

Exploring the Cultural Significance of Traditional Games and Sports Among the Tangkhul Nagas: A Sociocultural Analysis

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Abstract

This study delves into the cultural significance of traditional games and sports among the Tangkhul Nagas, an indigenous community residing in Northeast India. Through a sociocultural analysis, this paper examines how these activities are intricately woven into the fabric of Tangkhul Naga society, influencing and reflecting their values, social structures, and identities. The research highlights the role of traditional games in fostering community cohesion, preserving cultural heritage, and transmitting knowledge across generations. It explores seven specific games and sports, and their historical contexts from a folkloristic perspective to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of this unique tradition. The paper argues that the Tangkhul Naga traditional games and sports are not just a relic of the past, but vital cultural expressions that sustain the Tangkhul Naga identity and contribute to the broader discourse on cultural preservation and diversity.

Keywords: Tangkhul Nagas, Indigenous sports, Oral traditions, Folk games, Cultural heritage, Recreational activities.

Introduction

Traditional games and sports have been an integral part of human culture throughout history, serving as not just forms of entertainment but also as reflections of a society's values, skills, and communal spirit. 'Moreover, traditional games and sports reflect on different cultural expressions, and create a bridge between cultures for a better mutual comprehension' (S.C. Das, et al., 2014: 129). These age-old activities passed down through generations embody a rich tapestry of diverse cultures worldwide. One of the key aspects of traditional games is their cultural significance. They are deeply rooted in the history and values of the community serving as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. In many cultures, traditional games are deeply intertwined with rituals and celebrations, marking important events or seasons. One such example is the Native American game of lacrosse, originating as a ceremonial contest with spiritual undertones. It evolved into a sport showcasing physical prowess and emphasizing teamwork and strategy (Carey Jeffrey, 2012). Similarly, ancient Greek Olympic games were not only about athletic prowess but also embodied the spirit of competition and camaraderie. Traditional games often have a unique blend of physical activity and mental stimulation. Chess, originating in India stands as a timeless example of a strategic game that transcends borders. Its intricate moves and focus on intellect have made it a revered pastime worldwide.

India's cultural tapestry is woven with diversity and within this mosaic, the Tangkhul Naga community stands out as a vibrant thread, showcasing a rich cultural heritage. One of the striking aspects of Tangkhul Naga culture is its plethora of traditional games and sports. These activities are not mere pastimes but serve as a living testament to the community's commitment to preserving its heritage. Through these games, the Tangkhuls engage in Physical activities and transmit values, skills, and stories from one generation to the next. The traditional games of the Tangkhul Naga community are diverse, mirroring their homeland's diverse landscapes and seasons. They reside in northeastern India and extend into the northwestern part of Myanmar, occupying a geographically diverse region marked by hills, valleys, and rivers. This ethnic group is predominantly found in the Ukhrul district of Manipur, India, and neighbouring areas. Geographically, the Tangkhul Naga region is part of the Eastern Himalayas contributing to its picturesque landscapes and unique biodiversity. The topography, marked by hills and rivers has played a significant role in shaping the lifestyle and cultural practices of the Tangkhul Nagas. The Naga Hills, where they predominantly reside are known for their beauty and the challenges they pose for connectivity and accessibility. Historically, the Tangkhul Nagas have a rich heritage dating back centuries. They have cultivated a distinct cultural identity, encompassing traditional practices, folklore, and rituals that are deeply rooted in their connection to the land. This region has witnessed historical events, including interactions with neighbouring communities and the colonial period, influencing the socio-cultural fabric of the Tangkhul Nagas. The cross-border extension into northwestern Myanmar adds another layer to the Tangkhul Naga narrative. The porous boundaries have facilitated cultural exchanges while simultaneously presenting challenges related to geopolitical dynamics and transnational issues. This unique geographical positioning has shaped the Tangkhul Nagas into a community with a multifaceted identity that reflects influences from both India and Myanmar. For the study, seven (7) traditional games and sports of the Tangkhul Nagas were selected: Liho-laho, Phala, Thingreira Khangakhun (tug of war), Kori (hide and seek), Hangkhana Harnao Katak (an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens), Otrei Kaphung (carrying a giant load), and Lanza Kapru (high jump). Liho-laho, a game deeply embedded in Tangkhul culture reflects the community's emphasis on teamwork and coordination. Phala, a game rooted in strategy and skill, provides insights into the intellectual aspects of Tangkhul's traditional sports. Otrei Kaphung (carrying a giant load), a sport often carried out during harvest not only serves as entertainment but also serves as a cultural expression. Thingreira khangakhun (tug of war) known for its physical demands showcases the importance of physical fitness in Tangkhul traditions. Lanza kapru (high jump), a game of agility and reflexes highlights the significance of quick thinking and adaptability in the face of challenges. Hangkhana Harnao katak (an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens), a game that combines skill and precision, exemplifies the Tangkhuls' dedication to honing their abilities. Kori (hide and seek) is a traditional Tangkhul game that not only fuels physical activity but also sharpens cognitive skills as players strategically choose hiding spots. As participants engage in friendly rivalry, the game becomes a source of entertainment and reinforces the values of fair play and camaraderie. The paper, therefore, delves into the nuanced relationship between Tangkhul traditional games and the intricate social fabric of this distinct cultural group. Through a folkloristic perspective, it aims to unravel the cultural significance embedded in these games, shedding light on their role as carriers of cultural heritage.

