Chapter V

THE RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OF THE THADOUS KUKIS.

The impact of the natural environment and inanimate object on the religious worldview of Thadou Kukis.

The worldview of Thadous has been greatly shaped by the natural surrounding and animate objects. The term 'Worldview' needs explanation. A worldview is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously piece or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.\textsuperscript{161} The worldview of Thadous has governed and shaped by many inanimate objects and their surrounding in different ways. This is mainly due to the fact that they settled in the hilly areas or forest. These inanimate objects and their influences may be discussed by taking omens, dreams, taboos and fetishes as under:

1. Belief in Omen

An omen may be defined, as a phenomenon believed to have supernaturally inherent power. So, an omen is not an immediate event but rather a warning or an alerting, of an event to come.\textsuperscript{162} The following omens are said to have a great influence or impact in the religious worldview of Thadous.

\textsuperscript{162} Tirkey CAB, Primal Religion (Delhi:1SOCK:1998), p.178.
(a) A deer entering a village

It is a bad omen if a deer enters a village during daytime. It is a sign, which predicts the split of the village in the near future. Thadous firmly held that this omen proves to be true. For instance, a person living in Thingkangphai village said that just before the eruption of tribal feuds between Kukis and Zomis of Churachandpur District, a deer entered their village and escaped unharmed. In the feud, some villagers were killed, their houses were burnt and they deserted their village. Now some of them have resettled in the said village.

(b) A parrot chirping at night

It is a bad omen when a parrot chirps at night. This may indicate an event, which is unwelcomed and unfavourable for the villagers. This will bring unhappiness to the villagers.

(c) Van-ah jan na ham

Van ah is a kind of bird, just like a fowl. It may be called heavenly fowl. In reality, it may not be a fowl, but a bird chirping at night. Based on the sound of its crowing, it is simply called Van ah. If it chirps or or crows at night, it brings bad news for the entire village, because it signifies an impending death, which is to happen in the village shortly. As soon as the sound is heard, people keep on thinking about the bad event that will come as a result it in the locality. As believed by Thadous, it usually happened as believed.
(d) Eagles separated in the air

It is unusual to see a couple of eagles moving and flying in the air. It is held that if a couple of eagles flying in the air separates each other while flying overhead and fly to different directions without re-union in the eyes of the observer, it is a bad omen. It is a bad omen, especially for newly wed couple. They are sure to follow the same way or be divorced or separation will follow.

(e) Red clouds in the western horizon

When a red cloud is formed in the western horizon, just before sunset, it is a bad omen. It is interpreted to mean the death of a chief or a hausapu of the village. So, when they see this kind of red cloud forming in the western horizon, the chief’s death is inevitable.

(f) Mist forming in the western direction

If the western horizon is misty during daytime, it is a bad omen. It is a sign of the coming epidemic, which will break out in the locality or its adjacent areas. As a result of this, many people will die.

(g) A hen crowing at night

If a hen crowing at night, she is telling the community that someone in the village is illegally pregnant or a girl has been impregnated by a boy or a woman by a man.
(h) **A crying soul**

When someone heard a cry in the forest, or someone is heard crying for help in the jungle or forest, it is held that the soul of a person is crying out for help or that of the crier, the latter is sure to die. As a result, someone is to die immediately in the locality.

(i) **Animal climbing on the roof of a house**

If a dog or a goat is seen climbing on the roof of a house, it foretells the terrible misfortune, which will befall the inhabitants of the house.

(j) **A squirrel crossing the road or path**

If a person undertakes a journey, and on his way to his destination, if he sees a squirrel crossing a path a road downward, it is considered a bad omen for him or her to undertake such a journey. If he or she does not heed the warning but goes on, he or she is sure to meet with some kind of accident or unseen misfortune will disturb the whole journey.

(k) **Barking Jackal**

It is believed that if a jackal or a group of jackals is barking near a village or a locality an epidemic of some kind is inevitable. Events leading to death are sure to happen in the locality or in the vicinity where the jackals barked.
(l) **Seeing a corpse or a snake**

For Thadous seeing a corpse or a snake while undertaking a journey is considered a bad omen. In this regard many people on seeing a corpse or a snake discontinued their journey for fear of consequences that may happen as a result of seeing the said thing.

