Chapter III

The concept of God in Thadou Kuki Religion

The traditional Thadou Kukis believes in one God, who is the highest of all gods. He is called ‘Chung pathien’ which literally means, the ‘heavenly God’ or the God who is above. In Thadou, ’Pa’ means ‘father’, and ‘then’ means ‘holy.’ So, Pathen means ‘holy father.’ He is believed to have existed in himself, and for himself. It is impossible to talk about God without talking about his attributes. God is known to them by his attributes. The common attributes of God known to Thadous may be discussed as follows:

1. **God as the creator of all things**

   Thadous have firmly held that all things on earth, visible and invisible, are created by god or Chung pathen.

   (a) **God as creator of man**

   Even before the advent of Christianity, Thadous had already believed in God as their creator. They held that there is a special purpose behind the creation of man and woman. They believe that God created man and woman in order to have good life with seven sons and seven daughters to share in his blessings. The numbers of children given to them has a great significance. Here ‘seven’ stands to signify good quality, especially, God’s goodness in bestowing his blessings to mankind. Although they
cannot give solid explanation of the how and why of human creation, they have accepted God as their creator. So, whenever they have problems both physical and mental, the *thempu* or priest would ask God this question:

*Chung Pathen! Na misensa mihem ahiti tai. I kalo ding hitam?*

**English translation:**

*O, God of heaven! The condition of this person created by you has been reduced to this state. What should I do now?*

Though they were not certain about the *how* and *why* of their origin, and why God has created them, they fully held the view that God has created them; and in utter despair and disappointment, they turn to God to solve their problems. That is why, the priest not knowing what to do in such a predicament cried out to God and consulted his creator God what he should do in such pathetic condition.

(b) **God as the creator of the world**

The creation of this world has been attributed to God or *Chung Pathen*. God is said to have exercised his divine power in the creation of the world. He created the world and maintained it. Philosophically speaking, God is the efficient cause, material cause and final cause. They also believe that all things in the world have their own purposes.

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Thadous believe that the surface of the earth was a huge mass of stony crust without soil in it. They believe that the star discharge soils in the form of excreta. The fallen excreta of stars are numerous so they later on formed hills, valleys, and mountains. So, the manure is good for cultivation.

(c) **God as creator of heavenly bodies**

They believed that God who has created man and woman also created the heavenly bodies such as, the sun, the moon, the stars etc. Thadous have never worshipped these heavenly bodies as gods or god, but believe them to be the manifestations of his creative powers. They were not aware of the Copernican revolution and believe that the earth is the central of all heavenly bodies. Thus, the moon, the stars, the sun and heavenly bodies are said to revolve round the earth. They could not comprehend of the earth being round in shape and size. They have no idea of gravitational law. They held that whatever has weight or is heavy must fall to the ground. Proper rainfall and in time means God’s pleasure and happiness to them. But when man shed innocent blood and killed each other, God is angry and he is said to withhold rain as a sign of his displeasure. They also believe that thunder and lightning display the power of the great God. Since they are careless about God, their creator, it is believe that by sending thunder and lightning, God reminds them that he is alive, and is active in his creation.
(d) **God as creator of water**

Since water is important for their sustenance, they are aware of the fact that God is the real creator of water. The main purpose of water is to meet the needs of man. It should not be used to destroy nature. God has created water for the use and well being of man.

(e) **God as creator of vegetables, grains etc.**

Thadous have attributed God to be the creator of living and non-living beings. In order to pacify him, the giver, the same is offered to God in return of his kindness to mankind on earth. Because of this belief, they are constrained to offer sacrifices to both Pathen and Nungjai. Nungjai is believed to be God’s wife. She is said to be inferior to god in power and in strength. Thadous held that *Nungjai* is not the creator God nor is she involved in creation. It may be another name of god. In one of the rituals, both *Pathen* and *Nungjai* are mentioned by the priest, He said,

\[ \text{Nang ka mimpiju, ka changpiju,} \\
\text{Chunga Pathen na lhajin, Nungjai na lhajin.} \]

**In English:**

\[ \text{O, you wine which is prepared from seeds,} \\
\text{May you propitiate Pathen and Nungjai.} \]

As shown in the cited incantation, Thadous attributed the creation of paddy, maize etc. to Chung Pathen or heavenly God. They held a belief that there will be enough food in heaven.

