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Ethnography and History of the Singpho Community

Rubaina Sultana

Ph.D Scholar, Department of History Cotton University

Email: rubainasultana2024@gmail.com

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The decades following independence saw the shrinkage of Assam out of which was carved out Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972, Mizoram in 1987, Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. Manipur and Tripura remained as Union Territories of India between 1956 until 1972 when they attained full statehood. Collectively they are called the Seven Sister states. Sikkim joined as the eighth North Eastern Council state in 2002. The North eastern region of India thus comprises of eight states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

The demographic structure reveals that out of the eight states of north-eastern region Assam and Tripura have both tribal and non-tribal population while the other states have high concentration of tribal people which implies that the North eastern region is a predominantly a tribal inhabited region. It is the abode of several communities belonging to different races who have migrated in the remote past at different times and by different routes. The earliest inhabitants of north-eastern India were very probably of the Austric stock. They were the pre-Dravidian aborigines who are now represented by the *MonKhmer* Khasis and *Syntengs* of Assam.¹ Linguistic evidence, popular customs and some of the place-names of the province also indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Assam were speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khmer family which has been characterised by Schimdt as the Austric family of languages. The date when the Austric speakers began to filter into Assam is not known, but it must have been several hundred years B.C and certainly long anterior to the advent of the Aryans from the west.² they were followed by Negroid, Caucasoid and Mongoloid races. There were also other communities who came to Assam across the Patkai range which separates Assam from Burma. Each of these communities have their own history, ethnography, society and culture which has given rise to multiplicity of cultures in Northeast India.

Amongst the numerous communities inhabiting the North-eastern region are the Singphos. L. Devi writes 'The Singphos of Assam, with the exception of a few belong to the Tesan clan of the *Kakhyens*.' The chief habitat of the *Kakhyens* was on the great eastern branch of the

Irrawaddy .With the breakup of the northern Shan kingdom, the *Kakhyens* entered on a career of conquest and aggression, which practically placed in their hands the whole country lying between Upper Assam and Bhamo.³

Traditions about the origin and migration of the Singphos are many and inconsistent. The most commonly accepted tradition claims that they were formerly inhabitants of upper Burma. Colonel Hanney considers them to be identical in race with the *Kakus* or *Kakhyens* of Burma whose chief habitat was on the Eastern branch of the Irrawadi. But the Singphos of Assam by no means like to be called *Kakus* or *Kakhyens*, though they do in fact call their Eastern and Southern brethren by that name. They have family titles and division of clans common with them. There are a few Singpho clans namely Tasen, Mirip Lophae, Lutung and Mayrung each of which has got a *kaku* and Singpho branch. Besides these, where a clan of Lattora *kaku* is called *Lishu* or *Lesso* on the east of Assam, who originally came direct from the Chinese frontier.

The Singphos or *Kachins* are a numerous race, covering a large area, from Upper Assam across Northern Burma beyond the Chinese boundary into Yunnan. In Burma they presently extend as far south as 22°30' N.L. Their villages are scattered throughout the hills and mountains, and they have, to quote Mr. George, 'a horror for the plains, and but rarely come down to settle.' Only a small portion of them live within the territory included in the Linguistic Survey, in the Lakimpur district of then undivided Assam, chiefly on the Buri Dihing (in Upper Assam), Noa Dihing and Tengapani (in present Arunachal Pradesh). The *Kachins* call themselves *Ching- pa* or, dialectically, Sing-pho. In the western dialect this word is said to mean 'man,' but not so, according to Dr. Cushing, on the Burman side, where it only means a Singpho.⁴

The original homeland of the Singphos according to their own tradition was in the *Hukang* valley, a vast tract lying towards the North East of the Patkai. The name *Hukang* refers to a great massacre of the Singphos by the Burmese. South of the *Hukang* valley is a vast plain which is inhabited by the Burmese. Being obstructed by the Burmese in their Southward migration, the Singphos turned towards South-East, crossed the Patkai ranges of the Indo Burmese border and entered Assam in the early part of 18th century. With the passage of time, they occupied a large area of the upper Assam region. This is evident as many of the places in this region like *Pangsu* and *Tipam* are derived from Singpho word *Pangsum* and *Dibam* respectively. *Pangsum* meaning an Open area, and *Dibam* is the name of a Singpho spirit and the place is believed to be its abode. The habitat of the Singphos in undivided Assam lay to the East of Muttok and was bounded on the north by the Lohit River, on the South by the Patkai ranges. They live on the banks of Tengapani and Noa Dihing rivers (presently in Arunachal Pradesh).⁵ According to 1989 census, the number of Singphos in Arunachal Pradesh is 2,353. They live in Changlang and Lohit Districts.⁶