(m) **Husband’s journey prohibited during his wife’s pregnancy**

Thadous do not allow husband to undertake any kind of journey during his wife’s pregnancy. It is feared that accident of any kind can happen to him, if he undertakes the said journey. The husband is expected to be at home during his wife’s pregnancy. It is believed that if he goes on a journey, and if accident happens to him, it will be fatal. The news of his death will have an adverse effect on his wife and the baby in her womb.

(n) **Two members of a family cannot leave home in a day**

It is not generally acceptable and allowed to have two members of the same family to undertake a journey if they are to go to different directions. One should not go to the east and the other to west. They can go towards the same direction, but not to different directions on the same day. If the warning is not heeded, accident will occur and one of them will die as a result of the said impending accident. It is still followed by some people who entertained this kind of belief.
(o) **Killing of snake during pregnancy**

Woman, who is pregnant, must not kill snake during her period of pregnancy. It is generally believed that the tongue of the child will look like the fang of a snake.\(^{163}\)

(p) **The husband of a pregnant woman must not cut the mouth of a Bamboo container**

Thadous believe that during the pregnancy of his wife, the husband should be very kind to all people. It is not permissible for husband to cut the mouth of a bamboo container called Tuithei or Gotuithei. Since the cutting of this is done in a slanting way, if the bamboo cutting is done slantingly, the same thing will happen to the mouth of the child in the mother’s womb.

(q) **A father should not embrace his child if he is going out**

If a father or mother is going out for a work or for a journey, he or she should not embrace the child before undertaking such a work of a journey. So, when a mother goes out to the field, she bids farewell to her child and asked the baby to remain at home. It is believe that the soul of the child loves to follow its parents. When a child is found unwell on reaching from the field, they go back to the field and say, “Come, my child, let us go back home.” They also held that malevolent spirits of the jungles could entrap a child’s soul. As a result, the child will suffer.

\(^{163}\) Thangkhomang S. Gangte opcit p. 96.
(r) A pregnant woman should not be held by her hair

It is unsafe to hold a pregnant woman by her hair due to anger during a quarrel between the husband and the wife, for the matter by anybody. It is believed that if woman’s hair is held or pulled during pregnancy, the child is born prematurely, or there occurs an abortion.

(s) A crying dog

It is natural for dogs to bark at something; but it is unnatural for dogs to cry for no reason. It is held that if a dog cries in somebody’s house or in a locality, death is imminent. Death is sure to happen to the house very close to the dog or the house, which the dog faced when crying.

(t) A soul can be left while travelling

Thadous believe that the soul of a child can be left out unaware by its parents while travelling or while undertaking a journey. If the child is sick, they practise a method called ‘soul searching’ by which they search the soul of the child in the jungle or wherever, the soul of the child is believed to have been left or trapped. If they came across a river, they put a white thread for the soul to use it as a bridge for crossing the river. In this way special attention is given to the soul of the child. It is difficult to give scientific explanation for the beliefs in omens and superstitions. But from the analysis of these and folkways, we can conclude that the Thadous are simple by nature and believe in the uniform ways of nature. Any deviation from the regular pattern in the working of nature is viewed with fear and disbelief. Further, since life in the hills is very hard, they are
cautious of nature. Their beliefs in omens and superstitions are mostly based on their experience. However, such beliefs play important role in their practical life religious sacraments, although any body trained in logic would dismiss them as instances of the causal fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore, on account of this). The roles that group psychology and folkways play in building up the cultural pattern of a society cannot be ignored. Such beliefs are inalienable from the worldview and life form of the tribal people.

2. Interpretation of dreams

Dreams play a very important role in the religious life of Thadous. The most important things related to sacrificial acts are given to them through dreams. The following dreams and their corresponding interpretations are worthy of discussions.

(a) Wedding

If a person dreams a wedding indicates death or accident. A person in the native village of the researcher dreamt that he was to marry a beautiful girl. That very week, he went to the field and fell from a tree. Though he did not die, it took a month or so, for him to recover.

(b) Death

To dream of the death of a man indicates success in hunting and trapping of animals.
(c) **Loss of tooth**

If a person loses his tooth, death is inevitable in the family of the dreamer.

(d) **Grey Hair**

If a person dreams that his hair turns grey, the dreamer has a serious problem in store for him in the near future. A misfortune will be coming on the way.

