Chapter IV

RITES AND RITUALS IN THADOU KUKI RELIGION

Rites and rituals constitute the practical aspects of religion. They are involved in every religion. The lives of traditional Thadou kukiis are associated with colourful *rite de passage*. The following rites and rituals are practised by Thadous in their traditional worship. The important rites and rituals are discussed below:

1. **Birth rite**: As soon as the child is born, a piece of cloth is tied immediately in the navel of the child and then the umbilical cord is cut with the edge of a piece of bamboo or a clean knife. The mother of the child is served with wine soon after she delivered the child. After serving the wine, she is thus allowed to embraced the child or put the child to her breasts.

   (a) **Naominbol**

   Naominbol or naming ceremony is very important among the Thadou Kukis. This naming ceremony is a must as soon as the identity of the child is known. In naming a child, the name should contain part of the name of the grand father or mother of the child, depending on whether the child is a male or female. For instance, my son Thagminlun is named after my father Thongkhothang. Here, the last name of my father becomes the first name of my son, Thangminlun. In this regard, Thangkhomang Gangte says, “The naming system is so strong that even after generations it still holds way in the Kuki society and can maintain their genealogical
tree for generations together without confusion mainly through the naming system”

(b) **Naodopju**

Naodopju is a wine specially prepared for this occasion. The parents of the newborn child prepared this wine in reception of the child to their family. This ceremony is performed within seven days of childbirth. It is natural to invite neighbours and relatives for the ceremony. Here, the father of the child served *Ju* or wine to all invitees.

(c) **Naodopan**

When a child is born, there are many people involved in the process of delivery, as doctors are not available. For all these people, a special meal is prepared in reciprocation of their labour for the purpose, which is called *Naodopan* or *Naodom vah*. The parents of the child may kill a fowl or a big depending upon their capacity and served to all those invitees. They all partake the food happily together in the occasion. This is very important ceremony to reciprocate the experts in child delivery, who involved in that particular delivery. They thought that, when a child is to be delivered, the mother is in the brink of a tomb or jaws of death. If the whole process is finalized safely, it is credited to the experts of the delivery who are involved in it.

115 Thangkhomang S. Gangte *Ibid* p. 114
116 Khaikhotinthang Kipgen, *opcit*, p.93
This is one of the most important and significant ceremony after childbirth. Here, the priest is to bless the newborn child. Thadous are very peculiar in performing this rite. They do not allow an unmarried thempu or priest to perform the rite. This rite is prepared by the thempu who killed a cock outside the house, taking the name of the child in order that the child may grow up strong and famous. The importance of performing such a rite can be seen from a legend of Thadous that runs as follow:

Once upon a time there was a man who went to the forest hunting, and as it become night he took up a place under a tree for the night. About midnight, he was awaken by all thilhas calling to the thilha of the tree saying, “Let us go to the village of the human beings and cut the navel cord of the child who is to be born this night” the thilha of the tree replied, “I can’t go with you as I have a stranger tonight” The thilha of the tree stayed back. So, the thilhas went and after a short time returned. The thilha of the tree asked who cut the navel cord and the other told him that the same had already been cut by a tiger. The thilha of the tree then asked when the tiger would kill the child and the other replied saying, “When the child grows up, he will marry two wives. The two wives after a time will quarrel over a paddy mortar. So, the husband in order to make peace between them will go to the jungle and make another mortar so that the two wives may have one each. It is then that the tiger would kill him."

The hunter heard all the words of the thilhas and went home. On reaching home, he found that his wife gave birth to a son. He remembered what was said by the thilhas. The two wives quarreled after a paddy mortar as the son married two wives. So, the sone of the hunter went to the jungle to

\[117\] Khaikhotingthang Kipgen Ibid p.52.
\[118\] Shaw opcit p. 52.
make one more mortar. His father remembering the words of thilhas followed him. As the son was making a mortar, the tiger came. But his father killed it with his bow and arrow. The son on seeing the tiger killed by his father was very pleased, and going up to the tiger and got hold of its whiskers and said:

If my father had not killed, I would have killed you.” When drawing away his hand, the tiger’s whisker cut him and he died almost at once. So, in spite of his father’s warning, what the thilhas had predicted came true. Seeing all these happenings, the father of the dead youth declared in future a baby’s umbilical cord should be cut immediately after its birth and a name be given soon after its birth.  

Many Thadous felt that it was unwise to take the baby out into the sun before a particular period of time. The usual time fixed is seven days after birth of a son, and five days after the birth of a daughter.