Literature Review

Traditional games and sports are a crucial part of cultural heritage, reflecting the values, history, and soc-

ial structures of the communities in which they developed. These activities passed down through generations, offer more than just entertainment; they play significant roles in maintaining cultural identity, promoting physical fitness, and fostering social cohesion. Researchers and enthusiasts have extensively studied traditional games and sports to understand their cultural significance and evolution. This scholarly interest reveals how these activities serve as powerful mediums of cultural expression. Zhi-Zu W (2015) conducted a comprehensive study on the impact of social changes on the memory and heritage of traditional martial arts culture in Cangzhou. Using methodologies typical of cultural anthropology, including field surveys, in-depth interviews, and literature review, the study explored the effects of societal transformations on various aspects of martial arts heritage. The findings revealed that the evolution of Cangzhou martial arts is a natural consequence of modernization and cultural change. Several factors – such as alterations in the living environment, social environment, built environment, social and economic structures, and cultural values – have significantly influenced the living space, development trajectory, modes of inheritance, and the values associated with traditional martial arts. The study highlighted that traditional martial arts have undergone processes of invention, accumulation, dissemination, and adaptation, akin to a form of social natural selection. Key elements crucial for the inheritance of martial arts, identified in the study, include the audience, the inheritors, and the temporal and organizational structures. The research underscored the importance of adapting to social changes through glocalisation – finding a balance between global influences and local traditions. Inheritors of martial arts are encouraged to embrace integration and innovation, seeking common ground while respecting differences, to keep the tradition relevant and evolving with the times. Qian G (2013) conducted an investigative research study on the protection and development of the traditional sport of swing. The paper analyses the cultural and value aspects of national sports by examining the orientation, protection, and development of the swing. The aim is to promote ecological civilization within the Hani nationality area. Furthermore, the research holds significance for sustainable development and contributes to both economic growth and the study of national sports projects. Jogen Boro, Rita Daimary, and Bhupen Narzaree (2015) have highlighted the significance of traditional games and sports among the Bodo people, noting their integral role in the community from historical times. These activities serve as a means of recreation and a way to rejuvenate and prepare for upcoming tasks, offering a respite from daily routines. The Bodos have a diverse array of sports and games tailored to different groups: some are specifically for boys, some for girls, some for both genders and some are designated for elderly men and women. This cultural practice underscores the community's appreciation for leisure and its role in maintaining social cohesion and well-being. Somappa Badiger (2020) emphasises that traditional Indian games such as Kho-Kho, Kabaddi, Langadi (one-leg hopping), and Sagar-gote (five stones) are accessible and require minimal equipment. These games necessitate only participants and space, making them inclusive and easy to organise. The author highlights the benefits of these games in fostering teamwork and social interaction among children, thus playing a vital role in their development. Additionally, teaching children these traditional games helps them connect with their cultural heritage, instilling a sense of pride and identity. The inclusive nature of sports bridges various social divides, uniting people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, unstructured playtime e, including traditional games, strengthens family bonds and contributes positively to children's overall well-being. These games are viewed as practical extensions of Yoga, promoting holistic development.

As researchers and enthusiasts continue to explore and document these activities, they uncover the rich tapestry of human culture, revealing how deeply ingrained these games are in our collective history and social fabric.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting both primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with Tangkhul Naga individuals from various age groups and villages, conducted in a storytelling mode to encourage rich insights into the cultural significance of traditional games. Observational techniques were also used to witness firsthand the dynamic interplay between these games and social life. Secondary data included a review of ethnographic literature focusing on Tangkhul Naga's cultural practices and social structures related to traditional games. Thematic analysis was used to interpret interview transcripts, identifying recurring themes and patterns surrounding the cultural significance of these activities. Quantitative data gathered through observation helped describe the prevalence and popularity of different traditional games. Triangulation, combining findings from interviews, observations, and secondary data, ensured the robustness of the study's conclusions, offering a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of traditional games and sports among the Tangkhul Nagas.