According to another tradition, originally there were three groups called Khe, Ten and Kin who came down from the North. The Ten were defeated by the Burmese and were employed as serfs. Since then they came to be known as *Kachin*. It is known that the Burmese word for a labourer is *Kakhin*. Thus the word *Kachin* by which the people of the *Hukang* valley identify themselves can reasonably be traced to *kakhin*. The Singphos inhabitation in Assam, claim to have originated from the *Kakhin* or Kachin people inhabitation in the *Hukang* valley beyond Eastern border. Formerly this group was employed by the Burmese for guarding rafts and thus deriving their name Singphong.

Another Singpho tradition says that once in the *Hukang* valley the flowering of the Bamboos was followed by a famine, believed to have been caused by the wrath of a spirit called *Kiyagung* who described to the earth in the shape of a wild fowl and sent hoards of rats to destroy the crops. Soon occurred a terrible fire which spread through the whole valley.

Being scared of the calamity, the people deserted the valley and took refuge in the neighbouring countries. Some of them migrated to the Patkai hills and from there came to Assam through the Naga hills. These group of Singphos opened the way to Assam for others who followed them.

There is a great degree of homogeneity between the Singphos living in Assam and the *Kachins* of the *HuKang* valley. The Singphos in many a respect have assimilated themselves with the local people by adopting their religion and culture to a considerable extent.

History of the Singphos:

The first appearance of the Singphos in Assam was during the troubles following the Moamaria rebellion in the reign of Gaurinath Singha(1780-95).⁷ The Singphos drove out the Khamptis who were settled in Tengapani area and settled in the tract called Namrup. They thus brought under them the whole country watered by the Burhi-Dihing ,Noa-Dihing and the Tengapani rivers.⁸ During the reign of Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha(1795-1811) the Singphos in conjunction with the Moamaria rebels who had fled to Namrup being defeated at the hands of the Ahoms ,ravaged a number of villages in the eastern part of Assam.⁹ They also imported troops

from Burma. Receiving the news of the ravages caused by the Singphos to Assamese villages, Kamaleswar Singha in consultation with his ministers and other higher officials, commanded the Deka Phukan and some other officers to march against the Singphos. The Ahom army besieged the enemy in their fort who remained inside the fort mounting guns round the palisade. In the first attempt the Ahoms could not win over the enemy and they had to disperse with the loss of fifteen spays. But subsequently, the Ahoms renewed with great vigour and succeeded in breaking the fort of the Singphos by causing explosion to one of the guns mounted on the surrounding palisade of the fort. At this the Morans and the Singphos formed themselves into two separate groups and dispersed in opposite directions. The Ahom soldiers then entered into the fort of the enemy destroyed the houses that were within the fort and looted the properties. The spoils obtained consisted of men, provisions, cows, copper, brass and cloths. The Singphos appeared on this occasion as tame and submissive.¹⁰ Purnananda Buragohain the Ahom premier to appease the Singpho leader Bichanong even presented an Ahom damsel Rangili by name. Bichanong however presented her to the Burmese king Badawpaya to enhance the friendly ties with the Burmese. The Singphos violated the pact with Purnananda Buragohain. During the Burmese invasions of Assam the Singphos made constant raids on the hapless Assamese, carried off thousands as slaves and reduced the eastern part of the country to a state of de-population.¹¹ About 3,000 of these Assamese subjects, carried off by the Singphos, were subsequently recovered by Captain Neufville, the first British political Agent of Upper Assam.¹²

The Singphos invaded Sadiya in 1825 confined the Sadiya Khowa Gohain within his stockades and attacked the Bor Senapati in his own area. The Khamptis who were the settlers of Sadiya sought help from the Abors and both the Khamptis and Moamarias prayed for aid from the British thereby acknowledging the British as a superior power. Defensive operations were conceded by the British but strict instructions were issued to them that no offensive operations were to be undertaken against that tribe.¹³