(e) **Building a house**

Building a house in one’s dream foretells death in a family or the death of the dreamer. When someone is seriously sick, lying in a sick bed, and if the sick person is dreaming a bad dream in which he is building a house, the family will say the fellow is leaving them very soon, as soon as he completes his house. If someone dreams he or she had gone to a very beautiful village or to heaven, and is allotted a very good house and if he or she returns, the belief is that the patient or the dreamer will recover from his sickness. But if he or she chose to stay in the allotted house, he or she will die as his or her soul is leaving for that place.

(f) **Earthquake**

Seeing an earthquake in a dream is very bad since it foretells a serious problem, which will come to the family of the dreamer or to the whole villagers. It may be an epidemic or any kind of misfortune, which may result in death.
(g) **Fishing**

Thadous believed that fishing in dream is good. Catching a fish or a good number of fish is a good sign of getting money for the dreamer. He is dreaming about money which, he is, going to receive in the days to come. But catching a black fish is a bad omen.

(h) **Muddy Water**

Muddy water is a bad dream for the dreamer who sees it in his or her dream. If a person dreams that he is seeing muddy water or is bathing in muddy water, the dreamer is likely to suffer from cold and flu. Bathing in clean water, on the other hand, means good health and recovery from sickness. If a sick person dreams that he is bathing in clean water, the fellow is recuperating from his sickness.

(i) **Landslide**

If a person sees a landslide, in his or her dream, death in the family of the dreamer is inevitable. If the dreamer see someone’s house being swept away by the landslide, the owner of the house or a member of his family will die.

(j) **Seeing naked person**

Seeing someone in a dream without proper clothing may mean a lot to the dreamer and the person dreamt of. The dreamer will be hurt physically or the person dreamt about will be physically unwell.
(k) **Chasing by a dog**

It is believed that if a person is chased by a dog in his dream, some unwanted spirit is behind him.

(l) **Climbing a tree or a mountain**

If a person is climbing a tree or a mountain, and if he climbs upto the peak or the top, he will be successful in what he intends to do in the future. He will surely accomplish what he is doing now at present. But if he could not make it to the top of the mountain, it is a sign for him to know that he will not be successful in his attempt.

(m) **Setting sun**

Dreaming of a setting sun is very unfortunate for the dreamer. This dream is related to parents, particularly to the father of the family. If the dreamer dreams that the sun is setting in the western horizon, he is dreaming about the imminent death of his own father. If it is a moon, this refers to the mother of a family. Thadous take the sun for father and the moon for mother.

(n) **Bathing**

If a sick person bathes in clean water, it is good for him, for he will be recuperating from his sickness.
(o) **Singing**

Singing in a dream is a bad dream. If a person sings in his dream, he is sure to cry or will feel lonely as a result of some one leaving him.

(p) **Crying**

Crying in a dream is a good sign that happiness is in store for the dreamer. It is firmly believed that dreams often go contrary to what is actually dreamt.

(q) **Fire**

If some one sees a house on fire or is being burnt, the owner of the house, as well as his family member will face a serious problem. Their future seems to be very insecure, like the house in his dream.

(r) **Fling in the air**

If a young person flies in the air in his dream, the dreamer is sure to grow physically.

(s) **Seeing a mithun or a cow**

If a person sees a cow or a mithun in his dream, he is likely to suffer from cold and fever.

(t) **Crossing a bridge**

If a person sees a big river, and if he crosses the river through a bridge, it is a good sign for the dreamer. He will be successful in his attempts and all his fears about failures will vanish like a vapour.
3. Taboos

Taboos may mean forbidden activities or prohibition. Taboo is a caution or prohibition against supernatural objects, plants, animals or human beings that possess mana. Thus anything that is believed to be taboo should not be touched, smelt or tested or heard because such an act will lead to an automatic supernatural anger or penalty. There are taboos related to supernatural power, to man, to woman, to marriage, to person’s etc. The following discussions will clarify the Thadous view of taboos.

(a) Si

Si is a water spring, which is salty in nature. Thadous meticulously avoid jhuming when they come across a Si or spring of water in the jungle. They carefully avoid that part of the jungle where Si is located or found. It is said that Si water is salty and the same is said to be guarded by spirits. Spirits are believed to settle in this kind of si or a salty place. One particular Si is dreaded by people in the researcher’s native village. It is said that Khupkhuo cleared the site for jhuming cultivation and lost his dear wife. The same thing happened to the next person who cleared the same site for cultivation. Since then, no one in the village has a heart to clear that part of the jungle for farming or jhuming cultivation. The land there is a taboo for the villagers because of the si or spring of water. It is believed that the owner of the si does not allow any one to cultivate.