(d) Naopui or christening of the child

This is a special occasion where the child is to be taken to the maternal uncle or to the maternal grand parents. It is usually done when the child is strong enough to be carried or walk distance. The father-in-law will kill a fowl or a pig and thus performed the ceremony. In this happy occasion, the child’s parents are to give special wine or JU prepared for the purpose to be carried and poured by the family’s tuchas and bechas. (Tucha is a son-in-law of the house owner, who is at the beck and call of the family, to do all that is required, especially preparation of food etc. Becha is a person appointed by the house owner to help him in

119 Goswami ibid p. 5.
deciding family matters. In many cases, he is to speak what the house owner or inneipa is to say. So, he acts on behalf of the house owner). The baby’s parents also present the in-laws kind of woven clothes called *Naopuipon* (a cloth given to the in-laws by the parents of a child). Here, in this ceremony, the most important thing is the blessing of the child by the maternal grand father. It is a common practise to present a shawl to the maternal grandfather. The maternal grandfather in return, should kill a pig or a fowl. The blessing words should also be followed by *kilhalho*, which is performed to ward off the evil eye or the devil and future illness. Here the thempu plays a very important role in the preparations of the ingredients to be used in these Ceremonial blessings. The mother of the child should take the ginger, which is prepared by the thempu. Goswami writes:

Nang ka thingpinu, ka thing pipa,
Leiduppi, leithaopia hung kon chun,
Atin damlo hen, alun damlo hen,
Son, apah, phahen, hiche thing hitoh
Kethahen, nehje aumptapoi, chaje aumptapoi.

English translation

O mother of ginger!
O father of ginger!
You have grown out of the loamy soil
May you and your baby be
Blessed with health and long life,
May your child and children to be
Born of this child be prosperous.\(^{120}\)

Having pronounced the above blessing, the thempu gives the mother a chip of ginger and says, “From now on there shall be no restriction for

\(^{120}\) Goswami *Ibid* p. 7.
you in eating and drinking. Thadous have been very concerned about the identity of the baby. They prefer boy to girl baby. The reason is not far to seek. Their family lineage is counted from male line only. They rejoiced more when they got boy baby. On the other hand, inheritance is counted from the male line only. No female has any right to claim the property of her parents.

II. **Marriage rites**

Thadous have four kinds of marriages they are, *Chongmou*, *Sahapsat*, *Jollhai* and *Kijammang*. Brief discussion is as follow:

(a) **Chongmou**

*Chongmou* is the ideal form of marriage, here, in this form of marriage many people are involved. The boy’s parents send their agents or go-between to the house of the girl and they convey the message by giving *JU* or wine prepared specially for the purpose. When the girl’s parents agree with the proposal of the boy’s parents, the parents of the boy will kill a pig and thus started the discussion. The meat thus served is called *keptansa*. Here the two parties agreed to the actual price of the bride to be paid before the wedding day. There may be or may not be some haggling of the bride price to be paid to the girl’s parents. But agreement should be reached before the bride is taken away to the house of the boy. When the parties agreed upon a date, then both parties for fix the date the great occasion called *moupui*. To meet the challenge of the bride’s party, the bridegroom

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121 Goswami Ibid p. 7.
is to send his strongmen to the bride’s house. The representatives of both parties feasted at the expense of the bride’s parents. The parties thus indulged themselves in wrestling. Thangkhomang Gangte says:

If you are brave enough  
To snatch away the girl  
From our midst for your wife,  
Come and show us your prowess  
That you really deserve to be the man of our beloved girls.  

In the ensuing wrestling, the bride party usually wins the boy’s party. This is done so that the bridegroom’s party patient and show restrains to allow themselves to be overpowered by the girl’s party wins the wrestling, she, the bride is said to have a bright future, that is, to have many children. The next day, the bride and the bridegroom leave for the boy’s house.

(b) Sahapsat

In Sahapsat, the same procedure is followed, except wrestling and other activities. The bride and the bridegroom may leave the same day or the next day in the early morning. The role of the thempu or priest is important and it cannot be ruled out. In performing the wedding ceremony, the priest says the following to the newly wedded couple:

God has made you to live as husband and wife, (addressing the bride) and you are sent by God to become one of the members of the bridegrooms’s clan. It is not desireable for you to live with your clans after your marriage. Your love and attachment should not be exclusively meant for your parents. You have now become a member of your husband’s clan and it is your duty to beget children for your husband’s clan.”

122 Thangkhomang Gangte Ibid p. 81
123 Goswami opcit p. 52.
Thadous stressed happy union based on love. As the boy and the girl tie the knot, they are expected to bear many sons and daughters. Marriage to the Thadous is a permanent contract.

c) **Jollhai**

*Jollhai* is a kind of marriage, which is an elopement. This jollhai is different from the two kinds of marriages already discussed. Here, the boy impregnates the girl. They may be in love or may not be necessary be so. When others know the girl’s pregnancy, the boy, who impregnated takes the girls to be his wife. They boy’s parents have to go to the girl’s parents to discuss the whole matter. There at the girl’s parent’s house, they tried their best to settle the matter at any cost. Having settled the difference, they fixed the exact man or bride’s price to be taken by the girl’s parents.

d) **Kijammang or elopment**

This is the most common form of marriage. If a boy and girls are in love, they can marry even without getting the consent of their parents by eloping to a particular place or to any place the couple felt best. For this form of marriage, no ceremony is performed by both parties.

e) The boy’s parties has to go to the girl’s house and thus reported what has happened and try to come to an agreement to settle the bride’s price etc. If settled amicably, the man or price should be paid on due course. Here, the reasons for elopment may differ from person to person. Thangkhomang Gangte says,
When a boy and girl fall in love and when their parents or either of the parents raise strong objection to union, or when there appears a third person in between the boy and the girls, who is likely to stand in their way, because of his being a serious contender to win the hand of the girls in marriage, or when the economic consideration that involves in the event of all formalities of marriage are to be fulfilled in the case of either the boy or the girls being in abject poverty, or even when the girls is impregnated by either of the lovers, in all these cases marriage by elopment is resorted to.\textsuperscript{124}