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102 Goswami Ibid p. 212
This is in conjunction with their belief in God as the sole giver of all their needs.

**God as creator of animals**

God is said to have created birds and animals for man to use. The important role played by animals in the life of Thadous is remarkable. To clarify this point, a story found in the folklore of Thadous will help us to understand it. *Khupting and Ngambom* were lovers. But before their marriage *Khupting* died, and her lover *Ngambom* was left alone to face all sorts of loneliness and hardships in this World. The soul of *Khupting* continued to live in *mithikhuo*, the abode of the dead people. *Ngambom* caught a wild cat sent by *Khupting* to pluck flowers on her tomb. He was led to *mithikhuo* by the wild cat. There he met *Khupting* and lived with *Khupting*. He went for fishing and hunting; but those things were quite different from what he was used to in his village. He went back to the world, died, and joined *Khupting* in *mithikhuo*. He lived with his beloved *Khupting* for the rest of his life in *mithikhuo*. Thadous held that life would continue as it is there on earth. They hope to hunt animals for food in the land of the dead people. They used to collect the heads of animals killed and posted them at a place very close to the front door of the house. *Kulsamnu*, a very big woman with unkempt hair, is said to be at the gate of *mithikhuo*, guarding the entrance to *mithikhuo*. She used to torment people who had not killed wild beasts during their lifetime on earth. So, for Thadous, killing of animals is counted as a trophy or trophies in the
village of the dead people. Thus animals played a very important role in the lives of Thadou Kukis.

2. The belief in lesser gods or spirits or thilhaho

Thadous believe in the existence of spirits called thilhaho, which literally means the soul of the dead people. The spirits of the dead or thilhas can be divided into two main groups: benevolent and malevolent spirits. These spirits are believed to be many inferiors to heavenly God or Chung Pathen. Instead of equating spirits with God, they believe that spirits and man lived together in the same place many years ago. This is supported by the legend recorded below:

In the beginning man and spirit were alike, but man kept beating the spirit so it went to God and said," man keeps beating me the way he will be killing me entirely. God said to the spirit, ‘If you make some yeast cakes with block centers and put them into his well, the center of his eyes will become black and then he will be unable to see you.’ From onward, man has been unable to see the spirits.\textsuperscript{103}

Based on this legend, Thadous believed that man and spirits lived together in the same place. They firmly held that these spirits are created beings and can never be equal with God, the creator of all things. The creator God is different from his creation. The spirits or thilhas can be broadly divided into three groups based on their habitation. Some thilhas are said to live in big trees. Some thilhas live in water. The spirits living in water are believed to be more powerful than the spirits living in rocks and forests.\textsuperscript{104} Shakespear said that the spirits living in water are so strong

\textsuperscript{103} William Shaw, opcit, p. 72
\textsuperscript{104} J. Shakespear, opcit p. 197.
that they are named *Tui Pathen*, the god of water. Though it may be called *tuipathen*, the god of water, Thadous never worship it as God, who is worthy of honor and praise. No offering is made to this spirit in particular. There are other spirits believed to live in *kols or precipices* and hills. It is said that the thilhas of Kaihlam range and Koubru fought a war. The following spirits are believed to live in forests and are visible to people at different occasions.

(a) **Zoumi**

This spirit is a female spectrum. It is believed that seeing her itself, is a dire misfortune or a forerunner of misfortune. Mr.Letpao told me that he saw this spirit sitting on a tree, while he was chasing a mithun at Mulam, Ukhrul District, and Manipur. When he saw her, she appeared as if she was as tall as the tree on which she was sitting. She can make herself tall or short depending on the situation. When Zoumi is displeased, she obstructed the way of the passer-by. She is said to be fond of sitting on a tree and make herself as tall as that tree on which she is sitting. She is very fond of sucking of the blood of fowls and also of beans when it blooms. Though this *Zoumi* is found sitting on a tall tree, she never shows her face.

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105 Ibid.

(b) **Pheisam**

Pheisam is called Maltong *because* this spirit is said to have only one leg. This spirit is the keeper of the wild beasts. His blessings can be sought, if needed. It is believed that blessings from this spirit come to mankind in the form of riches, especially a blessing on domesticated animals, and success in cultivation and hunting.

