphasizing the community's dedication to preserving their cultural heritage. At its core, the *Hao kuiret* (Hao coiffure) serves as a powerful marker of identity. It is a visible manifestation of the collective heritage and social values that bind the people of Phungcham village together. Each man who wears this hairstyle signals his belonging to the community, participating in a tradition that transcends generations. Interestingly, the *Hao kuiret* (Hao coiffure) is carried by all men in the community except orphans and children. This practice underscores the hairstyle's role in social cohesion and differentiation. By excluding orphans and children from this tradition, the community delineates a clear boundary between adult male identity and social roles. This exclusion is not merely a social stratification but rather a way to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood and the acceptance of communal responsibilities.

The significance of Tangkhul hairstyles extends beyond personal expression; they play a role in maintaining social cohesion and upholding community values. The adherence to such traditions fosters a sense of continuity and stability, linking each generation to its roots and reinforcing the importance of cultural heritage. In essence, the various hairstyles of the Tangkhuls are more than a mere aesthetic choice. It is a cultural emblem that conveys a commitment to tradition, family, and community, providing a tangible link between the past, present, and future of the Tangkhul's rich cultural tapestry.

4.2 The Advent of Christianity: A Cultural Turning Point

Tangkhul hairstyles hold profound importance, reflecting a dynamic evolution over time. The transition period witnessed a harmonious blend of traditional and Christian influences, shaping a unique cultural identity. The evolution of hairstyles is symbolic, mirroring societal changes and preserving cultural roots. During the transition, Tangkhul's hairstyles seamlessly incorporated elements from traditional practices and Christian beliefs. Traditionally, Tangkhul hairstyles held profound cultural significance, serving as

markers of identity, age, and social status. As Christianity gained prominence in the region, the incorporation of Christian beliefs into Tangkhul hairstyles is evident in the adoption of simpler and more modest styles. The advent of Christianity among the Tangkhul hills brought about a distinctive shift, notably observed in the male population adopting Western hairstyle, coined as the “Pettigrew hairstyle”, named after the Christian missionary who introduced the faith. According to the information gathered from the field, in 1907, the quaint village of Hunphun witnessed a profound transformation as seventy (70) households embraced Christianity. However, a curious turn of events unfolded when sixty-three (63) households backslid by participating in the *Thisham Phanit*, a festival honouring the deceased. This schism led to a conflict with seven households opposing the majority. Amidst the discord, a central figure, Pettigrew, emerged as a key mediator, playing a pivotal role in reconciling the two factions. His efforts bridged the gap between the two factions within the Christian community. To maintain harmony, a compromise was reached, and those participating in the *Thisham Phanit* festival were encouraged to adopt the “*Hunphun Sampho*” (Hunphun male folk hairstyle). Meanwhile, the remaining seven households retained the “Pettigrew hairstyle”, creating a visual distinction. This compromise was not merely a sartorial choice; it carried profound cultural and religious significance. The adoption of traditional hairstyle symbolized a continued connection to traditional practices, intertwining cultural roots with the new faith, i.e., Christianity. On the other hand, the “Pettigrew hairstyle” became a marker of a distinct identity, emphasizing a commitment to the newly embraced Christian faith. The *Thisham Phanit*, despite initially causing division, ultimately became a catalyst for cultural negotiation and accommodation. Pettigrew’s role as a peacemaker exemplifies the village’s resilience in navigating the complexities of cultural change. The compromise struck not only preserved harmony but also allowed each faction to express their identity, fostering a unique coexistence in Hunphun village.

Phungcham village and Chingjui villages also exhibit a unique cultural transformation observed during fieldwork, particularly after the conversion to Christianity. A distinct practice that emerged is the adoption of the Pettigrew hairstyle among male community members. This hairstyle serves as a visual marker, distinguishing those who have embraced Christianity from those adhering to the indigenous faith, known as the Hao religion. This interweaving of hairstyles becomes a visual representation of the delicate balance achieved between the introduction of Christianity and the preservation of Tangkhul traditions. It showcases the adaptability and inclusivity within the community, symbolizing the coexistence of diverse beliefs and practices. The “Pettigrew” and “*Hao kuiret*” hairstyles stand as a living expression of a harmonious blend between the old and the new, reflecting the evolving cultural tapestry of their respective villages.

The evolution of hairstyles among the Tangkhul population has witnessed a notable shift from elaborate styles to a more subdued and practical approach, mirroring the influence of Christian values. Traditionally, ornate styles gave way to simplicity, aligning with the values of modesty and humility embraced by the community. Additionally, the introduction of Western education and lifestyle also played a role in shaping Tangkhul hairstyles during this transition. Western grooming practices and hairstyles began to influence local trends, leading to a fusion of traditional and modern elements. This fusion not only reflected changing beauty standards but also showcased the adaptability of Tangkhul culture to external influences. Despite these changes, it is crucial to acknowledge that Tangkhul hairstyles retained elements of their traditional roots. The evolution was not a complete departure but rather a nuanced synthesis where traditional and Christian values coexisted within the intricate braids and adornments. This amalgamation serves as a testament to the community’s adaptability and resilience, fostering unity amid diverse influences. The hairstyles became a canvas for cultural expression, showcasing the coexistence of age-old traditions and contemporary values.