When a boy or a girl eloped, the boy’s parents are to go the girl’s house to report the matter to the parents of the girl. A ceremony called inlut is performed. They tried their best to make peace with the girl’s parents. When this inlut is done, then the girl’s parents will recognise the marriage as valid and accept the two as son and daughter. If by accident, the girl died before this inlut is performed, the girl’s parents will not allow the boy’s family to bury her dead body untill and unless all outstanding problems are solved by both parties including man or bride price. So, when inlut is performed, the marriage is considered valid and the two families maintain thus a new relationship. The daughter will remain their daughter, but the son or the husband will be called son-in-law to the wife’s parents. But in some cases, the parents are not convinced and thus take back their daughter even though she has lost her virginity.\textsuperscript{125}

Regarding marriage rituals, it will be proper to discuss man or bride’s price, as it is very important in setting disputes in marriages. In Thadou society the price of the bride entirely deoends upon the social status of the

\textsuperscript{124} Thangkhomang Gangte opcit p. 79.
\textsuperscript{125} Prin Vaiphei opcit p. 10
person involved. Bride price differs from clan to clan even among Thadous. Shaw says:

The question of the amount of marriage prices among Thadou is not definite. Chiefs and wealthy persons usually claim and pay the equivalent of 10 mithuns, Rs.200 in cash, 2 dahpi (large gong), 2 dahbu (set of gongs) 2 khichang (ear beads), 2 khichong (necklaces). The ordinary person often actually pays a couple of mithun, khichang and khichong and Rs. 25 or so in cash. 126

There is no common fixed price to be taken as bride’s price. It is said that Sitlhou chiefs were said to have taken 10 mithuns, Rs.200, 2 dahpi, 2 dahbu, 2 khichong plus pile gol, neojo sumsan. 127 On the otherhand, Singsons charged 30 mithuns without any items, such as Khichong, Khichang, Dahbu, Dahpi etc., unlike the other clans of Thadou Kukis.128

Thadous never allowed the bride price to be paid in full, though they may afford to do so. It is retained just to show love and respect to the wife’s family. In some cases, the retaining part remained unpaid for many years, say even upto a generation or so. 129 The following may be discussed in connection with the price of bride.

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127 Ngulseh Hangshing, opcit, p.105.
126 Thangkhomang Gangte opcit p. 95.
129 Shaw opcit p. 59.
Mankang

This *mankang* is not counted in the bride’s price and the same is not included in it. The father of the girl may ask his friends or any one who is related to him to take this mankang. But the claimant has to give a gift to the girl in the form of necklace etc. To claim this, he must kill at times three pigs or for their equivalent to the next of kin or to the husband. This is not compulsory. It all depends on the decision of the bride’s father. But the claimant cannot claim more than a mithun. If the bride divorced her husband and returned to her father’s house, the claimant has to complete his task by giving the remaining amount to the girl’s husband. If the donor dies before one pig is killed, no claim lies against the bridegroom.\(^{130}\)

(a) Manpi

*Manpi or manlamkai* is paid to the father of the girl. Man or bride price can be different depending on the clans to which the girl belongs. J. Shakespear said the mithun paid to the girl’s father is fixed to 3 and the maximum is 30 mithuns. Khaikhotinthang Kipgen aid, “The price of a bride can be paid by instalments. The following are the bride prices of some major Thadous clans: Doungel and Sitlhou 10 mithuns, 2 gongs, 2 necklace and 2 earbeads. Chongloi and Hangshing 7 mithuns, 1 gong, 1 white gong, 1 bead and 1 necklace. Kipgen and Haokip 10 mithuns, 2 gongs, 2 necklaces and 2 earbeads.\(^{132}\) In general, a female mithun called

\(^{130}\) Ngulseh Hangshing *opcit* p.108  
\(^{131}\) Shaw *opcit* p. 59.  
\(^{132}\) Khaikhotinthang Kipgen *opcit* p. 98
sielpi chapotsa. A mithun which already borne a baby or given birth. Gangte says, “For this purpose one mithun is always attach to the bride price, and is considered to lead the whole lot of bride price and is called manlamkai.”

(b) Sumkhao sattan man

If girls married someone other than the one to whom she is bethrothed, then she must pay a pig or mithun to the bridegroom first selected for breach of promise. One the other hand, if a boy fails to carry out a promise after the performance of sumtansa, he has to pay a mithun to the girl’s parents. So, this sumkhao sattan man is applicable to both boys and girls who ever failed to carry out the agreed proposal.

(c) Jalkhun chonman

It is a mithun paid to the first husband by the second husband. No Jalkhunchonman is charged if the husband dies, it is the duty of the man’s brother to take her as his wife. In that case he has nothing to pay as the bride’s price etc. The rule is that as he, the brother of the deceased should lovingly take care of his brother’s wife. If a distant relative marries the said widow, then the first husband’s family can charge jalkhun chonman. The minimum charge is a mithun.

(d) Noitui chanman

If a man dies leaving behind his wife who does not return to her

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133 Thangkhomang Gangte opcit p. 94.
parents again, but lives on in her husband’s house or in the village, and some person marries her then a mithun is to be paid to the late husband’s next of kin or to his children by the new husband. This must be paid in addition to the bride’s price.

