

THE NĀGA TRIBES OF MANIPUR

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cation. All the villages consist of a number of "clans," which are groups of agnatic kindred who must marry outside the clan. Kinship is not reckoned through females, and rights of succession, both to village office and to movable or personal property, are vested in males. The tenure of immovable property is complicated by the reversionary rights of the clan which accrue in the event of a failure of direct male heirs. Among tribes which, whether by inclination or by necessity, subsist by temporary cultivation and therefore migrate, if not annually, at any rate with frequency, there is not the same reason for evolving definite customs in regard to the ownership of land. We are sometimes able to distinguish a Kuki from a Nāga clan by the development of the chieftain in the former instance into a secular leader who takes only a ceremonial part in the tribal rites, and in the latter case by the diminution of the secular authority of the gennabura, who remains the religious head of his village. Perhaps the evolution of the secular authority of the Kuki chief is due to the urgency of the need among such communities of strong administration unimpeded by "turbulent priests."

In conclusion, while the first impression to be derived from a study of these tribes is of luxuriant variety in every detail, the final result is to deepen the sense of an underlying unity; to realise that all these variations mark experiments in social evolution and development, some of which are doubtless intentional, and to perceive that here, as elsewhere, man is adapting himself to the conditions rigorously imposed upon him by his physical environment, which he is intelligently handling so as to enjoy its advantages and to mitigate the rigour of its domination.¹

Tribes such as the Chiru on the western side of the valley and the Marring on the eastern side, form connecting links with the true Nāga tribes and the numerous Kuki tribes then living in the south.²

DRESS.

The dress of Tangkhul men consists of a simple cloth worn round the waist and tied in a knot in front leaving the ends

¹ Cf. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, Vol. I., p. 281 and Vol. IV., p. 271.

² McCulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

hanging down. These ends are fringed with straw pendants. The waist cloths are made of stout cotton woven in red and blue stripes two inches wide and horizontal. Over the body they wear in cold weather a long cloth in red and blue stripes to which in the case of chiefs custom permits the addition of a handsome border. Another pattern is in white stripes with terra cotta stripes and a black and white checker pattern, the plain variety being worn by the common people and the variety with the fringed border twelve to eighteen inches deep with white orange, green and red stripes being restricted to chiefs. They often dispense with the not very ample clothing above described and consider themselves properly garbed if only they have the ring on.¹

On high days and holidays the men wear a much more elaborate costume than that described above. It consists of a handsome kilt embroidered with ornaments like sequins and the headdress is the luhup with decorations of toucan feathers and tresses of hair.

The women wear small caps of blue cloth when working in the fields. Their petticoats reach from the waist to the knee and are made of cotton cloth manufactured in the weaving villages with red and white or black and white stripes two inches in width. Occasionally those who have some pretence to wealth or position wear petticoats of red with small stripes of white and black. A small jacket of the style worn by Manipuri women or a single cloth of the kind worn by the men completes the costume.

The ordinary dress of a Mao Nāga² consists of a short black cotton kilt about eighteen inches deep which is ornamented by three or four rows of white cowries, or in these degenerate days of white trouser buttons. Tradition and the statements of the older officers who knew these people in their unreformed period, declare that no man put these rows of cowries on his kilt until he had slain two men. A dirty white cotton rug thrown over the shoulders completes the costume. Headmen and "lung-chingbas," men who have erected a stone, are privileged to wear a dark blue cloth woven in Manipur on which are embroidered in red thread quaint figures of animals

¹ See Appendix I. below.

² Of Marām and Mayang Khong Nāgas also.

and conventional patterns which I have often thought were remotely like some fantastic animals. On gala days the costume of a warrior is most handsome. The cane helmet which is sometimes covered with tiger or leopard skin, bears a brass disc in front, and thin crescents of buffalo horn tipped with red hair are fastened to it in front. I have seen a red and yellow painted structure made of thin lath worn on the helmet rising at least two feet above the peak of the cane helmet. This looks like a pair of horns which it may be intended to imitate. From the sides hang solid wooden discs decorated with red seeds, with the wings of the green beetle and with pendants of hair which also fringe the helmet at the back. In the bad old days before the Sircar stopped all raids, these tresses were shorn from the heads of the slain in battle. On these days men wear their decorations from bravery in fights. Here as with us there are various degrees of merit each with their appropriate badge. An article like a sporran but fringed with red and yellow hair and ornamented with bands of cowries is hung round the neck of the valiant. The next higher degree is marked by a badge from shoulder to shoulder made of the same material and of the same colours, which may be called their "colours" as much as red and blue are the "colours" of the Tangkhuls. The most curious ornament on these occasions is the caudal appendage with its curve upwards and a long hair fringe of the usual colours. Is this indeed a tail, is the curved horn attachment to the helmet intended to resemble horns of some animal, is there a conscious therio-mimesis in all this scheme of decoration? Indeed, three tails are sometimes worn. One may be a totemic survival, but three are surely only swagger. The "tail" serves a useful purpose, for it has a space hollowed out in which panjis (sharpened bamboo spikes) are kept by the warriors. Handsome white plumes are worn and attached to the shield. Of the weapons, the shield, the spear, and the dao that are brandished by the gay warrior with this dress, more will be said in the section dealing with weapons. The ample calves are covered by leggings of the usual combination of colours which hide the black rings of cane which all wear round the knee, perhaps, as some say, to give them strength when climbing.