Results

Traditional games among the Tangkhul Nagas play a pivotal role in preserving their rich cultural heritage and fostering a strong sense of community spirit. These games, deeply entrenched in tradition, serve as more than mere forms of entertainment; they are a testament to the values, beliefs, and identity of the Tangkhul Naga people. First and foremost, traditional games serve as a medium for entertainment, offering individuals and communities an avenue to unwind, relax, and have fun. They provide a break from the daily chores, allowing them to immerse themselves in moments of joy and camaraderie. Moreover, these games hold significant social value as they unite people, strengthening community bonds. Participation in traditional games fosters a sense of belonging and unity among the Tangkhul Nagas, transcending barriers of age, gender, and social status. During these gatherings, relationships are forged, stories are shared, and memories are created, reinforcing the fabric of community life. Additionally, traditional games are a testament to the physical prowess and skills of the Tangkhul Nagas. Many of these games require agility, strength, and strategic thinking, honing physical abilities and mental acuity. Through generations, these games have been passed down, serving as a platform for the transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. Furthermore, traditional games serve as a means of preserving cultural identity and heritage. Each game carries with it a wealth of symbolism, rituals, and folklore, deeply rooted in the history and traditions of the Tangkhul Naga people. By actively participating in these games, individuals not only keep their cultural heritage alive but also gain a deeper appreciation for their roots and identity. Here are some traditional games and sports of the Tangkhul Nagas based on fieldwork findings:

a) Liho-Laho:

In the heart of Chingjui village, an ancient and cherished game known as Liho-Laho has been passed down through generations, creating a unique tapestry of entertainment and camaraderie. This captivating game, played by both boys and girls unfolds with unique rules that distinguish the experiences of the two genders. For the girls, Liho-Laho transforms into a vibrant spectacle as ten (10) participants from each

group eagerly engage in the spirited competition. The game's essence lies in its ability to foster teamwork and camaraderie among the female participants. As the girls gather on the playfield, the rules of Liho-Laho come alive with a blend of skill, strategy, and tradition. The game for girls unfolds with a flurry of activity where agility and precision become paramount. The players adorned in traditional attire skillfully maneuver through the field, showcasing a dance-like coordination that captivates onlookers. The objective for the girls is to harmonize their movements and strategize collectively to outsmart their opponents. Liho-Laho for them becomes a celebration of unity and empowerment with laughter and cheers echoing through Chingjui village. In contrast, the boys' version of Liho-Laho takes a different form involving two (2) participants from each group. The dynamics of the game shift towards individual prowess, emphasizing strength, agility, and tactical acumen. The boys face a more intense and focused competition where every move is crucial in gaining an upper hand. The simplicity of the game for boys highlights the raw athleticism and competitive spirit ingrained in the Chingjui village's cultural fabric.

Gameplay for girls:

For the girls, Liho-Laho takes on a distinctive form. The essence of the games lies in strength, coordination, and teamwork. In this spirited activity, two robust girls from each group take centre stage, ascending a bamboo rod that stands tall as the focal point of the game. This engaging spectacle unfolds with eight girls per group carrying the two standing on the bamboo rod, positioned at waist level. The organisation of the game is meticulous with groups formed based on locality or yarnao (same age group) affinity. Each team comprises ten (10) enthusiastic participants ensuring a dynamic and competitive environment. In this game, the concept of allowing numerous groups to participate in a single game not only amplifies the fun but also promotes inclusivity, diversity, and a sense of community. For example, when six (6) groups participate, they are strategically arranged with three groups on each opposite side. The convergence of all six groups in the middle marks the commencement of this thrilling competition. In the enthralling spectacle of two girls standing on the rod, their roles as both defenders and aggressors unfold in a mesmerizing dance of strength and strategy. Tasked with punning down opponents from rival teams, they become pivotal figures in the relentless pursuit of victory, each moves a delicate balance between physical prowess and cunning tactics. As defenders, their focus sharpens on safeguarding their own teammates, anticipating the opponent's every move with a vigilant eye. The rod becomes a precarious battlefield, where equilibrium is maintained through calculated maneuvers and swift reactions. The defenders, guardians of their team's survival, embody resilience and strategic acumen as they resist the aggressive advances of their adversaries. Simultaneously, these girls transition seamlessly into aggressors, embracing the offensive aspect of their role with determination. Their goal is clear: eliminate opponents from the game by pulling them down from their perches. A crucial element of Liho-Laho for the girls is the potential consequence of a group losing its grip on the bamboo rod. If a team falters and the rod slips from their grasp, resulting in a tumble to the ground, they face defeat. The physicality of this endeavour demands not only raw strength but a keen understanding of the opponent's vulnerabilities. It is a display of calculated aggression, where timing and precision are paramount. The spirited battle unfolds with each team striving to outwit and outmuscle the other. The rod, once a mere platform, transforms into a symbolic arena where the complexities of competition manifest. The delicate balance between strength and strategy becomes the essence of their engagement, a testament to the multifaceted nature of this exhilarating contest. In this dynamic interplay, the defenders evolve into aggressors and vice versa, blurring the lines between roles. The fluidity of their actions mirrors the

unpredictability of the game itself. Success hinges not only on individual prowess but on the seamless coordination between teammates, forming a synergy that transcends the sum of its parts. As the battle rages on, spectators witness a captivating display of athleticism, intellect, and teamwork. The two girls standing on the rod embody the essence of competition, where the pursuit of victory demands a harmonious fusion of strength and strategy. In this unique sporting arena, the delicate balance they maintain becomes a captivating spectacle, leaving an indelible mark on the narrative of their spirited contest.