The Singphos writes Mackenzie 'made advances to our local officers and negotiations were entered upon with the view of inducing them to surrender their Assamese captives, and refrain from plundering the Sadiya villages. Enquiries were also instituted as to whether they would undertake to hold the passes of the Patkai against the Burmese. They seem to have had serious fears lest the British should proceed to expel them as they had driven out the Burmese. Considerable tracts of land had been occupied by them and were cultivated by slave labour. These they were anxious to retain. The main difficulty, however which lay in the way of a permanent understanding with the Singphos was the uncompromising attitude taken up by the Government with regard to the retention by them of captives and plunder.'¹⁴

In 1825 four chief cantons of the Singphos, namely –Luttora Gam, Lattoo Gam, Beesa Gam and Duffa Gam tried to outwardly convince the British of their submission and to get rid of the Burmese though they at the same time had also made over their stockades to the Burmese forces. The British tried to seize the opportunity and win the Singphos on condition if they would give up the Assamese slaves. In June, the British under Captain Neufville by a series of expeditions expelled the Burmese from the villages of the Beesa and Duffa Gams and eventually from the plains altogether and managed to release about 3,000 Assamese captives which had been held captive by the Singphos.

In June 1826 the Governor General's Agent, Mr. David Scott visited Sadiya when 16 out of 28 Singpho chiefs entered into engagements with the British government agreeing to give up captives and aid the British troops in case of future need and promising to refer disputes to the arbitrament of local officers. Altogether Captain Neufville had released 6,000 captives.¹⁵ The loss of this wealth probably adversely affected the Singphos but as a substitute 'Mr. Scott proposed to create a trade between Assam and the Upper Irrawaddy, which should pass through their hands.'¹⁶ There was an understanding that the Beesa Gam should have a general control over the rest of the tribe who had submitted and that the twelve chiefs who still had not submitted should be warned

that if they did not submit within two months they would not be allowed to settle in Assam. Mackenzie writes 'It does not appear that the idea of opening up a trade across the Patkoi ever came to anything or indeed that any active steps were ever taken to develop it.'¹⁷

In 1830 however an attempt was indeed undertaken to create a trade at Sadiya itself by the opening of a Government depot and Mr. Bruce being appointed with a salary of Rs 100 monthly with a share in the profits.. 'How long the experiment was persevered in it is impossible to say. Like many other points of interest in the older records it drops out of sight.'¹⁸

Mackenzie writes that the policy of the British of treating the Beesa Gam as paramount chief of the tribe may have dissuaded the other twelve chiefs to enter into terms with the British. He writes 'The Duffa Gam indeed seems to have had his hand against every man, for we read of his siding with the Shans against the Burmese, a confederacy which the British officer at Sadiya was at one time invited to join.'¹⁹

In February 1830 there were reports from the Agent about a possible joint operation by an alliance of Khamptis and Singphos with their brethren across the border to oust the British from Sadiya and there were strong indications pointing in that direction. Beesa Gam reported that large bodies of Singphos and Khamtis had crossed the Booree Dihing and invaded the plains.²⁰ 'Captain Neufville attacked and dispersed them and afterwards drove them out of Luttora back to the Bor Khamti hills.'²¹ 'The Beesa Gam had throughout these operations shown himself loyal to his engagements.'²² Certain members of his family who rendered timely aid were therefore rewarded with grants of land and the conduct of the Beesa Gam was shown as praiseworthy in the despatches.

Rumours were again heard that a large body of Burmese were going to invade Assam and the British tried to avert such an attack and had even sought the aid of the Manipur Raja, Gambhir Singh. David Scott, in the meantime submitted an elaborate report suggesting as before restoration of a Native Government in Central Assam. He further suggested to settle the friendly Singphos near Borhath and he would co-erce the rest of them to leave the country. In February 1833 the Government at last decided in Scott's favour to make Upper Assam a Native state under Purandar Singha. 'In July 1834 a European officer was posted at Sadiya permanently; and the chances of any Singpho Chief retaining his slaves became smaller than ever.'²³