Thadous never charge full man or bride’s price in the second marriage for a divorced or a widowed or a runaway wife. It must, as a rule, be one mithun less than that of the first marriage.

(c) **Dumditman**

A mithun is paid to the father of the woman as *dumditman*. If the woman died without having given birth to any children, this amount should be paid in full satisfaction of the next of kin male. No *longman* is due either. ¹³⁴ *Dumditman* is paid to the woman’s father if she dies without leaving any issue, whether male or female. No man or bride price is to be taken. Death cancels the bride price. ¹³⁵

(f) **Jollei**

Jollei is a kind of fine in cash or in kind measured in terms of one mithun paid to the father of the girl if the boy or the man who impregnated the girl refuse to marry her. If the man intends to take the child, when weanable, he has to pay one more mithun to the girl’s parents as a fee or charge of the maintenance of the child. If the father concerned refuses to take the child when it is weanable, then the child will be

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¹³⁴ Shaw opcit p. 61
¹³⁵ Ngulseh Hangshing opcit p. 111
Counted as a member of the mother's family. In this case, the final decision is to be taken by the person who impregnated the woman whether or not he is to take the child. His decision made on that account should not be changed or altered in any way. The child should be born in the house of the one that impregnated the woman thus making recognition of the child better or easier. If the child dies before he or she is three years of age, both husband and wife will share the misfortune.

(g) **Sukai**

Sukai is a fee, an amount of which is paid by the boy or bridegroom to the chief of the village to which the girl belongs when he takes her to be his wife. This practice of Sukai has a story of its own, which runs as follows:

In the days of Munthom, one of his villagers married one woman named Kilnem and fled away to Khodai village. At the request of the girl’s parents, Munthom went to Khodai to bring her back. But unfortunately, the people of that village killed Munthom. His son, Thomhil when grew up wanted to take revenge. So, he attacked Khodai village and killed many people there. He then proclaim that he would take *sukai*, kind of tax levied on women or married girls as the *longman* or corpse price of his dead father, Munthom. Thus, the custom became established among the Thadous.\(^{136}\)

(h) **Jachatman**

It is a fine imposed on a person in the form of a mithun paid to a man who entices or seduces a way or impregnated the wife of another

\(^{136}\) Ngulseh Hangshing *opcit* 110-111.
man. In otherwords, this is a mithun paid by the adulterer to the husband of the woman as a fine.

(i) Daman or Divorce

_The man who divorces his wife to his wife's parents pays Daman or divorce price._ Instead of getting something back, the man has to pay one more mithun to what he has already paid. But if the woman runs away, the man must call him by sending his own people. But if the woman runs away because of her own fault or mistakes and the case is found to be valid, what he has already paid is returnable. After sending his delegations, if the woman does not want to go back, her family has to return all man or bride’s prices to the man who married the woman.

(j) Sumken

Though some would call this _sumken as_ dowry, it is not exactly a dowry, but a love- gift given by the brother or the best friend of the father to the bride. In Thadou, it is called _thilken_, which is a property gift. It is a _thilken_ or a love gift given to a bride by her parents or relatives. Unlike the dowry, this can never be fixed by the husband or the wife, but it all depends upon the generosity of the parents and their relatives. It is said that sumken or thilken is a must in chongmou in sahapsat, but the amount cannot be fixed.\(^\text{137}\)

\(^{137}\) Ngulseh Hangshing Ibid p. 115.
Laisui

*Laisui* is a gift given to the bride’s mother in kind, and not in cash. It is given in the form of cloth by the boy’s family for having given birth to the girl, who now becomes his dear and loving wife.

(k) Lutom

*Lutom* is a gift given to the girl’s father by the boy’s family in the form of a cloth, as he being the one who begets the girl.

III. Death rites

Thadous hold a serious view of death. They believe that evil spirits or malevolent spirits causes death. So, in anger and anguish, relatives of the dead person takes up dao and start challenging the one who caused death. As soon as they know that dead occurs in the family, the common practice is to call the relatives of the dead person, and they will ask him not to leave them, as they love him or her. It is said that when a person is dying, all the relatives are called to the house and they call to him or her not to leave them. It is said that by this means (calling the dead person not to leave them) person almost dead are sometimes brought back to life again. Since the soul’s attention has been attracted back to the house from its wanderings by the calling of the name.\(^{138}\) *Thilhas* or spirits are believed to have caused the death of any person. In the course of the researchers interview a *thempu* or priest who worked as a witch doctor or an active priest told him that a malevolent spirit names *lhajong* is

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\(^{138}\) Shaw opcit p. 53.
responsible for all deaths. It is not God who killed people, but this lhajong, he said. In their utter despair, the members of the dead person's family will then challenge the thilha or spirit and say, "Where is the thilha who has taken away our loved one. Let it show now and we will kill it. " This act itself is called kitom. The utterances show itself or the words used during kitom are beautifully rendered into English by Thangkhomang Gangte as follows:

I am the son of so and so, who the devil are you  
To snatch away so and so from our midst? Where are you?  
Reveal yourself, I challenge you. If I were able to see you with my naked eyes, I would have done to you like this and like that (brandishing what is in hand).  