Gameplay for boys:

In the boys' version, two participants from each group engaged in this game where balance and rhythm play pivotal roles. As the game commences, the participants sit on the ground, interlocking their legs, and place their hands on the back of their heads. The rhythmic cadence begins with one partner touching their back to the ground, uttering "Liho", and returning to the sitting position, interlocking their partner's legs for support. The cycle continues as the other participant reciprocates by touching their back to the ground, saying "Laho", and seamlessly returning to the sitting position. This rhythmic movement and coordination persist until one participant falters, unable to maintain the rhythm or properly execute the transitions. The key to success lies in the synchronized collaboration between the two partners as any disruption in the flow can lead to defeat. The game demands a balance of strength, agility, and communication as participants rely on each other for support and coordination. The climax of the game is reached when a participant successfully falls back, touches their back to the ground, and swiftly returns to the initial sitting position, all while the rhythmic exchange of "Liho-Laho" is maintained. This moment signifies not only physical accomplishment but also the seamless synergy between the participants.

Beyond physical aspects, Liho-Laho embodies cultural values of unity, teamwork, and friendly competition. The game serves as a platform to showcase their strength, agility, and strategic thinking while fostering a sense of community and mutual support. The game with its distinct rules for boys and girls reflects not only the uniqueness of Chingjui's traditions but a cherished chapter in the ongoing story of this close-knit village.

b) Phala:

In the vibrant village of Chingjui, a time-honoured tradition known as Phala takes centre stage during festivities. This captivating game not only brings both men and women together in spirited competition but also showcases the rich cultural heritage of the community. Phala played separately by gender involves a unique combination of coordination, rhythm, and teamwork making it a cherished part of Chingjui's celebrations. Phala emphasises the significance of unity and camaraderie within age groups as participants form teams according to "Yarnao" (same age group), ensuring that individuals of the same age group come together to create a strong bond. This thoughtful grouping fosters a sense of belonging and shared experiences among team members, enhancing the overall enjoyment of the game.

As the participants gather on the battleground, anticipation fills the air. The game begins with a distinctive stance – players lift one leg and carefully place it on top of the other creating a visually striking tableau. This posture not only adds a layer of complexity to the game but also symbolizes balance and coordination, crucial elements in the forthcoming challenge. A key element of the Phala game is the synchronised chant of 'Phala, Phala...' combined with rhythmic clapping. The moment the

game commences, participants jump in unison, maintaining the delicate balance of their intertwined legs. The repetitive chanting and clapping serve as both a rhythmic guide and a jubilant expression of the collective spirit, echoing through the festive atmosphere. The challenge lies in maintaining perfect coordination. If any participant falters and loses synchronisation, causing the legs to tumble, the team faces disqualification. This adds an element of suspense and excitement as the players strive to uphold their unity and continue jumping in harmony.

Beyond the physical aspect, Phala serves as a cultural cornerstone, preserving the spirit of togetherness and shared joy. The choice to form teams based on age groups reflects the village's commitment to inclusivity ensuring that both young and old actively contribute to the festivities. As the players continue to jump in unison, the rhythmic clapping and chanting echo through Chingjui village, creating a symphony of tradition and exuberance.

c) Thingreira khangakhun:

Tug of War, locally known as Thingreira khangakhun is a traditional game deeply rooted in cultural significance, particularly during Luira Phanit or Luita Phanit (seed sowing festival). The game is played with a rope called “thingreira”, collected by village youths who venture into the jungle. The collection process involves a ritualistic offering of pork and rice beer to the deity of the concerned thingreira or of the forest (Sothing W.A Shimray, 2000:140). This sacred rope believed to bring prosperity undergoes a reverential treatment of coating it with pork fats, locally known as “Saphurthao” before being brought home. The belief in the prosperity associated with touching the thingreira is ingrained in their culture. As the thingreira is brought home, villagers, both young and old partake in this symbolic gesture, reinforcing the communal bond and shared aspirations for abundance. The game is played according to localities, referred to as “Tang” adding a communal aspect to the competition. The rule is simple: break the thingreira. If not, it signifies a lack of strength, symbolising unprogressive work for the year. In such cases, a unique tradition unfolds, “either by using knife or other implements, the rope is made semi-cut and make it break while pulling” (Sothing W.A Shimray, 2000: 141). The victorious tang or locality has the responsibility of safeguarding the two broken halves of the thingreira. Recognizing its symbolic significance as a lucky charm, the rope is meticulously cut into multiple pieces and distributed among all families of the winning tang. This distribution fosters a sense of unity and shared fortune, reinforcing the cultural ties within the community. In essence, thingreira khangakhun extends beyond mere physical competition; it encapsulates spiritual rituals, communal bonds, and the belief in the interconnectedness of prosperity and strength. The game becomes a manifestation of cultural heritage, a celebration of unity, and a unique way for the community to come together during the festive season of the Luira phanit or Luita Phanit festival (seed sowing festival).