Mackenzie writes 'The Duffa Gam by his relentless intrigues and constant raids or feints of attack was a standing trouble to us and the entire frontier. In 1835 he made a sudden foray from across the Patkoi and cut up Beesa's village killing some 90 persons including women and children. Later in the year he again appeared, built stockades as though he meant to stay for months and drew to his side most of the Gams who had been made subordinate to the Beesa Gam in 1829. A party of troops however drove him over the hills again and all the Chiefs save the Luttora Gam returned to their allegiance.'²⁴ The Luttora Gam who was the most powerful after the Duffa Gam submitted in February 1837. The British Government at this time entered into negotiations with the Burmese and the Duffa Gam placed himself at the hands of the Burmese which again set the British thinking about their next plan of action. The Duffa Gam returned with the Burmese to Ava where he was welcomed with dignity which enraged the Governor General in Council and ordered the Resident in Burma to report about the facts. The result revealed weak role of the British representative at Burma which necessitated the urgency of a second Burmese deputation with a view to making a final agreement on the Singphos.

Mr. Bayfield with the Duffa Gam came from Burma to the Patkoi frontier during the second Burmese British negotiations while arrangements were made that an officer from Assam should cross the Patkoi to meet them and accordingly Major White, Captain Hannay and Dr. Griffiths proceeded from Sadiya for this purpose. Lack of provisions led Major White to ultimately drop out but the other two proceeded. While moving down from the Patkai Major White came across a group of Nigrang Singphos from Burma and it was observed that they were attacking some Naga tribes who dwelt on the Northern side of Patkai. Since north of the Patkoi range belonged to the

British the Singphos had to surrender all their captives and make peace. Soon after Major White's departure the Burmese Governor appeared and put forth a claim to the whole of Upper Assam as far as Jeypore but were ridiculed at by the two British officials Captain Hannay and Mr. Bayfield at which the Burmese officials returned to Burma. That the second British Burmese negotiations at the Patkai frontier did not yield results is evident from the Duffa Gam's attempt to make fresh attempts on Assam. An order was issued to prevent his entry to Assam and a military outpost was also set up on the Booree Dihing.

The Assam Singphos began to quarrel amongst themselves, the Lat Gam villages being attacked by the Peeshee Gam during the early part of 1838 necessitating sending of British troops to restore order. Resistance was offered to the British troops by the Peeshee Gam who in alliance with the Luttora Gam began to make common cause against the British. The local officers by that time agreed that the Singphos were in a disturbed state and further troubles from them and hence were apprehensive. Using military force both the Khamptis and Singphos were brought under British control. While trying to suppress the Khamptis a strong force passed through the Singpho settled areas which may have created a fear psychosis amongst the Singphos so much that it led to the submission of Ningroola a Singpho chief of influence hitherto attached to the Duffa Gam. He was induced to take up tea cultivation near his village. Though the British troops had burnt his village before submission he appeared to be much concerned about being loyal in future and his friendly disposition was evident by informing the British of the existence of a store of brass canon of Hindustani make buried in the jungles in the days of the Mughal invasion of Assam and never discovered by the Authorities though known to the Singphos.

Around that time an attempt was made by the colonial administrators to bring all the Singpho settlements within reach of surveillance by shifting them within the line of stockades from Ningroo to Saikhowa. Mackenzie writes 'No information is given as to how far the attempt succeeded...'²⁵

During the winter months of 1841-42 Captain Vetch visited the Singpho and Naga frontier and found a tranquil atmosphere and hence transferred the management of the tract from the Political Department to the Revenue and Judicial Departments of the Bengal Government. But on 10th January 1843 a force of Singphos from Burma attacked a British outpost at Ningroo in large numbers and killed seven men. A simultaneous attack by the combined forces of Khamptis and Singphos at Saikhowa were reported and the attack seemed to have been the involvement of the Tippum Raja from Hookoom while both the Beesa Gam and Ningroola too appeared to have been accomplices. All the Singphos on the Noa and Boree Dehing took active part in the attack. British troops were therefore marched against them in retaliation. Ningroola surrendered at the outset and was followed by Beesa Gam. They promised thereafter to act against the Burmese Singphos who were under Seroola Sain and the Lat Gam. The remaining Singphos and Nagas of Assam also returned to British allegiance and rendered aid to the British against the foreign invaders. The Lat Gam was beaten and surrendered. Stockade after stockades were used to quell the revolt.