As soon as they finished kitom, they start chopping the doorpost with dao as if they are going to kill the thilha who killed the dead person. Weeping and showing sorrow and concern then follows this. The dead body is then washed and covered in a cloth and the same is placed in what is called sanglai. The coffin is usually made of rough planks. Thadous buried they are dead outside the house. The relatives and friends of the dead person dig the grave. Bamboo marks are made to that the dead person killed animals or performed the so-called changai during his lifetime, here on earth.

**Classification of death**

Death may be classified into three main groups:

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139 Thangkhomang Gangte opcit 108.
(a) Thipha or natural death; (b) Senhut or childhood death; and (c) Thise or unnatural death.

(b) Thipha

_Thipha_ is known as natural death. This is different from _thise_ in a number of ways. Those who died natural death are accorded or buried in the normal ways. As soon as death is known, messengers called _thijinkou’_ are sent out to inform all the relatives, close friends friends, and the others who cared for the dead person. In many cases, it is thise messengers who perform this _kitom_ as soon as they return from their mission.

It is said that this kitom was not obligatory on the part of every messenger on his return from his mission of breaking the sad news of demise of relatives and well wishers. Even if one does not know how to do kitom, he is taught how to do it. Otherwise, it is feared that such messenger, who does not perform ‘kitom’, will be taken ill.¹⁴⁰

(c) Senhut thi

Senhutthi or childhood death is considered the first death in the family this usually occurs within birth to three years of age. If it is senhut thi, the child is covered with the shawl of its father and is buried in a hole below the raised platform floor of the house. The body is lowered into the hall from above through an opening made from the floor crushed bamboo flats.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Goswami opcit p. 203
(c) **Thise or unnatural death**

If a person dies of leprosy, and accident like falling from a tree, killed by animals, or by enemies, it is called *thise* or unnatural death. The death body cannot be given all the natural burial system followed in the case of natural death. For instance, the dead body of a person who died by hanging or committing suicide by hanging or killing himself by a gun or so may not be touched by others because such dead is considered a bad death or unnatural death. A man who murders his fellow man must not be given natural burial. Thangkhomang Gangte says:

> An exclusion of persons of importance in the reckoning of genealogical tree of the clan or lineage due to being a murderer is the example of Thalhun in the genealogical tree of the Thadous, because he killed his wife accidentally. ¹⁴²

Here, in this case, Shakespear goes further and says that in case of unnatural death or thise, memorial stones are not generally put up by the Thadous, with the exception of Singsons, whose proximity to the Lushais might be the main reason why they are different from the other clans. ¹⁴³

No rite is performed for the people who committed suicide and unnatural death. If a person dies of an epidemic or of a certain diseases, the dead body is to be buried outside the village. So, no rite is performed when a person died of cholera, leprosy or of small pox.

If the dead person performed chon ritual, during his lifetime, he should not be buried before seven days. Each day the dead body is to be

¹⁴² Thangkhomang Gangte opcit p. 113
¹⁴³ J. Shakespear opcit p. 205.
taken out of the house seven times with much shouting. A mithun is to be killed on each day. The carrying in and out of the corpse is called lap. This process of lap is continued for seven days or more days. This is done, and has become a customary way of paying respect to the great person and acknowledgement of their prosperity and good deeds during their lifetime. Every relative and slave has to attend the ceremony and bring with them some animals to be killed to adorn the great man’s grave. In olden days, human skulls taken for the lap ceremony from some other clan had to be added to the other trophies over a chief’s grave. Thus, the chiefs are given special status even in their death by putting their corpses into a small house, which usually is not very far from the village of the chief. His dead body is to be dried in the fire in order to prevent from decomposition.

Thadous are in the habit of cutting off the heads of the dead chiefs and take them to be buried in another place so as not to allow any one to steal the head of the chief, found, or removed as trophies, should the village be raided. The internal organs of the animals killed in honour of the dead person are placed on leaves at the post against which the corpse rested during the funeral feast and are left for several days, even up to one month. At every meal a handful of rice is taken out of the post and placed on the leaves before any one is allowed to eat. The portion of the food thus set aside or offered is known as thianse or thianpeh, which literally means a food, offered to the deceased.

144 Khaikhotinthang Kipgen opcit p. 103.
145 J. Shaespear opcit p. 204.
146 Shakespear Ibid p. 204.
*Thempu* or the priest leads the funeral ceremony and even in the shouting ‘*Lam ot in*’ or ‘make way.’ After laying the corpse of the deceased in the grave, some persons whose relatives had died earlier drop some quantity of Ju or wine, fruits etc. in to the grave in the belief that the soul of the dead person would take them to heaven where the soul of their late relatives lived.

Thadous do not throw away the soil dug out for the grave, but used it again for filling up the grave. After the burial of the deceased, animal mostly domesticated ones are killed as *kosa*, which means grave meat. These animals killed for *kosa* is considered to be the last animal killed by the deceased.\(^{147}\) If the dead person had not performed chang-ai ceremony or sa-ai, a pig was the animal killed on the day of *kosa*. This animal killed as *kosa* has a very great significance for the deceased, especially for his journey after death to the village of the dead called *Mithikhuo*. After taking out some portion of the meat, the rest are cooked to be served to feed all that attend the funeral service on that day. This animal, killed as *kosa* is said to be very important. According to traditional belief, animal killed as *kosa* are taken to constitute a part of the property or properties of the soul of the deceased in heaven or *Mithikhuo*.