d) Lanza kapru:

The high jump known as Lanza Kapru in Chingjui dialect is not merely a physical activity; it is a reflection of their cultural identity and social cohesion. Rooted in ancient traditions, the Tangkhul high jump is often a centrepiece of community festivities and celebrations. It serves as a platform for individuals to showcase their agility, strength, and prowess, embodying the spirit of athleticism deeply ingrained in their cultural fabric. Participants, often adorned in traditional attire elevate the event to more than just a sporting spectacle – it becomes a visual representation of their cultural vibrancy. The high jump event is not confined to athletic prowess alone; it serves as a means of fostering camaraderie and

unity within the Tangkhul community. Participants receive encouragement not only from fellow athletes but also from the entire community, creating a sense of collective pride and support. This communal spirit is a testament to the integral role that sports play in the social dynamics of the Tangkhul society.

In the realm of Chingjui, the traditional game known as Lanza kapru is more than just a high jump; it is woven into the fabric of an ancient oral tradition. The roots of this game extend back to the tale of a courageous man named Krahai, hailing from the affluent lineage of a local family. One day while Krahai's parents toiled in the paddy fields, he encountered an orphaned boy who shared a chilling account of a neighbouring village besieged by a giant serpent, devouring two households a day. Unperturbed, Krahai, intrigued by the mysterious threat, instructed the orphan to prepare a meal for him. Having feasted Krahai armed himself with only a knife and spear and set out to confront the serpent that had terrorized the nearby village. Challenging the serpent proved futile as it remained unresponsive to Krahai's calls. Upon returning home in the evening, Krahai encountered the snake slumbering beneath a wild apple tree. Without relying on tools, Krahai fearlessly attacked the snake's neck initiating a perilous struggle. The serpent in turn coiled itself around Krahai starting from his legs. Meanwhile, as Krahai's parents returned, inquiries about their son's whereabouts led them to the orphan who revealed the perilous situation. With a resolve only a father could muster, Krahai's father armed himself and hastened to his son's aid. Upon arrival, he witnessed the gripping scene: Krahai ensnared by the serpent, defiantly holding its neck. Seizing the opportunity, Krahai's father valiantly slew the serpent, rescuing his son from the coils of peril.

After recovery, Krahai found himself confronted with a tale of destruction wrought by Lavui, an invisible serpent causing landslides in its wake. The orphan boy bearing news of Lavui's havoc, recounted the devastation near their village. Responding to the call of duty, Krahai, having feasted on a meal prepared by the orphan, armed himself with a knife and spear to confront Lavui. As Krahai faced Lavui, a relentless battle ensued throughout the day. Jumping over each landslide caused by Lavui's movements, Krahai's agility was put to the ultimate test. Exhausted, both Lavui and Krahai found themselves reaching their limits. In a fateful moment, Krahai grasping a fig tree branch became the victim of Lavui's tail losing half his body. When Krahai's parents returned, the orphan relayed the dire situation. Krahai's father rushed to the scene, only to discover the tragic outcome, with only Krahai's upper body remaining. However, as days passed, the villagers noticed a peculiar occurrence – Krahai's spirit lingered. He visited the village daily engaging in a game with the young boys known as Lanza Kapru. This game, a symbolic enactment of Krahai's escape from Lavui became a cherished tradition in Chingjui village. Lanza Kapru not only served as a memorial to Krahai's bravery but also embodied the resilience of the village against unseen forces. The spirited play became a testament to the enduring spirit of Krahai and the strength of the community to transform tragedy into a ritual of unity and resilience.