The Government appointed a Commission to enquire into the causes of Singpho revolt and Captain Jenkins was eventually entrusted with the matter. The enquiry revealed that the possible causes of Singpho insurrection were mainly three-

- 1) Encroachments on the land and privileges of the Singphos
- 2) The Seizure and punishment by local officers of some members of their tribes
- 3) The orders by the Tippum Raja, now Chief of the Hookoom province under Burma.

Mackenzie writes '...how the action of the local officers was gradually pushing back these tribes from territories which they once had occupied. The Beesa Gam had in 1842 complained bitterly of the loss of lands. Add to this the accumulated grievances arising from forcible release of their original slaves and continued care to prevent their acquiring others were sufficient causes of rebellion...On these views of Government, the Agent was invited to submit further report.'²⁶

‘The British felt that a new convention was to be made. But all captured rebels were to be brought to trial. The Beesa Gam was found guilty of rebellion and imprisoned at Debrooghur for life.’²⁷ The final submission of the Agent revealed that the primary cause of Singpho insurrection was the loss of their slaves. The Beesa Gam was the Chief who had suffered most by this. The Beesa Gam was further annoyed because the British had communicated with the other Chiefs direct, and not via him. He had appointed one Seeroo-la-sen to be his successor, and the latter was enraged with the British for the imprisonment of a cousin of his for selling an Assamese; so he joined and led the insurrection. A son-in-law of Beesa’s Jugundoo was imprisoned for cattle stealing and took part in the rebellion. The Lat Gam, a Kaku, Beesa’s dependent afraid of punitive action of the British as he had put slaves to death for practising witchcraft. The rebellion of Ningroola and his sons was less easily accounted for. Probably loss of slaves and temporary irritation caused it. Ruffandoo joined the rebels because he was not allowed to raid on the Nagas. All the other chiefs who took part were from Burma.²⁸

In his final Report Captain Jenkins arrived at the conclusion that the loss of land had nothing to say to it. No lands had ever been granted to the Singphos or recognised as theirs or been claimed by any of them till lately when the Beesa instigated by Tippum Raja, set up such a notion. There were possible other minor grievances that had helped to irritate the Singphos, such as demands for forced labour to build stockades for our troops, but on the whole, the Agent believed that in the slavery question lay the secret of this abortive rebellion.²⁹

Government accepted the final Report of Jenkins and took some positive steps. To educate the Singphos a school was set up at Saikhowa. Ningroola and his son were pardoned and released. On the question of slavery the Government was fully committed and no retrograde policy could be entertained. Nothing was to be done to encourage the Singphos to believe that slavery would ever be winked at.³⁰

Society and Religion of the Singphos:

The Singpho society can be broadly divided into three estates:

i) The Chiefs ii) Plebians iii) The Slaves

The Singpho chief is called *Ddufan*. He is the head of the Village holding legal and administrative power. Among the Singphos, Chieftainship is hereditary. If a chief dies leaving behind no son to succeed him, the chieftainship may pass to one of his nearest agnates, no matter, even though if he belongs to some other Village. He directs all village activities concerning the welfare and well being of the village community and controls the use of village land for purpose of agriculture. In legal matters he is assisted by a few counsellors usually chosen from within the village on the merit of their personal influence and wisdom.

The people of the village as a whole is known as *Cingmung* or *Mreng-dong* which in fact refers to all the commoners under the chief’s jurisdiction. The basic relationship between a chief and his people is of mutual assistance and help.

Next in rank to the *Mrengdong* are the *Mayam*. A *Mayam* is considered to be the descendent of non-Singpho progenitor such as the Ahoms, Morans and Muttacks, who were the Aboriginal inhabitant of the Nao-Dihing valley. With regard to the origin of the *Mayams* it is said that in old days the Singpho used to kidnap a large number of men and women from the plains of Assam and assigned them as slaves. With the passage of time, these captives by adopting the Singpho language and culture became a class in themselves having their own clan names.³¹

Singpho Clans: The Singphos are organized into a number of patrilineal descent groups or clans. Each individual bears a clan name to which he belongs. The Singpho term for clan is *fan* which literally means “belonging to the same blood”. The idea is that the descendants of a particular clan

in the male line feel themselves possessing the same blood. The belief also has practical implications as all the members of the clan irrespective of the sub clans to which they belong consider themselves as agnatic kins, and so abstain from marrying amongst themselves as this goes against the rules of clan exogamy. An individual derives his prestige and status in the Singpho society from his membership of the clan to which he belongs. The members of a kinship group in villages are bound to a considerable extent by the bonds of participation and natural obligation towards each other.