(c) **Chomnu**

*Chomnu* is another type of spirit visible to mankind. She at first sight appears as a small boy or girl. Many people have misunderstood her and took her to be a real person. Some even chased her trying to catch her. When someone tries to catch her, she disappeared and thus vanished from sight.

(d) **Lhadam**

This is another kind of spirit. *Lhadam* is literally said to be the soul of the dead people. They used to play on human beings when they go to the dense forests and jungles. Their main work is to play on mortal man, threatening them when they go to the jungle and sometimes in the village at night. Some years ago some families at Kamkeilon village heard a voice calling them to help. They went and search for the caller but could not find any one there. This continued for almost two weeks. So, they stop responding to the called. They said that many years ago a person was killed there, while cutting bamboo. His dead body remained unburied. So,

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107 Prim Vaiphei Ibid p.23
his spirit is said to live in the area. Thadous believe in the existence of other spirits called Nelhao. This group is said to be consisted of seven malevolent spirits. They keep roaming in the hills and mountains. Any one coming across this group is sure to suffer ailments. Thadous are very afraid of this group, because the group is known to be very cruel and destructive in nature. For this reason, Thadous in olden days did not mention their names as well as did not like to play their favorite musical instrument called Goshem. This Goshem is just like a bagpiper, a musical note, loved by Thadous in olden days. It is believed that Nelhaos like their musical note.

In addition to Nelhaos, there is another group called lhangnel this group can be seen with naked eyes. They can change their colors and forms, from animals to humanbeings at any moment, if and when they wished to do so. Goswami says:

> It is believed that the lhangnel can cause erosions. They can also enter the body of a baby while it is in a womb. If a baby at birth is found without hair on the side of its head, it is believed that the baby is possessed by one of the lhangnels. If two or more babies are born, on the same date at an interval of one year in between, it is considered as the work of the lhangnels. People are afraid of the lhangnels that they donot utter their names.”

108 Goswami opcit p. 215
Lhangnel

The real lhangnel is a big snake with reddish square all over the body. It has the plum of staff hairs like the teeth of a comb on its head. If any one sees lhangnel in this form, in water, the person who sees it dies.

(a) Sampi

Sampi is also another manifestation of lhangnel. It also appeared as snake and lived in water. The big snake has no plum of hair on the head. It has a plain body without the coloured cheek. It was said to me that this snake could cause damages to big lands and bridges during floods or when the river overflows its bank.

(b) Gulngongsan

It is a small snake with a red neck. This snake lives on dry ground. It is taken to be one of the manifestations of Lhangnel.

(c) Ahpachal

It is a wild cock. A real wild cock lives in jungles. Hunters used to kill this wild cock. This manifestation of lhangnel in to this wild cock proves that it can change its shapes, sizes and colours at will.

(d) Sajuhchaltung

Here the spirit lhangnel appears as if it is a real stag or a deer. It has an unusual horn formation. It has two straight horns. Hunters often
mistake this animal to be a real animal and thus tried to kill it. But it could escape unharmed.

(e) Mihema kilah

This lhangnel sometimes appear as if it is a human being. It can appear as a boy or a girl. When this is seen in its human form, especially in the form of a boy or a girl, it is found wading water when the river overflows its over bank. When it takes the form of a man, this indicates that death is imminent in the locality; especially that of men in numbers. When it takes the form of a woman or a girl, it means death of many women in the locality. When this lhangnel appears as a big snake, it is accompanied by rain. At the native village of the researcher, Kamkeilon, this happened many years ago. Though the rainfall was not heavy, rainwater came down as if it was flowing in to a big river. The snake left a big mark on the ground. The ground was cleared, and looked like a canal.

There is another group of spirits called Kaushe. They are not related to lhangnels of nelhaos, but is a disembodied spirit or being, ghostly in nature. Kaushe may be divided into three kinds:

(a) Kaumeide

It is the first kind of kaushe this is generally known as kaumeide or ghost fire. It can be seen at right. It can break itself up to many more

109 Goswami Ibid
smaller fires. They can be big or small. Many have seen this fire in its various forms. They are thought to be harmless.