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In modern days of science and technology, this may be due to the fact that the agricultural crops do not grow well if the soil is too salty. Another reason may be the need for protection of brines, because salt is a rare but essential commodity for the people inhabiting in the remote hill areas.

(b) **Kol**

*Kol* is called precipice. *Kamkeilon Kol* was very popular in the past. People in the areas had to pass through that *kol* or precipice. In olden days, people believe that spirits live in this kind of *kols*. It is said that spirits that live in *Kaihlam kol* and Koubru hills once fought a war. On that day, they said that many bat like black birds flying in the air. No one knows who won the war. In addition to these, it is believed that thilhas or spirits used to expose/put their cloths in the sun during winter. Many have claimed to see these clothes.

(c) **Jamjing or Bungpi thing**

*Jamjing* is a tree with many leaves and branches. It is held that thilhas live in this trees. Cutting or felling of this tree is said to be a taboo. It is said that the spirits who made the tree their habitation punishes the person who cut the tree down.

(d) **Thinggophel**

Thing gophel is found in a tree, which has its branches shaped like a bow or a circle. Cutting down or cutting off this kind of tree is a taboo
for Thadous. If a person cuts it off, the owner of the bow, the spirit is angry with the cutter, as a result of which, he will be suffering from physical ailments.

(e) **Tuivamit**

*Tuivamit* literally means a fountain, which looks like a bird’s eye. Just as the bird has eyes in both sides of the beak, water comes out from two sides. It is taboo, since it is unnatural for water to come out like this. Some spirits are believed to live in this *tuivamit*.

(f) **Khuhse kuo**

Khuhse kuo is a hollow place, believed to be the abode of the spirits. If someone cultivates such rather places, the person is sure to have ill health. It is also said that the air, which comes out of the hole, is snot good for health. It is unhygienic to do anything very close to the said hole, because the air is said to be impure.

(g) **Gamlah a Ai hon**

It is a taboo for Thadous to cook crabs or a crab in the jungle based on one story narrated through the ages. It is a story about a tiger, which was caught unaware in a net set by a hunter. During that period, a crab came and rescued the tiger by biting and cutting off the net, thus allowing the tiger to escape unharmed. The tiger thanked the crab and promised to return the good deed done to him. So, whenever, the tiger heard the smell of a crab being cooked in the jungle, he comes to rescue the crab. Elders
of the society therefore, forbid that crab should not be cooked while camping in the jungle.

(h) Gamlah a *palhung* hon

Cooking of a mushroom found in the jungle is taboo for Thadous till today. They dreaded boiling this *palhung* or mushroom because they believed the same to be the testicles of the spirits who live in the jungle. The researcher’s grandfather, Limkhojam once went out to the forest for hunting. As the sun was setting, he was late to go home. He spent the night in the jungle, in a small hut. He cooked *palhung* and was disturbed by an unknown sound and unseen spirit. It all began just after sunset. He could sense that something was coming, he could not shoot it. The horrific force almost knocks down the small hut in which he was sheltering for the night. In great fear and anger, he took out his gun and aimed at the unseen spirit but could not see anything. But the hut was moving as if someone was pulling the hut down. He felt the presence of something unnatural, though he could not see anything.

(i) *Lhaphul man jana gamgie*

Thadous cannot use the present calendar for counting days and months. They look at the moon, which appear at night. Months are counted by looking at the movements of the moon in the sky. In many cases, their months precede our calendar months. It is taboo to stay in the jungle on the last day of May or the fifth month. It is held that a group of malevolent spirits called Nelhaohon used to move here and there,
especially in the form of a strong wind and storm. The group is said to be the vilest among the spirits. They left no stone unturned to cause problems to those who are out in the jungle. They turned the stones upside down. No one dares to spend the night in a jungle on this particular day. Thadous never dare to go out fishing late at night on this particular night for fear of malevolent spirits.

(j) **Lounah a Thang-kam**

Trapping or setting a trap at the northern edge of a field is taboo for Thadous. They held that if a trap is set in the northern edge of a field, the soul of the family members might be caught unaware. As a result, the person concerned will have ill health, which may lead to death.

(k) **Child’s bed**

Thadous in olden days, used to make bed for babies to sleep in. Other are not allowed sitting on or to sleep in the bed meant for the baby. Sitting on or sleeping in the baby’s bed is strictly forbidden for adults. It is held that the person sitting on or sleeping in the bed of the child may sleep on the soul of the baby unaware and thus killed it, without knowing it.