An analysis of the stories connected with the origin of the Singpho clans suggests that the Singpho do not ascribe to totemic objects, like Animals, plants etc. to the origin of their clans. Clans come into being as a result of some particular historical happening. For instance the word “*Larga-tu-ni*” means “growing of banana tree”. The ancestor of this clan had witnessed an unusual growth of a banana sapling on the roof of a house. Also sometimes, a clan is named after the habit and aptitude of an individual. The word “*Fup*” means “restless”. It is said that the Originator of this clan was restless like a Fowl.³²

Family: A Singpho homestead consists of an elementary family of parents and children living together. The father is the central figure within the family having the responsibility for its maintenance. His decision in all the matters relating to the inter relations of the members of the family and management of the property is final and binding. He also has responsibility relating to the marriage of the children performance of ceremonies and sacrifices and economic pursuits.

Inheritance of property is in the male line and peculiar in the sense that the eldest and youngest only inherit, the intermediate sons getting nothing. The eldest obtains the estate while the younger gets the moveable property and goes off to find a new settlement.

From the age of ten onwards, a boy gets training from his father to play a responsible part in the agricultural work. Girls of that age usually help their mother in the house and in works in agricultural fields. Economically, the family functions through common pooling of the resources of the household.

Slavery is prevalent. It was estimated that they and their Burmese kinsmen possessed in 1837 no fewer than a hundred thousand Assamese whom they had carried off as slaves. In a large homestead, there might be one or two slaves who are treated as members of the family.³³

Marriage:

The Principal feature of the marital organization of the Singphos is the clan exogamy i.e, no person can marry in his or her own clan. However cross cousin marriage or marrying one's own mothers, brother's daughters is acceptable. Bride price is prevalent in the Singpho society. Monogamy is the general rule in the society, however Polygamy is also prevalent to an extent and it is not uncommon to see a man taking a second wife.³⁴

Religion: The Singpho Pantheon reveals that the people have no notion of a supreme God, who is eternal, all powerful, and omniscient guardian of morality.

The Singphos believe in a great number of spirits hovering all around whom they term as *Nats*. These *Nats* are conceived of having anthropomorphic figures. They are lacking in many of the attributes given to an idealized God.

On the whole, these *Nats* are benevolent. They are helpful to men in their difficulties. All the good that men enjoy comes from these *Nats*. Singpho

Legends also suggest that the *Nats* look after the well-being of men and protect them from sickness and immature death.

There are also believed to be some *Nats* who are generally evil and prone to harass men out of sheer spite. They are held to be responsible for misfortune and many diseases that men suffer

from. They make men suffer from diseases and all sorts of hardships to extract sacrificial offering from them. Thus a Singpho lives in constant dread to these *Nats*.

In the Singpho Pantheon the sun has an ambiguous character, although his benevolence to mankind is recognized, yet it is not worshipped and offered any sacrifice.

Occasionally the Singphos refer to *Mathum Mathwa* as the greatest of all spirits and he is given an important position in their religious practices. *Mathum Mathwa* is addressed by various names. The most popular names are 'Protector', 'holder of all power' and 'onlooker of all things'. In the Singpho Pantheon *Mathum Mathwa* holds a position similar to that of the principal members of compact family who has got a vital concern for the well being of its members. But, *Mathum Mathwa* lacks many of the virtues which are normally attributed to a supreme being as conceived, by highly developed religious. He has no control over the natural forces such as wind, fire, lightening, nor he can control them. To withhold those powers, he is to approach other spirits who preside over them.³⁵

The *Ccha* or rice beer is a religious necessity to the Singpho. There is hardly any religious ceremony in which rice-beer does not come into use. All the Singpho spirits are believed to be great drunkards and therefore, rice-beer is held to be one of the important items of the offerings made to the sprits in order to please them.³⁶

The Singphos also believe in Black Magic. It is believed that the soul of a man who has died of an accidental death can be domesticated by offering timely and befitting sacrifices. The magicians acquires magical power from the soul he domesticated and engages it to bring about misfortune to his enemies.³⁷

Livelihood: Agriculture, Hunting, Fishing

Agriculture: The Singphos practice permanent cultivation. The Singphos usually employ buffaloes for ploughing, although bullocks are also used. The season of cultivation begins after the fall of first shower of May. Transplanting the seedlings goes on from the beginning of July to the middle of September.