e) **Otrei kaphung:**

The game of Otrei Kaphung which translates to 'carrying a giant load', stands out as a significant cultural practice during the harvest season. This age-old practice revolves around a unique display of strength and camaraderie among the villagers. Otrei Kapung is conducted during the harvest season, a time when the community reaps the rewards of their year-long agricultural efforts. This period is marked by collective joy and celebration, reflecting the deep bond the Tangkhuls share with their land and each other. The game is traditionally held in the paddy fields of the village chief and the affluent individuals,

symbolizing both gratitude for the bountiful harvest and respect for the community's hierarchy and social structure. The essence of otrei kaphung lies in its physically demanding nature. Both men and women step forward to participate in this rigorous challenge. The game involves carrying an excessive amount of grain, meticulously packed in a traditional loin shawl. For the menfolk, the grain is wrapped in Phangui kachon (Phangui shawl), a firmly woven harvest shawl specifically designed for this purpose, while the women use Shonglakhom kachon (Shonglakhom shawl) in the Western Tangkhul regions. In the Northern Tangkhul regions, the load is packed in a Luirim kachon (Luirim shawl), which is then joined with a Haora kachon (Haora shawl). The women folk don a newly woven kashan (wraparound) and are equipped with rain shields woven from tender date leaves. Upon reaching, the women folk lay the rain shield on the ground and sat on it. Throughout the day, they engage in harvesting and threshing, preparing the grain for the evening's grand procession. As dusk falls, the women help the menfolk by lighting torches made from pine resin, guiding them back home. This torch-bearing act is practical and symbolizes the light of cooperation and mutual support within the community.

The procession is not a solitary endeavour; instead, it transforms into a communal spectacle. The villagers revel in the festivities, cheering and observing with anticipation to witness who among them will emerge as the strongest individual in the group or the entire village. The unique technique employed by the carrier to balance and carry the load becomes a demonstration of skill, showcasing the physical prowess that defines the true champion of Otrei Kaphung. The challenging terrain adds an extra layer of complexity to the game, making it clear that this is no ordinary feat. Those who falter are not left to struggle alone; their fellow friends step in, embodying the spirit of camaraderie that defines community life. The game reaches its climax when the carrier against all odds arrives at the owner's house. This achievement bestows upon him the esteemed title of the strongest guy in the group or village. It is a moment of pride, a celebration of individual strength and collective support.

Otrei Kaphung, therefore, is not just a physical challenge; it is a game that intertwines tradition, celebration, and friendly competition. The unique technique employed by the carriers to manage the giant load showcases the cultural prowess of the community. The act of replacing tired carriers with their fellow friends adds an element of strategy to the game, making it not only a test of strength but also of teamwork. In essence, Otrei Kaphung embodies the spirit of harvest celebration in the Tangkhul region. It is a cultural practice that not only honours the physical strength of individuals but also strengthens the social fabric of the community. As the hills echo with laughter and cheers during this game, the villagers not only celebrate a bountiful harvest but also the enduring spirit of togetherness and resilience that defines their community.

f) Hangkhana Harnao Katak:

Hangkhana Harnao Katak is a traditional game deeply rooted in the culture of the Tangkhul hills. This engaging activity involves two spirited teams, each with a unique role – one portraying a clever eagle and the other, led by a strong leader, embodying a protective mother hen defending her precious chicks. This game mirrors the real-life struggle of an eagle snatching chickens. In this lively game, the hen's team made up of an unlimited number of participants acting as chickens forms a chain by holding onto the person in front of them, each member representing a chicken. The objective is clear – the eagle's task is to break the chain by chasing after the participants, imitating the real threat of an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens. As the game unfolds, the eagle driven by strategy and agility attempts to disrupt the united front of the hen's team. Meanwhile, the hen and her defenders strive to shield their

“chickens” from the cunning eagle’s advances. The game captures the essence of the struggle between an eagle and a mother hen protecting her chicks, providing a dynamic and engaging experience for participants.

The symbolism in ‘Hangkhana Harnao Katak’ resonates with the daily scenes witnessed in Tangkhul villages where eagles are known to snatch chickens. The game not only entertains but also serves as a cultural reflection, embodying the villagers’ spirit and their efforts to safeguard their poultry from natural predators. The game’s outcome is straightforward – if the eagle manages to successfully break the chain, it claims victory. On the other hand, if the hen’s team successfully defends its chain from the eagle’s attempts, they emerge triumphant. ‘Hangkhana Harnao Katak’ stands as more than just a traditional game; it is a celebration of community, strategy, and the timeless struggle between predator and protector. The echoes of laughter and shouts that accompany this game provide a glimpse into the vibrant cultural tapestry of the Tangkhul hills.

g) Kori:

The hide-and-seek game, known as ‘Kori’ in the Chingjui dialect, unfolds in the vibrant Chingjui village, where children engage in a spirited pursuit of joy. Divided into two groups, one plays the role of a seeker while the others skillfully hide themselves. As the seeker counts down, an air of excitement envelops the playing field. The players scatter, seeking refuge in nooks and crannies, their heartbeats echoing the suspense of the impending pursuit. The game not only fuels physical activity but also sharpens cognitive skills as players strategically choose hiding spots. The seeker embarks on a quest, relying on perception and deduction to unveil hidden comrades. The tension escalates with each other passing second and the element of surprise becomes a potent force. The joy of discovery is matched only by the relief of those successfully concealed, creating a delightful ebb and flow of emotions.