4.3 Symbolism and Interpretation

Symbolism plays a pivotal role in the evolving hairstyles of the Tangkhul community. Each hairstyle conveys specific meanings, ranging from social status to rites of passage. The intricate *Hunphun Sampho* adorned with porcupine spikes by the male folk of Hunphun village reflects a connection to ancestral customs, while subtle modifications signify the integration of Christian principles into daily life. This symbolism acts as a visual narrative, communicating the cultural narrative to both the Tangkhul people and outsiders. The significance of the “Pettigrew hairstyle” lies in its symbolic role as a cultural identifier, reinforcing the religious shift within the community. This practice not only highlights the personal commitment of the male individuals to their Christian faith but also serves as a means of social distinction, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity among the converted population. Moreover, the adoption of the “Pettigrew hairstyle” may be rooted in the desire to visibly break away from traditional practices associated with the “Hao religion” (Indigenous faith). It becomes a statement of allegiance to the new faith, representing a departure from ancestral beliefs and a commitment to the values and principles of Christianity. In addition to its religious connotations, the “Pettigrew hairstyle” may also carry social and communal significance. It could serve as a form of solidarity among the Christian converts, reinforcing a collective identity that goes beyond individual faith. This shared visual element creates a sense of unity and mutual understanding within the community, strengthening the bonds among those who have embraced Christianity.

Fieldwork in Phungcham, Chingjui, and Hunphun villages provides valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between religious conversion, cultural practices, and social identity. The transition from the traditional “*Maranao Samphun*” (orphan hairstyle), “married man hairstyle”, and “unmarried man hairstyle” to the “Pettigrew hairstyle” carries profound significance. Its emergence reflects the impact of external influences on Tangkhul society, highlighting a shift towards a more interconnected world. This transition represents the community’s adaptability and openness to change while preserving elements of their heritage.

The evolution of hairstyles among the Tangkhuls following the introduction of Christianity in the Tangkhul hills holds profound symbolic significance. This transformation, therefore, reflects shifts in not only religious beliefs but also cultural identity and societal values. Hairstyles, once deeply rooted in traditional practices, have become a dynamic expression of the interplay between faith and cultural adaptation. Symbolically, the evolving hairstyles mirror the internalization of Christian values and the embrace of a new way of life. As individuals altered their appearance, they signalled their commitment to the Christian faith and distanced themselves from the traditional belief systems.

4.4 The Cultural Metamorphosis of Tangkhul Hairstyles

The transition from traditional to more simplified hairstyles was not merely a superficial change but represented a deeper cultural metamorphosis. Hairstyles, as a form of non-verbal communication, played a crucial role in conveying the community’s response to the introduction of Christianity. The simplification of hairstyles signified a broader shift towards adopting Western aesthetics and values. This cultural transition can be seen as a form of adaptation and resilience. While the Tangkhul people embraced Christianity, they also sought to retain elements of their cultural identity. Over time, a syncretic approach emerged, where traditional elements were subtly integrated into new Christian practices.

The Tangkhuls faced multifaceted challenges during their conversion to Christianity, encountering resistance to change within their community. This resistance stemmed from deep-rooted cultural practices, creating a complex dynamic as they navigated the transition. Despite this, the Tangkhuls exhibited a remarkable ability to adapt, particularly evident in the evolution of their hairstyles. Resistance to change within the Tangkhul community was deeply ingrained as traditional beliefs and practices played a significant

role in their identity. The adoption of Christianity posed a challenge to these established norms, leading to a tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing a new faith. This resistance was not merely an ideological struggle but also reflected the struggle to maintain a distinct identity amidst external pressures. A notable adaptation during this conversion was witnessed in Tangkhul hairstyles. This adaptation was not just a cosmetic change but a tangible expression of the broader cultural shift within the community. Despite these adaptations, the Tangkhuls demonstrated a keen commitment to preserving their cultural identity amidst the transformations brought about by Christianity. Elements such as traditional attire, language, and customary practices remained integral to their way of life. The maintenance of these cultural markers became a deliberate effort to strike a balance between embracing a new faith and safeguarding their distinct heritage.