It is also said that there is a practise among Thadous and other Kuki group of people that purifying from the contamination of death and its burial is a must. Thangkhomang Gangte says:

In taking this purifying bath, some water is prepared in a big brass gong where in silver and beads are dipped. With such

\(^{147}\) Khaikhotinthang Kipgen opcit p. 104.
water, the persons concerned take bath symbolically by washing their hands or whatever part of their body they wish to wash. In this process they purify themselves.

Thadous used to claim longman or corpse price in the past. The exact price is not fixed, but it is generally considered that a mithun or Rs.40 (Rupees forty) is sufficient. The dead person’s maternal uncle is the recipient. To claim this corpse price, the one who claims has to kill a pig or a mithun, which called mangman betna. This longman or corpse price cannot be claimed if the dead persons died or thise or unnatural death. No claim should be entertained if the deceased died of accident, suicide, is killed by enemies or has been killed by a tiger etc. longman can be claimed if a person dies natural death. If a woman dies before giving birth to or dies because she is with child, no longman can be claimed.

IV. Belief in life after death

Even before the advent of Christianity, Thadous firmly believed that there is life after death. The person who died a natural death is washed and thus given a clean bath and dressed in the best garments. An elderly person puts a piece of cloth in the anus of the dead person in order to allow the corpse leaning his back against the middle pillar called Sut or Sanglai. Having performed Thilamhom, this is making way for the dead person, with shouting, crying and chanting of the names of the forefathers of the deceased one by one from Chongthu to the dead man. Firing of guns, and chopping of the left front frame of the door of the house. This is

148 Thangkhomang Gangte op.cit p. 111.
149 Ngulseh Hangshing op.cit 121-122.
done, perhaps to reveal the dead persons’s identity so that evil spirits may respect the departed soul on its journey to heaven.\textsuperscript{150} With the departure of the soul from the dead body a gong is sounded off and on until the dead body is buried. What Prim Vaiphei says about the Vaiphei is true of the Thadou also. He says, “Today is the day we part, do not love us, do not love your family, but go in peace.”\textsuperscript{151} This was the parting words of the family members and loved ones of the deceased. It is also held that the soul lives on and used to visit his or her house for seven days after burial. After seven days, the soul is believed to have gone to heaven or the village of the dead people, mithikhuo. Thadous believe that life does not end with physical death, but it will continue to exist in heaven. So, the living ones comforted themselves by saying that their loved ones are living in heavens. The song composed by a man who deeply mourned the death of his child explicitly explains this idea very well as below:

Lengvan san nan ka banjal aneme.
Ka tuoil buolna chung thangvan hung khe nem in.

\textbf{In English:}

Tired are my hands stretched towards heaven,
Descend nearer, high heavens,
My beloved child’s abode.\textsuperscript{152}

Thadous held that the soul of a dead person never perished with death. Death is considered to be a gate that leads to heaven or \textit{mithikhuo}, the abode of the dead people. Detail discusssion of the abode of the dead people or heavens may be as follow:

\textsuperscript{150} Khaikhotinthang Kipgen opcit p. 106.
\textsuperscript{151} S. Prim Vaiphei opcit p. 41
\textsuperscript{152} Khaikhotinthang Kipgen opcit p. 100.
(a) **Mithikhuo has a gate**

Before a person enters the abode of the dead or mithikhuo, there is a gate. In order to live there in mithikhuo, or heaven or vangam, one has to die physically. Kulsamnu, a woman with unkempt hair, big breast and dreadful guard the entrance to mithikhuo. As a gate keeper, she used to torment those poor souls who had not killed any wild animals during their life time by asking them to catch or pick up her lice; which is said to be composed of worms and insects. Children are afraid of her and her lice. Knowing this, when children died, their parents wisely put the seeds of mustard or sesame in the nails of children. This is done just to cheat Kulsamnu, who would be satisfied on hearing the sound of the cracking of the seed. It is said that Ngambom, the legendary hero of the folktale once killed this woman. But she is said to regain her life after hours of unconsciousness. But she is said to be afraid of the soul of bravemen, who killed their enemies and wild beasts during their lifetime on earth. She, being a woman is said to be afraid of such gallant men who killed both men and wild beast.

(b) **There are two places in mithikhuo**

Though there are differences in opinion, there are two important places in the land of the dead people. One place is reserved for commoners and the other for the overcomers. The overcomers are the ones who killed animals and enemies. The skulls of those animals and enemies killed are said to be counted as trophies in that village of the dead people. Commoners are those who hardly enter the abode of the dead
people but had not killed animals or enemies. Commoners had not performed the chon feast or Sa Ai or Chang ai to prove their superiority in their life time on earth. So, whatever was done, was done, not only for this life here on earth, but also for the next life to come; where they would be awarded for their good deeds and valour. In the middle of mithikhuo, it is believed that there is a tree known as Sohlibungbu, a plum tree that grows upside down. If someone picks or plucks the fruit of sohlibungbu, it falls upward. It is further held that Kosa or Gravemeat animals have been killed as Kosa, the animals thus killed as kosa are tied together at that tree. As many people have died, and as many animals are killed for kosa, the tree is about to fall down one day. The animals killed for kosa will surely pull down the plum tree. If this plum tree falls, this will bring an end to life on earth. But life in mithikhuo will never be touched or harmed by the said catastrophe. Here one can be aware of the end time plus the hope of their future after death.