The Singphos observe two ceremonies associated with agriculture. The first is performed in honour of the spirit *Insam Nat* just before the ploughing. This spirit is worshipped as he is considered to be the owner of the field, who if not properly appeased might destroy the crop. Another ceremony is performed in honour of the spirits *Swon Nat* and *Sithun Nat* before threshing of the grains. The sacrificial offerings consist of one pig, six fowls and cooked rice.

A number of taboos are associated with the agricultural activities. From the time the crop begin to sow till the harvest the field is to be guarded from animals and birds. It is a taboo for a woman to enter into the hut. Cutting of jungles around the field at the time when the crop ripens is also a taboo.³⁸

Hunting: The Singphos practice both fishing and hunting.. They hunt both bird and beasts. Their weapons of hunting consist of gun, bow and arrows and two types of daos.

The Singphos do not undertake group or community hunting. An individual, if he feels like, may go out alone at any time

Fishing: Singphos also does fishing for their livelihood. The usual method of catching fish is by means of hook rod and line. As bait the people use earthworm and eggs of wasp and hornet.

Different Rites and Ceremonies:

The religion of the Singpho is a system of ceremonies. Singpho ceremonies may broadly be divided into four categories:

1. Ceremonies for the well being of the individuals of the family
2. Field ceremonies
3. Ceremonies for curing the sick and
4. Ceremonies for the dead

Ceremonies for the well being of the members of the family:

When the aim of the ceremony is for the general welfare of the whole family then spirit *Natkun* is worshipped with the offering of a fowl. This spirit protects the young children and the members of the family from the malice of the malevolent n evil spirit. It is believed among the Singphos that a simple utterance of his name keeps the evil spirit away from home and brings success to the members of the family.³⁹

Field ceremonies:

Another ceremony is related to the field. It has already been mentioned that the spirits *Cithung Nat* and *Insam Nat* are connected with the crops. Ceremonies are performed to keep these spirits in good temper. A female spirit associated with the crop is Mam Matha. She is believed to make the crop grow but if she is angry with a farmer, she withers all crops. The handful of crops that is left standing last on the field is said to be her place of dwelling. Thus, after the harvest is over, it becomes necessary to perform a ceremony in her name.⁴⁰

Ceremonies for curing of Diseases:

It has already been mentioned the causes which leads the *Nats* to harass men and bring misfortune. It is thus when a men falls ill, a priest is summoned to ascertain the kind of sacrifice to be offered, and also to fix the date as to when the ceremony is to be held. After everything has been fixed the householder hastens to collect the required materials for performing the ceremony and build the Alter for sacrificing the animal if required.

Ceremonies related to Death:

A death in a Singpho family is a burdensome experience involving the householder with a great deal of expenditure as it entails on him to perform a number of ceremonies to propitiate the deceased's soul as well as he is to give a number of feasts to his co villagers and relatives who come to join in the morning.

When there occurs any death in Singpho Society, *Cu-nat-ca* ceremony is performed which makes the living relations of the deceased free from the malice and further trouble of the soul of the dead. As soon as a death occurs in a family, a ceremony known as the *Magasat* is performed. This ceremony is performed on everyday as so long as the corpse is kept inside the house. After death till cremation takes place another rite called *Ningthai-miri-tai* is performed on everyday by the householder. The ceremony that is performed after the corpse is taken to the cremation ground is called *Joan Tai*. The object of this ceremony is to send the deceased's soul to the land of the dead. After the cremation when the dead man's relation or the funeral party return home, they step over a few *Megela* plants placed on the road leading to the village as a precaution against coming of the soul of the dead back to the village.⁴¹

When a wealthy or an important man dies, an additional ceremony called ***Manglupmai*** is performed. This ceremony requires the construction of a shrine called *karrai* and an earthen mound called *Lupwa*. This ceremony is a delight and enjoyment to the entire village. Dancing and merrymaking continues on the ceremonial days. Everyday Pigs and Buffaloes are killed and feasted to the guests. On the last day of the ceremony, in the afternoon , all the guests and the householder goes to the cremation ground in a procession carrying the deceased s garments and few other belongings and put them near the *Lupwa*.

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