The journey of the newly converted Christians in Phungcham village, bearing the symbolic weight of two planks known as “*chikhai*” in the Tangkhul dialect unveils a tale of religious transformation and resilience. As they step outside their homes, the road of their village remains forbidden to them, a restriction imposed by adherents of the traditional faith. To navigate this spiritual divide, they ingeniously employed the *chikhai*, laying one *chikhai* on the road to tread upon while the other for the subsequent step. This practice, a poignant testament to their commitment to Christianity, served as a tangible expression of their newfound faith. The dual *chikhai* or planks became not only a physical means of traversing the village but also a symbolic bridge between their old and new beliefs. Over time, the echoes of change reverberated through Phungcham village. A turning point arrived when reconciliation softened the barriers between the adherents of traditional faith and the newly converted Christians. This reconciliation, a testament to the power of understanding and empathy, paved the way for a more harmonious coexistence within the community. In a significant move, those who had embraced Christianity decided to relocate to Paorei village, where their religious convictions could flourish without the shadows of past restrictions. Paorei village, now the chosen abode of the converted Christians, stands as a testament to the resilience of faith and the power of reconciliation. The journey from Phungcham village to Paorei village encapsulates not only a physical relocation but also a spiritual migration toward freedom and acceptance. In this narrative of religious transformation, the *chikhai* or planks symbolize not just a makeshift path but a profound journey of identity, belief, and coexistence. The story of these individuals serves as an inspiring reminder of the human spirit’s ability to adapt, reconcile, and find solace in a community that embraces diversity.

Similarly, in the quaint village of Chingjaroi Khullen, a profound transformation unfolded as one individual embraced Christianity, setting the stage for a complex interplay of beliefs within the close-knit community. Amidst the allure of a new faith, the absence of uniformity in adopting Christianity within families became a source of tension and conflict. Within households, a stark divide emerged between those who embraced the new faith and those staunchly adhering to traditional beliefs. A symbolic representation of this divide manifested in the form of large stones placed above doors by those clinging to ancestral customs, a gesture that hinted at an underlying threat to those who had converted. Though the threat was ominous, it is crucial to note that, fortunately, no reports of fatal consequences surfaced from such symbolic acts. Instead, the rift between family members led to instances of injuries, creating a palpable tension within the village. These incidents, however, became catalysts for dialogue and reflection, forcing the community to confront the complexities of religious conversion. In a surprising turn of events, reconciliation became the path forward. The wounded relationships began to heal, with families gradually bridging the gap between the old and the new. A pivotal moment in this narrative occurred when those who had embraced the Christian faith decided to make a fresh start. The migration of these converts to Chingjaroi Christian Village marked a significant chapter in their journey. Settling permanently in a new locale allowed them to forge a sense of

unity and solidarity among themselves. The move not only symbolized a physical relocation but also served as a metaphorical journey towards a harmonious coexistence of diverse beliefs. This tale from Chingjaroi Khullen village echoes the universal theme of the struggle for harmony amidst religious diversity. The conflicts that arose due to differing beliefs ultimately paved the way for a more nuanced understanding, fostering a spirit of reconciliation and unity within the community. As the converted Christians embarked on their new chapter in Chingjaroi Christian Village, they carried with them the lessons learned from the challenges faced in their quest for faith and acceptance.

The Tangkhuls' conversion to Christianity was not without challenges. The clash of traditional beliefs with the doctrines of Christianity led to tensions, but over time, a synthesis of the two often occurred. This syncretism allowed for the preservation of certain cultural practices while embracing the new faith. Rites and ceremonies transformed, incorporating Christian symbolism while retaining their intrinsic cultural significance. The syncretic enabled Tangkhuls to celebrate festivals and rites in a manner that resonated with both their cultural heritage and newfound faith, showcasing a harmonious coexistence. For example, the *Shalew Angkhui* festival in Chingjui village marks the culmination of ploughing and transplanting activities in the paddy fields. Traditionally, the festival's timing was heralded by the distinctive chirping of tree crickets, signalling the community's transition to a period of celebration. In pre-conversion times, the festivity involved joyous gatherings with the consumption of rice beer, a communal activity that strengthened social bonds. The festival also witnessed the slaughtering of animals such as buffalo and pigs, symbolizing abundance and prosperity in agricultural endeavors. However, with the community's conversion, there has been a shift in the festival's practices. The traditional libations of rice beer have been replaced by a more tempered celebration that involves attending church services. The essence of the festival remains rooted in gratitude for a successful harvest, but the means of expression have evolved to reflect the community's changing beliefs. The adaptation showcases the resilience of traditions in the face of evolving cultural landscapes, weaving together the threads of the past and present in Chingjui village. Moreover, syncretism acted as a mechanism for cultural resilience. By selectively integrating aspects of Christianity, Tangkhuls safeguarded their identity amidst external pressures. This adaptability allowed for the preservation of traditional languages, art forms, and social structures, ensuring a sense of continuity in the face of religious change.

The evolution of Tangkhul hairstyles in the wake of Christianity's introduction to the Tangkhul hills exemplifies the dynamic nature of cultural identity. The metamorphosis from intricate, symbol-laden hairstyles to more simplified forms reflects a community's ability to navigate cultural transitions while preserving aspects of their heritage. This paper, therefore, underscores the significance of hairstyles as cultural artifacts, serving as markers of societal change and continuity. It also contributes to the broader discourse on cultural studies by highlighting the interplay between tradition and modernity; local and global influences.

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