The concept of life after death is supported by folklores, others told, and retold among Thadous. Let us cite the case of a story in a nutshell. Khupting and Ngambom were in love. To make the long story short, Khupting died and left Ngambom to feel the pangs of love in the world of the living. He, through a wild cat reached mithikhuo, before he died. He could recognise Khupting very well in that land of the dead. Both of them lived in mithikhuo very happily, though Ngambom was living his earthly life. Life was quite different for Ngambom from what he used to live on earth. He went back to the world and died physically to join his beloved Khupting in the land of the dead people. When he went back to
mithikhuo, he wondered at his works and achievements while he was sojourning in the land or the dead people. Thus he and Khupting were united happily in the land of the dead people to enjoy life.

V. Religious rites and rituals

Thadous believe that what they do here on earth has a corresponding importance in the next life or the life to come after death. It is, therefore, important to be familiar with all rites and rituals, which are performed in order to gain or express divine approval as below:

(a) Chang-ai

Thadous highly esteemed this feast called Chang-ai. It is the most important festival where woman took the leading part. Thadous settlements in the early part of their journey were large. The performers of the feast have to feed the whole population of the village. As it is very expensive, it can be performed by few people who are well to do. In olden day, it was performed by the wives of chiefs and rich people who could afford to provide food for the entire village.

In the actual rite, they marked the numbers of bushels of paddy consumed in the festivities. In order to get the recognition of God, the giver of paddy, a stone is erected. They expected God to look down from heaven and be aware of the ritualistic feast. A woman is allowed to perform this feast three times during her lifetime on earth. Drinking and dancing is done in the house of the performer of this feast. The animal
killed for the feast is mithun. The performers do so, in order to be assured of a secured place in *mithikhuo*, where they will be heading to after death.

(b) **Sa-ai**

Sa-ai is performed by man only since it has to do with the killing of animals in the jungle. The one who performs the feast has to feed the whole village for a day. Men who killed ferocious and wild beasts are entitled to perform this ritualistic feast. In order to perform this feast, a person must fulfilled this requirements: he must killed a tiger; an eagle (*muvanlai*); a wild bear; thoche and *vengke*. Even if he had not killed them all, he can add to his credit, if his close relatives, such as younger brother, elder brother or nephew etc. and killed the, to fulfill the apriori condition.153

The priest sought the permission of Pathen to erect the ‘Y’ shaped post. After erection of the post, the animal is killed by piercing it with a spear or a sharp bamboo made specially for the purpose. After blessing the performer, the *thempu* or priest killed the animal, *Ju* or wine is served, thus they all enjoyed the *Ju* and food served by the performer.

(c) **Chon**

Chon is one of the most valued and expensive festivals of Thadous. This ritualistic feast can be performed only by any man who has performed *Sa-ai* three times. In order to perform this festival, a person has to kill 7 each of all kinds of animals. Except Noimangpa and Thadoupa,

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153 Thangkhomang Gangte opcit p. 179
no other person has ever performed this chon festival. Later on the rule was relaxed to allow and enable others to perform the same feast, if they could afford it. According to Ngulseh Hangshing, Chon can be performed successively by killing a fowl, a pig, and finally by killing a mithun. It is believed that the performer of chon will be awarded a paramount place in the abode of the dead called mithikhuo. They are assured of eternal happiness there.

The real important rites and rituals are given below in addition to what has been discussed.

(a) Daikham

Thadous performed this rite called aikham to avert the spread of epidemic diseases. The actual rite is performed by the priest, who can be called a doctor or medicineman. Daikham is composed of different things such as animals, roots, trees and blood. The ai-plant, which is a kind of small plant, is mixed with others like Thingsaphulip and Thingthuh trees. The blood of Guldu or gibbon is mixed with other things for the villagers to anoint themselves with the material and also taste a little bit of it. They like to anoint the forehead. The thempu then put the left overs at the gate or on the way and then calls upon Pathen’s or God’s help to protect the whole village from epidemic. The village will remain taboo for a minimum of fifteen days. During this time, no one is allowed to go out or

154 Khaikhotingthang Kipgen opcit p. 85.
155 Ngulseh Hangshing opcit p.
156 Khaikhotingthang Kipgen opcit p. 85.
157 Shaw opcit p. 76.
go in to the village. No visitor is allowed. Shaw said, “It is said that one
gibbon dies each moon and so they are not heard making a noise between
the old and the new moon. The death is the tool taken by Pathen from
them in order that they may be quiet then. In consequence, a gibbon is
thought to be the appropriate animal to sacrifice in case of approaching
fatal epedemics.\footnote{Shaw opcit p. 77.}

In general, Thadous used trees as good medicines. They used
\textit{Thingsaphulip} tree like a powder and spread the same in the field as a
good pesticide to prevent insects from destroying their paddy plants in the
fields. As a member of Thadou community, the researcher has the
experience of spreading the said pesticide to prevent \textit{Kumthu}, a kind of
insect from destroying the paddy plants.