This captivating game may trace its origins to the emulation of a spirit named “Khamapui”, a supernatural entity, that embodies both benevolent and malevolent aspects. The villagers ascribe significance to the colour of the spirit, associating white khamapui with prosperity and black khamapui with adversity. A belief permeates the community that the village thrives when the white khamapui graces it and conversely, faces challenges in the presence of the black one. Legend has it that the perception of khamapui’s size and demeanor is influenced by the way people interact with it. When people look down on khamapui, it diminishes in size and poses no harm. Conversely, gazing up at the khamapui causes it to grow taller and more menacing. Described as resembling bamboo, the malevolent khamapui bends down to devour humans. Villagers aware of the potential danger, flee and hide whenever they encounter khamapui, ensuring safety until the khamapui departs. Incorporating these beliefs into the game of Kori adds an intriguing layer to the cultural fabric of Chingjui village. The children perhaps unknowingly engage in an age-old activity that echoes the traditions and superstitions of their community, blending playfulness with the echoes of ancestral tales.

The traditional games among the Tangkhul Nagas are not merely recreational activities; they are a reflection of their rich cultural heritage and community spirit. By embracing these games, the Tangkhul Naga people not only celebrate their traditions but also strengthen the bonds that bind them together as a community. As custodians of their cultural legacy, it is imperative to continue cherishing and promoting these traditional games for generations to come. By engaging in traditional games, the Tangkhul Naga people tangibly celebrate their cultural heritage. These games are often featured in festivals and community gatherings, where they serve as a means to educate younger generations about their

traditions. Elders play a crucial role in teaching and preserving the rules and significance of these games, ensuring that cultural knowledge is not lost. During these events, the games also become a platform for storytelling, where elders recount the origins and historical context of the activities. This practice not only keeps the traditions alive but also instills a sense of pride and identity in the younger members of the community. Furthermore, traditional games provide an inclusive environment where individuals of all ages and abilities can participate. This inclusivity promotes social cohesion and ensures that everyone feels valued and connected to their cultural roots.

Discussions:

A sociocultural analysis of Tangkhul traditional games reveals their profound impact on identity and heritage. Traditional games like Liho Laho, Phala, Thingreira Khangakhun (tug of war), Kori (hide and seek), Hangkhana Harnao Katak (an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens), Otrei Kaphung (carrying a giant load), and Lanza Kapru (high jump) are integral to Tangkhul culture, shaping individual and collective identities. These games, deeply rooted in the Tangkhul Naga community's history not only serve as recreational activities but also play a pivotal role in shaping and preserving their cultural identity. They are a manifestation of the community's social fabric, reflecting values, beliefs, and historical narratives. Through participation in these games, individuals forge a connection with their cultural roots, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. This dynamic process of cultural transmission helps in the preservation and perpetuation of Tangkhul's heritage. Furthermore, these traditional games serve as a platform for social interaction, strengthening community bonds. The communal nature of these games promotes cooperation, mutual respect, and a collective sense of responsibility. These games, therefore, act as social catalysts breaking down barriers and promoting a shared sense of identity among the Tangkhul people.

The gender dynamics within traditional games, exemplified by Liho-Laho showcase how cultural norms permeate recreational activities. The differing rules and techniques for boys and girls in Liho-Laho underscore traditional gender roles. This not only reflects historical social structures but also serves as a medium through which these norms are transmitted across generations. Moreover, the transmission of cultural values through traditional games is a dynamic process. As individuals engage in these activities, they absorb the unwritten codes of conduct, moral principles, and social norms embedded in the games. Concepts such as fair play, respect for opponents, and adherence to rules become second nature contributing to the preservation of Tangkhul cultural values. Furthermore, the oral tradition associated with these games enhances the cultural transmission process. Elders often share folklore related to the games, providing a narrative context that reinforces the values embedded within them. This storytelling becomes a bridge between generations, ensuring that the cultural significance of the game is passed down intact. The tangible and intangible aspects of Tangkhul heritage are thus intricately intertwined with traditional games. The preservation and continuation of these games serve as a living testament to the resilience of Tangkhul's identity, providing a tangible link to the past while adapting to the evolving dynamics of the present.