(l) **Sahnit**

Sahnit is a day off after the death of and burial of a person who died a natural death. No one was allowed to go out on the day observed and the whole village remained taboo for a day. It is held that if some one goes
out, it will be very bad for the growth of the paddy, maize, cucumber, beans etc, which are in the field.

(m) *Junolnit*

After harvesting is done, it is held that the rats are eagerly waiting for water to quench their thirst for survival. When such kind of rainfall was there, the said birds and rats are happy. In order to share in the happiness of such creatures, they too observed a day as a non-working day to allow the birds and rats to complete freedom to enjoy water to their hearts contents. It is like a mixture of two opposites: a day of joy and happiness for birds and rats, and a day off for Thadous, for their care and concern for the living creatures.

(n) *Tuganit*

Thadous in the past had a fixed day to sow the seed they are to cultivate in their fields for the year. On a day fixed by villagers, they all will go to the fields to sow the seeds. The next day was declared a taboo, where no one was allowed to touch his or her instruments or break the ground on that day. It is held that if someone disobeyed the order to observe the day declared to be tabooed, the seeds will not sprout as expected. As a result of such disobedience, it will not produce enough food for the family as well as for the village. The seeds fixed to be sown on the day fixed were: maize, cucumber, rice, a kind of bean, millet, watermelon, jam and other.
4. **Belief in fetishism**

The word fetishism is derived from the Latin word facticius, the form simply means something that is made. Jonathan H. Thumra says, “A fetish may be defined as an object which is believed to be inhabited by a spirit and thus supposed to conger its power upon the person who possess it as his fetish. The selection of fetish varies from place to place.”\(^{165}\) Thadous too, have this fetish. It can help or protect the owner from his or her enemies. Thadous have different fetishes used in olden days:

(a) **Stone**

*Salung* is a small stone, which is used as a fetish by its owner to have a successful hunting. Before hunting can be undertaken, such a stone needs to be oiled by rubbing the blood of animals to the stone. By observing the stone, the timing for a good hunting is known. Sometimes the stone would indicate that the hunter must go for hunting. He could not resist that kind of urge or compulsion. In obedience to the urges, he went out and shoot the animal. He saw the animal as if it was fully drunk. As soon as he shot the animal dead, he felt that something has gone wrong. The hunter went home and found that the salung or stone, which had urged him to go for hunting, was broken into two pieces. In his dream, the hunter was severely rebuked by the master of the stone. The master of the stone said, “Why did you shoot me?” You should have waited for some more time to go. I am pulling the animal for you to shoot. In fact, I was

\(^{165}\) P.S. Daniel et.al. *opcit* p. 51.
blinding the eyes of the animal to enable you to kill it.” It is said that after that incident, the fellow was not successful any more in hunting. The researcher was shown a black stone, which was used in the past. We tested the stone and found that it was not functioning anymore. One can test to see whether the stone is dead or is workable. The simplest test is to keep a small particle on the stone. If it moves, it is considered working, if not, it is dead. The small particle on the stone will move clock-wise, if the stone is workable. It remains static and unmoved, if it is dead.

(b) *Ngalchang ha.*

In olden days, Thadous used the tooth of a wild bear as an instrument for protection. It was very useful during wars and tribal feuds. If a person has this object, he cannot be hit by enemies’ bullet or arrows. It is said to have the power to protect the owner. The researcher was told that it is still rare to find this kind of tooth because it is the spirit itself who helps the owner to hide himself in the eyes of his enemies. It was said that on a certain day the object is inactive or dead. The owner has to test it everyday to see and ascertain that the object he or she is using is working. A man told the researcher that if he possesses the said tooth of a wild bear, he would not be visible from a distance of ten (10) feet or so. There is power that helps the owner to hide himself from people.

Thadous are not the only people who used this fetish in the past. There are many people who used fetishes. Tirkey says,
Such fetish artificially made is very common among peoples of the world. This type of fetish is very much used by traditional groups of India so much so that even Hindus and Muslims used such fetishes as well as mana."  

So, Thadous like many people of the world religion, used many things used and practised things practised by others in other countries. Their religious worldview has been greatly shaped by omen, dreams, taboos fetishes, which they felt, are very important for their religion to survive. There are also elements in the traditional Thadou religion belief, which shows concern for the protection of environment and sustainable development in nature.