(b) \textbf{Daiphu}

Daiphu is another ritual that is important for the field. This is
performed when the field is cut, dried and burnt. Cutting the jungle for
\textit{jhuming} is called \textit{Louvat}. \textit{Louvat} or cutting the jungle for \textit{jhuming} is
followed by dying it, which is called \textit{Chapphou}. When completely dried,
it is burnt and the act of burning is called \textit{Louhal}. In order to make
\textit{daiphu}, the \textit{Thempu} has to make these articles: elephant tooth or \textit{Saipi ha},
a couple of slave, \textit{Vengke, Thoche, sel, Khichang}, and \textit{langbel} (here
vengke is patridge and thoche is squirrel), sel is mithun, khichang is
earbead, and langbel is mica).
Having made all these, the thempu takes an egg and some cotton and take them to the field and pleads Pathen to forgive the cultivator of that field for damaging his land by cutting and burning down the object he made and returns to the village. One day is observed and no one is allowed to do anything. The next day, the thempu goes to the field to see whether the objects are still there in the exact place where he left them. If any of the object is missing or broken, this indicated that a member of the family who performs this rite must die or suffer illness as God is not pleased with the excessive damages done to his land. The step is to perform Kilhalho, just to ward off any evil effects from the thempu's interpretations of Daiphu rite. This point to the facts that Thadous ascribed all creations to Chung Pathen as the sole creator of everything on earth. Thadous even though they had no proper education in those days, had great concern for their society and their environment as is seen in Daiphu, where the thempu is asking God to forgive them for destroying his beautiful creation. Their ecological concern could be gleaned through this rite. In fact they realized their ecological responsibilities. Life here on earth is interdependent with that or plants and animals. In this regard, the researcher agrees with what Emmanuel James says, in his book entitled, Ethics: A Biblical perspective. He says, "There are many environmental changes. There are also natural havoc like floods, soil erosion, famines, hurricanes and other disasters that need to be met. Human beings have added to these wars, use of nuclear weapons, biological warfare, industrial waste, increased use of automobiles, which run on petroleum and gas products, deforestation and pollution creating holes in the protective
ozone layer in the atmosphere. These dangers cannot be simply overlooked. Since environment means all human beings, it entails a sense of responsibility to themselves and their fellow human beings.

This is not just intellectual effort or government efforts made by a few welfare organisations but also moral effort that needs to be taken up at war footing.”159 As said earlier, Thadous had a concern for their environment though their religion is considered to be primitive in nature. They felt that they destroyed God’s creation and thus asked God to forgive them.

(c) Changlhakou

This rite is done after reaping and storing the paddy. It is a kind of thanksgiving ceremony to the spirits for showering so much blessings upon the owner of the field for yielding so much for the year. The thempu and the owner along with the villagers proceed to the field from the house of the owner of the field. Clay is made like mithun. Ten clay moulded like mithun are made. Another clay is made to act as slave. A pair of clay modeled elephant tusk is made. Clay models or jubel or winepot, tuibel or water pitcher, vengke or patridge and jungle squirrel, thoche are made. All these articles are placed beneath a bamboo platform. The bamboo platform is built on the down hill slope keeping its top with the high ground above. Just at the center of the threshing yard, the priest sets and puts three leaves one upon the other of a particular tree called Nakedo.

leave of *Nake* tree. The priest sprinkles winedrops on the leaves and chats the following words:

Changlha kouna Pathen nungjai ka lhaijin,
Leiduppi, leitahopi nalhaijin,
Tuihat gala aivomnu poh bang in
Nakethom to noija sabi te nupa changlha poh bang in
Tamsanpa kaicheh changlah bangin,

**English Translation:**

May this propitiate the heavenly lord of the evil,
May this wine propitiate the black soil and the bulky earth,
May the soul of the paddy, which was grown by black female crab from across the river of strong current, come here,
The soul of the paddy, which was carried by sabitung tenupa (couple) while arguing, Reposed below three *Nake* with its three pronged branches may now come here.\(^{160}\)

Whatever the case may be, Thadous are pleased to see the good harvest. The people after the chanting of the *thempu*, sit down on a mat. The owner of the field handed over the cock to the *thempu* to kill it by cutting off its head. The cut head and the trunk are allowed to fall in the dome of the paddy or *Changsal*. The headless cock moves sometimes and then stops moving. The bottomline here is that if the trunk faces towards the hill slope, it simply indicates that the collection of paddy will be great. But if it faces the opposite direction, say, downhill, it may mean poor collection of paddy from that particular field. The *tucha* and the *becha* served the special wine prepared for that special day in a bamboo cup. The cock then is cooked in a pot. Thadous love *Sijou* so mixed this cock with this leave *Sijou* is a kind of leave found in the jungle) this mixture of cock meat and *sijou* made an excellent food for Thadous. The same is served to all to

\(^{160}\) Goswami opcit p. 160.
enjoy. These rites and rituals related with the life cycle of the Thadou Kukis from birth to death, are mostly concerned with their understanding of God, whom they called him Chung Pathen, meaning God of Heaven or above. He is worthy to receive their offerings to him. Their hope for the future, the hope to go to a better place after death makes their lives meaningful and practical.