Tangkhul traditional games and sports hold profound cultural significance within the community serving as more than mere recreational activities. These activities play a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting the rich cultural heritage of the Tangkhul Naga tribe fostering a sense of identity and unity among its members. One prominent aspect is the way these games are deeply intertwined with rituals and ceremonies, often associated with agricultural practices and religious beliefs. For instance, games

like “Thingreira khangakhun” (tug of war) which encapsulates spiritual rituals, communal bonds, and a belief in the interconnectedness of prosperity and strength; and “Otrei Kaphung” (carrying a giant load) with its focus on a unique display of strength among the Tangkhuls symbolize the agricultural cycle, reinforcing the connection between the community and the land. Such games become a tangible expression of the tribe’s dependence on nature and the cyclical rhythm of life. Moreover, Tangkhul traditional games contribute significantly to social cohesion and community bonding. The communal nature of these activities fosters a sense of belonging and cooperation among participants, transcending individual interests. Team-based games like “Liho-laho”, a game showcasing strength, agility, and strategic thinking that reflects the distinct Chingjui tradition; “Phala”, a cultural cornerstone preserving the spirit of togetherness and shared joy; and “Hangkhana Harnao Katak”(an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens) which mirrors scenes witnessed in Tangkhul villages portraying the crow snatching chickens, highlighting the cultural intricacies ingrained in daily life exemplify this communal spirit reinforcing the values of teamwork, coordination, and mutual support.

The Tangkhul traditional games also serve as a means of passing down cultural knowledge and values from one generation to the next. The oral traditions embedded in these activities carry stories providing a unique educational platform. For instance, games like Lanza Kapru among the Chingjui village serve as a memorial to Krahai’s bravery embodying not only individual courage but also the resilience of the village against unseen forces. This game becomes a symbol of collective strength and a testament to the Tangkhul people’s ability to overcome challenges. Kori (hide and seek), imitating people fleeing and hiding from Khamapui (malevolent), a supernatural deity that consumes humans holds significance in symbolising the community’s beliefs and folklore. Elders play a crucial role in passing on not only the rules of the games but also the cultural nuances, stories, and historical significance associated with them. The significance of elders in this context extends beyond the mere mechanics of play; it encompasses the broader tapestry of Tangkhul culture. Tangkhul traditional games are not just recreational activities; they are repositories of cultural identity and historical narratives. Elders as bearers of this cultural torch play a crucial role in ensuring that these games are not just played but understood in their larger context. Through oral tradition, elders narrate stories associated with these games weaving a cultural fabric that connects the present generation with their roots. In a rapidly changing world, where modern influences often challenge traditional practices, the role of elders becomes even more critical. They act as cultural guardians preserving the authenticity of Tangkhul traditional games against the tide of globalisation. Through their guidance, the younger generation not only gains proficiency in these games but also imbibes a deep appreciation for the cultural heritage embedded within them. In essence, Tangkhul’s traditional games go beyond entertainment, serving as vessels for passing down cultural narratives, values, and identity. These games act as a living tradition, connecting generations and reinforcing the community’s cultural fabric, embodying the spirit of resilience, camaraderie, and the profound interplay between tradition and contemporary life.

Conclusion:

Among the various aspects of their rich tradition, traditional games hold a significant place. Games and sports like Liho-Laho, Phala, Thingreira Khangakhun (tug of war), Kori (hide and seek), Hangkhana Harnao Katak (an eagle swooping down to snatch chickens), Otrei Kaphung (carrying a giant load) and Lanza Kapru (high jump) play a vital role in preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of the Tangkhul Naga tribe. These games are not merely recreational activities; they are profound expressions

of the Tangkhul Naga identity, reflecting their history, values, and community spirit. Beyond their entertainment value, these games reflect the core values, resilience, and communal spirit that define the Tangkhul community. As custodians of these traditions, individuals bear the responsibility of preserving and passing down these games to future generations. The significance of Tangkhul traditional games lies in their ability to bridge the past and present, offering a glimpse into the rich history and cultural evolution of the community. Each game reflects specific aspects of Tangkhul life, whether it be the agricultural practices, daily life activities, or spiritual beliefs. Preserving these games ensures that the cultural tapestry remains vibrant and intact.

In the face of modernization and changing lifestyles, there is a pressing call to action for the preservation of Tangkhul traditional games. This entails documenting the rules, rituals, and stories associated with each game, as well as actively involving the younger generation in their practice. Community leaders, educators, and cultural enthusiasts must collaborate to create initiatives that promote the continuation of these games. Preserving these games is not just a matter of nostalgia; it is a commitment to maintaining the unique identity and cultural diversity of the Tangkhul community. These games are threads in the intricate fabric of Tangkhul heritage and their preservation ensures that future generations inherit a rich legacy that fosters a deep connection with their roots. Through collective efforts, the custodians of these traditions can fortify the endurance of traditional games, fostering a deeper comprehension of cultural evolution. By actively engaging in the preservation and promotion of these games, they contribute to the resilience of the Tangkhul cultural tapestry. This collective effort ensures that the rich heritage embedded in these games continues to thrive, serving as a testament to the community's commitment to cultural preservation and an invaluable source for future generations seeking to understand and appreciate their roots.

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