(b) **Gamkau**

*Gamkau* is the second kind of kaushe. It can move very fast. Thadous are afraid of this spirit because it is held that it loves to suck human blood. No one dares to point this *gamkau* with his or her fingers at night. It can be seen at night. Parties fishing at night often see it.¹¹⁰

(c) **Kaushe**

It is highly held that people who are possessed by this spirit can enter the body of people and can eat the internal organs, especially the lungs and the heart. So great is the fear of the person that they could not as rule on any occasion utter or mention the name of the person as being possessed by *kause* for fear of being heard by the vampire. If the man, who has the spirit, hears it, he could start to devour the person who had spoken ill or him.¹¹¹

2. **Indoi, a household god**

In addition to their beliefs in God, lesser gods or spirits, Thadous also believe in *Indoi*, which literally means 'household god or deity'. This worship of *indoi* has its origin in a traditional story. *Kimchal* Hangshing had a beautiful daughter named *Japhal*, who was known for her beauty.

¹¹⁰ Shaw opcit p. 151.
¹¹¹ Shaw ibid.
She was loved not only by the boys, but attracted the spirits too. She went to a field, but did not return again.

She was searched by the people of the village, but to no avail. In the dream of her father, a spirit appeared to him and asked him stop worrying about his daughter, Japal. He was asked by the spirit to make \textit{indoi} or house magic, comprising of seven objects bound with a single court to a bamboo spike, dome of the objects being ornamented with feathers from a white cock. The spike is thrushed into the porch of the house. \footnote{Thangkhomang S. Gangte, \textit{The Kukis of Manipur}, (Delhi: GHP, 1993) p.109-110.}

\textit{Indoi} is made of the following things as instructed to Kimchadal by the spirit.

(a) Vohpi lugu or a female pig skull,

(b) Kelchalki or two horns of a he-goat,

(d) Khaokuol or bamboo bangle 7 rounds each (it should be double)

(e) Peng (small gourd) 2 pieces, one for ju, one for seed,

(f) Tengdop or tengcha (spear)

(g) Chemkol (dao)

(h) Belval (a circular stand for a jar made of bamboo split). \footnote{Thangkhomang Gangte \textit{Ibid.}}
As instructed in his dream, Kimchak took the Indoi and worshipped it or installed it in his house. As a result, he became very rich. His relatives followed his ways, and thus indoi worship became the main religious deity of the Thadous and their cognates. This indoi has become the most important house-god among Thadous. But, one of peculiar thing is that, they donot worship the indoi as god, but rather like the ark of God worshipped by the Jews. The object itself was not god, but it was held that God’s power was there or revealed through indoi. Thadous cannot be said to worship indoi in the proper sense of the term, for they donot worship any visible object as God. But they believed that the power of God was there in indoi.

Thadous believe in God, but the real problem was that he was far away from them. So, they felt that they were harassed by the evil spirits or malevolent spirits that were constantly at war with men. Since, they could not see them, as before, they had to kill their animals to please the anger of those spirits. They felt that the spirits were hindering their works. They could not enjoy the blessedness of believing in God, who created them and the whole universe. Inspite of all these, they still attributed all goodness to God, who wonderfully bestows his blessings to man and animals. Thadous understood God as a loving God, who never wants his created beings to suffer especially, the human beings. So, all sufferings and problems are said to be the works of the malevolent spirits.

114 Ibid
The researcher asked a priest about the works of the spirits. He replied the researcher and said that a spirit called lhajong is behind the death of all human beings on earth. He said that lhajong is the killer of man. This spirit is behind all divorces. It caused untold problems and sufferings to man and his environment.

Thadous understood God as a loving God, who never wants his people to suffer hardships and pain. As the spirits are said to have caused all sufferings and pain, they blamed all the spirits for all disorders and complained to Gos. The fact is seen when some one dies. They rely on God, though they failed to worship him as he really is. Those persons who could see the spirits are said to be less fortunate. They are thought to be enslaved by the spirits to work out their evil designs as their agents. Had they worshipped the spirits, they would have such people as great prophets like Daniel, Hoshea, Jeremiah etc. those prophets found in the Old Testament. Instead, those who can see the spirits are said to be unfortunate fellows, who are abnormal to carry on their normal duties.

The fact that Thadous worship the living God is seen in the way they express their thank fulness to God for all the good things he has done for them. For instance, a good harvest is attributed to God, not to spirits. All misfortunates, even deaths are considered to be the work of the spirits. God loves, but the spirits are the sources of their sufferings and misfortunes.